

The 2010 Equestrian Land Development Young Rider and Disability Modifications Para Equestrian National Dressage Championships saw over 200 horse and rider combinations gather at Queensland's Royal Toowoomba Showgrounds from Thursday 24 June through to Sunday 27 June for 4 days of spectacular competition. Riding her beautiful warmblood mare, Larundel Gelata, Susan and her support team including her carer, groom, and coach, attended the event.

Gelata and I had been training hard in the lead up to the event. We had great support from local equestrian clubs that enabled us to practice the new Para Equestrian tests at open dressage competitions against able-bodied riders, this competition experience proved crucial to our preparations.

Arriving late the day before the competition began there was little time to get settled before the first event the Australian Paralympic Committee FEI Para Equestrian Team Test. Thursday was windy and the indoor arena was a little dark and scary for most of the horses. Gelata and I had a shaky start to our test with a spook on the centerline. We achieved more relaxation as the test progressed but it was a bit too late with the test all over in less than five minutes. We scored 66% to claim 2nd place.

A midday start on Friday for the Disability Modifications FEI Para Equestrian Individual Test was an opportunity to enjoy a glorious sleep in for all except for my groom who had to be up early to feed and water Gelata (doing so with no complaints). Not enough credit is given to the wonderful job the grooms do for their rider, without them us riders would be lost!!!

This time our test was in the outdoor arena and luckily it was a beautiful sunny winter day with no wind. We were much more relaxed in our warm-up before the test, in fact we were so relaxed our test was flat this time!!! In dressage, too much tension in the horse restricts the movement, but too much relaxation can reduce expression. Combining the three judges' scores we achieved 68% and were 3% behind the winner.

The final event on the Para Equestrian program was the Freestyle to Music Test on Saturday. In the Freestyle Test the choreography is designed by the rider with a few compulsory movements that have to be included. The test is ridden to music of the riders' choice to give the impression the horse is dancing to music. Extra marks are given by the judges for artistic presentation as well as technical execution so riders can be very inventive, making freestyle tests the most entertaining to watch.

Larundel Gelata is a true showgirl so her freestyle music is The Can Can, which was famously used at the Paris Moulin Rouge. During the test, Gelata doesn't miss a beat and the test is in time with the music. Pleased with our performance we score 73.000% and only narrowly come second to 73.750%, a very close result. Overall Larundel Gelata and I are presented (2nd) Reserve National Champions in Grade 1B.

Saturday night there is a lovely dinner and entertainment in the indoor arena to cap off a successful event. We enjoyed a Pas De Deux demonstration by young riders on matching chestnut horses, a Hanoverian stallion workout, and more freestyle competitions with the CDI-Y, Young rider Grand Prix, and a showcase of the Para Equestrian Grade 4 Freestyles.

I want to congratulate the organizing committees and event sponsors for running such a great championships! THANK YOU to my team, and my supporters and sponsors that made my trip possible. Our next adventure will be to the World Equestrian Games Australian Team Selection Competition at Sydney International Equestrian Centre on July 16th-18th.

