



Blyth Tait at Karaka Sales complex

10 acre block in the country when I was 10. I shared a pony with my sisters, but the affinity with horses wasn't instant. Once I joined the Manau Pony Club, I got keen on riding and travelling and competing as a team. It was the right way for me because I wasn't pushed into the sport too young. I was in it to enjoy it.

How did enjoying pony club lead to a career with horses?
As I got older I decided I wanted to make riding a career. My father was involved in racing through breeding and training and he guided me. I had done all the pony club things like show jumping, but I really fell into it when I got two very good horses, Rata and Messiah. Messiah was my first international horse. I was living in Pukekohe when I first went overseas to compete. We set off for Badminton, where we came second. Then we won at Stockholm, so it was really 'instant success.'

To what do you attribute your success? It came from what makes any New Zealand sportsperson successful – a total commitment and a real hunger to succeed. It was a big move to go to England. I had to sell everything I owned to get over there to compete. The plan was to return to New Zealand after the competitions, but winning changed that. It's very difficult to campaign out of New Zealand – it's expensive to transport horses back and forwards and they have to be acclimatised before competing. So I stayed on in England. Success brought in sponsors and the sport then became like a business – working to produce the results expected. When you're in the lead, it's hard graft to stay there. Success wasn't just handed to me. As with any sport, if you slacken off, you give everyone else the competitive edge. It's a tough sport to be involved with. With horses, there's no getting away from them. They have to be cared for and exercised all the time and you have to plan periods of intensive training. It can be lonely, living one on one with the horse. Winters can be endless, out in the pouring rain. You can't just go off for a holiday, or stay inside where it's warm! I don't think I was an exceptional talent, but I developed a winning formula and had a really good horse in Ready Teddy. A lot of riders have a big number of horses, but I always kept it small and concentrated on training and developing that close working relationship.

What did it feel like when you were competing at that level?
Cross country is dangerous – I have broken my leg, my arm and my face – but riders accept the risks. There's a rush of adrenalin with the challenge of the course that fires us and when we get it right, we're elated. There is fantastic camaraderie with the other riders. We're competing against each other, but we are also combating the same conditions – the course, the mud, the rain, the trials and tribulations of preparing a horse. Since retiring after the Athens

INTERVIEW Blyth Tait

Blyth Tait is one of New Zealand's most successful riders, winning four Olympic medals and a world championship. Blyth won an individual gold medal and a team bronze at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, team silver and individual bronze at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and won the Eventing World Championships in 1990 in Stockholm and in Rome in 1998. He was awarded an MBE in 1991 and in 2001 received the Lonsdale Cup from the New Zealand Olympic Committee as the athlete who made the most outstanding contribution to an Olympic or Commonwealth Games sport that year. Blyth was chosen as flag bearer for the New Zealand team at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. He now breeds foals for the racing industry on his Waiau Pa property.

When did your connection with horses begin?

I grew up in Whangarei and got into horses when we moved to a



animal stuff

LOCAL STOCKISTS OF:

- NRM
- Fibrefresh
- Takanini Feeds
- Lucerne
- Dunstan
- Pedigree
- Mitavite
- Bomac

Phone 09 294 7831

Karaka Road
(State Hwy 22)
opp. Pukekohe Golf Course

Hours
Mon to Fri 8.45am to 5.45pm
Sat 8.30am to 2pm

for all your horse feed requirements