

AUSTRALIA'S YOUNG VAULTERS TAKE ON THE WORLD!

MEET TEAM ZELOS

JUST OVER SIX MONTHS AGO, A VAULTING CAMP CONDUCTED BY ALI DIVITA AND KERRIE WILSON WAS HELD IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS OF NSW, WITH THE INTENTION OF GATHERING INTERESTED VAULTERS FOR THE FIRST FEI WORLD VAULTING CHAMPIONSHIPS FOR JUNIORS TO BE HELD IN AUGUST 2015. THE VAULTERS WHO PARTICIPATED AT THIS CAMP ALL SHARED A DREAM: A DREAM WHICH ULTIMATELY BECAME AN EXCITING REALITY IN THE NETHERLANDS REGION OF ERMELO.

After this initial camp, nine vaulters from all over Australia continued to train intensively together on a fortnightly basis and to set their high goals for training at home with their own clubs.

The final FEI World Vaulting Junior team consisted of Emily Jones NSW, Isabella Napthali NSW, Eliza Wark-Chapman NSW, Ginger Kennett NSW, Kelsea Haste NSW, Mckeira Cumming Qld, Rebecca Vandeppear SA, Kieran Halliday WA and Alex Playfoot VIC. And after first meeting the extremely athletic Alex Playfoot (who has been nick-named 'the monkey' by her family and friends) at EQUITANA Melbourne in 2014, HorseWyse Magazine was super excited to see Alex and the team taking on the world this year! Alex started 'normal' riding lessons when she was five years old, but her riding instructor quickly observed her penchant for swinging herself about on the poles as her pony was being tacked up, and suggested she try vaulting. And the rest, as they say, is history!

As 2015 progressed, the team trained on several horses around Australia and competed at four competitions including Sydney Royal, Scone Horse Festival, Ella Springs and Qld State Championships. Each competition was with a different combination of horses and vaulters, which meant modifying the routine to suit and giving all the vaulters a start in each event. Ali Divita was joined by Bamdad Memarian from Cologne Germany, to share the Australian team coaching role, and as the year progressed a 'tribal themed' performance evolved. The elaborate

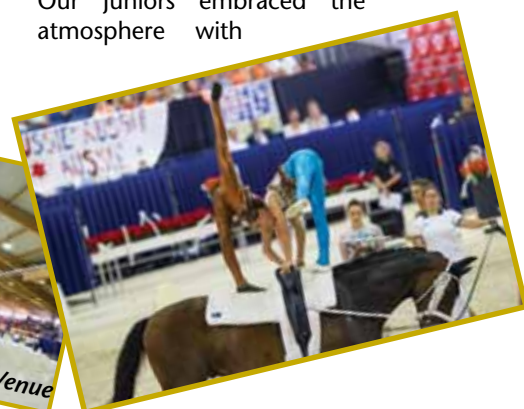
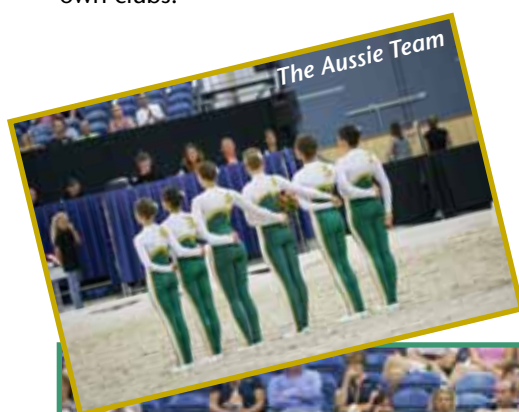
costumes were designed by Ali and made by Kerrie Stapleton and involved hours of intricate handiwork. In early June, prior

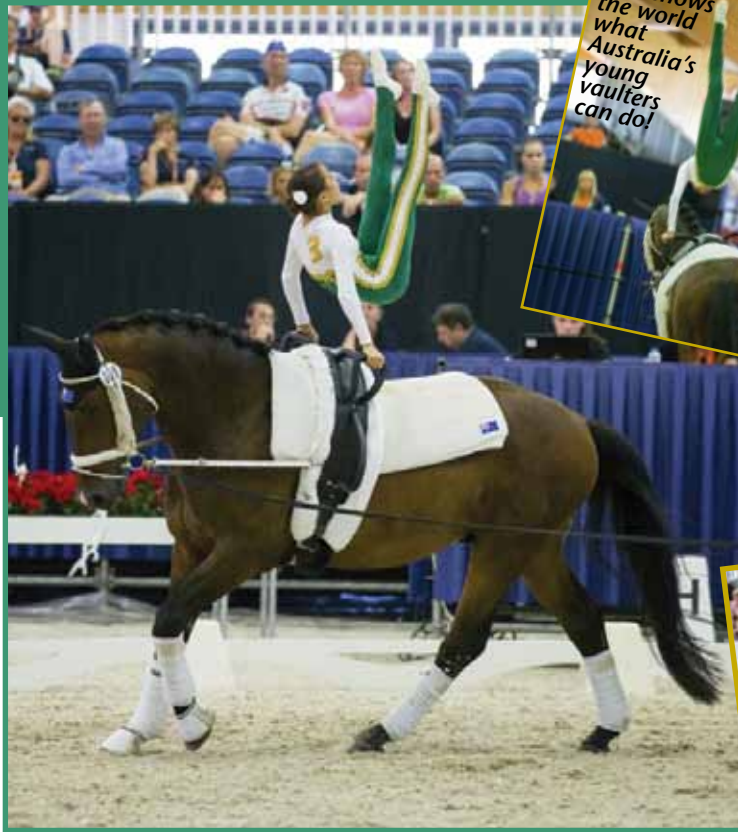
to being selected to represent Australia, the squad left for Europe and attended clinics in Denmark, Krumke and finally three weeks training in Cologne on the horses that they were to be using at the Championships. During this time in Europe the vaulters found themselves training alongside World Champions and on some of Europe's top vaulting horses and with worlds best coaches.

Team training commenced every morning under the watchful eyes of coaches, Ali Divita (US) and Bamdad Mermarian (Germany) and involved jogging on the sand arena, strength training in the gym at Club Cologne and drills on the stationary barrel. The team also had the luxury of rehearsing their routine on the mechanical barrel, which simulates the canter of a moving horse. Horse sessions with Warrel, the borrowed team horse, were in the afternoons. The kids were exhausted on these days after double sessions but nobody ever complained. A reserve horse was engaged and the team trained on him, also.

The FEI World Vaulting Championships for Juniors held on the 8-10th August was for Individuals, Pas de Deux and Squad vaulters aged 18yrs and under. During the week leading up to the Championships, Australia's Chef d'Equipe Rebecca Chambers, along with the parents and supporters of Team Zelos, made the journey to Ermelo in the Netherlands.

The FEI event was spectacular in every detail - from the formality of the Veterinary Inspection to the excitement of the Opening Ceremony. Our Juniors embraced the atmosphere with





Alex shows the world what Australia's young vaulters can do!



great competitive spirit. A very touching moment was when the youngest athletes from each Nation were invited to join together to assist with the FEI Flag raising and 11-year old Bella Naphthali stood amongst her peers as Australia's representative in the ceremony. The highlights of the Opening Ceremony also included a pas de deux with World Champions Joanne Eccles (UK) and Jacques Ferrari (Fr) and a dressage demonstration by two Friesian Stallions.

The horse that Australia chose to compete on at the Championships was from Cologne and already very experienced in teams competition. Warrel, a 9yr old 17.2 hh Warmblood gelding owned by Gerlinde Grün, and lunged by Alexandra Knauf, stole the hearts of our vaulters, as he gave them a perfect platform to show their best routine with his consistent and regular canter.

The first round of the competition consisted of the compulsories, where all six vaulters show the prescribed exercises. Australia was coming 11th after this phase with a score of 5.564. The second time Australia entered the main arena was for their first display of the freestyle routine, which scored a credible 6.135. This left Team Zelos sitting in 10th place going into the final round.

With twelve teams competing on the final day, Team Zelos drew second. Having already displayed their routine in Germany at the home of Team Neuss, and now having performed

their freestyle in the championships in round one, Zelos were confident in themselves and determined to show the world their best. Indeed, their freestyle scored 7.437 and it ended up being the fourth highest freestyle round of the day! Team Zelos and their supporters were overwhelmed with the result, a final score of 6.135 and a commendable eighth place. According to Joanne Eccles she "was chuffed at how well the Australians performed and so glad to see that Australian vaulters were up there in the field".

TEAM ZELO'S YOUNGEST MEMBERS HAVE THE LAST WORD

Isabella Naphthali - aged 11 years

Being part of team Zelos meant many things to me. Such as meeting new people and creating new friendships, growing in vaulting, learning to vault as a team and learning different cultures from all over the world. And the team is NOT over yet! Bella

Alexandra Playfoot - aged 13 years

It has been an honour to be part of Team Zelos. I have enjoyed every moment of training and competing with this squad and we are not only a vaulting squad; we are also a family. I can't believe how far we have come and how much we have improved in just six months, despite having to travel such great distances to train. Competing at the FEI 2015 World Vaulting Championships for Juniors in the Netherlands was a dream come true and our journey has only just begun.



Are you into vaulting? When we told our HorseWyse facebook followers we were doing a Summer 15 feature on Vaulting, we received a heap of photos from readers around Australia who are involved in this growing sport, including this great post from HW reader Matilda Yates.



HW reader MATILDA YATES shared this FAB vaulting pic on facebook

"Vaulting is such an awesome sport; it brings people together and the feeling of standing on top of a moving horse is like nothing else. I love that you don't need a horse to be able to do it- everyone shares the horse, and can even vault on it together. It really is a team sport- the lunger, vaulters, horse, coach and supports all play such a big part in having a successful team. It helps with fitness, flexibility, and I've found that it's helped to make me a much calmer person under stress." Matilda Yates