

# I Ryan's Rave Final Selection trials for the Eventers are Over

“Both Sam Griffiths on his mare Paulank Brockagh and Paul Tapner on Kilronan were amazing...”

**I**N MY LAST column, we looked at the results from the first lot of selection trials, which were the Sydney three-day event April 25-27, and Badminton on May 7-11. Both events were fascinating, however, at the end of the day the only performance to emerge from the Sydney three-day event that conclusively warranted team selection was Shane Rose on CP Qualified. Other riders who we had expected to cement their spot on the team, like Sonja Johnson and Craig Barrett, experienced difficulties during the competition, which meant their inclusion was not automatic.

Then came Badminton and Australia performed way better than anyone would have dared to predict. Both Sam Griffiths on his mare Paulank Brockagh and Paul Tapner on Kilronan were amazing and cemented immediate inclusion into the Australian team. Although incurring a run-out that would normally mean a failed effort, Chris Burton, on his Adelaide four-star winner TS Jamaïmo, was also impressive.

So, at the end of my last column, I was of the opinion that maybe four of the six available spots in the Australian team had been claimed. The next event was Saumur in France from May 22-25. The only Australian to perform with any credibility was Chris Burton on Graf Liberty, where he scored 50 penalties and ended up fifth. This was a good result, however, for some reason or another did not catch my imagination of the above mentioned four combinations. The next competition was Melbourne International Horse Trials on June 6-9. Unbelievably, Shane Rose emerged again as the winner - on a different horse. Shanghai Jo is a young Thoroughbred that looks just brilliant and Shane immediately announced that this horse was really on a 2016 Rio De Janeiro Olympic program. So Shanghai Jo is being kept at home under wraps for the future. And second and third placegetter was Sonja Johnson on her two Sydney three-day event rides, Parkiarrup Illicit Liaison and Belfast Mojito respectively. This really did put Sonja back in the frame. The other rider and horse we had expected to perform again at Melbourne after their Sydney hiccup was Craig Barrett and Sandhills Brillaire. Craig felt that his mare had done enough to be selected anyway and so did not front up to Melbourne.

At Melbourne three-day event there were some left-field performances that showed signs of being really good, but on the day these riders were not quite ready to challenge the established superstars. Adam Benson and his wonderful, wonderful Thoroughbred Enthusiast were fourth but some 14 penalties away from the leader. Just a little too far away to make the selectors look at him hard. Rohan Luxmoore on his horse Bells 'n Whistles won Melbourne two-star last year and came in fifth in the three-star class this year. Rohan was some 17 penalties away from the leader which is just too far away, however, we all get it that Rohan and Bells 'n Whistles are on the up and up and very likely to be a frontrunner in 2016 for the Rio team.

The final selection trial was Luhmühlen in Germany on June 12-15. This turned out to be a huge competition with some of the best riders in the world competing. Bill Levett was the best of the Australians on a horse called Improvise, finishing on a score of 60.7 penalties, some 17 penalties away from the leader. Andrew Hoy and Rutherglen came in at 11th with a score of 64.7 penalties, and »



Chris Burton and TS Jamaïmo © Julie Wilson & FEI



Paul Tapner and Kilronan © Kate Houghton & FEI



Sam Griffiths and Paulank Brockagh © Kate Houghton



Shane Rose and CP Qualified © Julie Taylor & FEI



Bill Levett and Shannondale Titan © Fiona Scott-Maxwell



Sonja Johnson and Parkiarrup Illicit Liaison © Jenelle Christopher

» Natalie Blundell and Algebra came in 13th with a score of 71.7 penalties. For me these scores were too big and too far off the lead for automatic inclusion in the Australian team.

Anyway, for what it is worth, that is how I see the results of the eventing trials. Now the process has gone one step further and the selectors have named the squad of six who will start at the 2014 World Equestrian Games for Australia on August 28. Here they are:

**Chris Burton and TS Jamaïmo** – I think a very good selection. Reliable and good in all three phases.

**Sam Griffiths and Paulank Brockagh** – After the mightiest performance at Badminton this combination had to be selected.

**Sonja Johnson and Parkiarrup Illicit Liaison** – This is one of those combinations that is as tough as, and such a competitor.

**Bill Levett and Shannondale Titan** – You could have knocked me over with a feather when I realised that Bill had been selected on Shannondale Titan. Bill and Titan did start at Badminton but fared not well with 21 cross-country jump penalties, 41.6 time penalties and 16 jumping penalties on the final day. It was a very tough track and at least Bill finished. Bill and Titan did win their very first CC13\* event, being Saumur in France in 2013. Apparently Titan is just sensational in terms of quality and talent. I assume that Bill will run as one of the individuals and the selectors believe that should he be on his day he may win an individual gold medal. Bill was the best of the Aussies at the final trial on Improvise in Germany in Luhmühlen. However, Improvise has been included as a reserve by the selectors.

**Shane Rose and CP Qualified** – Shane is completely on fire at the moment and if all goes well he may well become the World Champion.

**Paul Tapner and Kilronan** – An absolute hero at Badminton and capable of leading from the start with no real weakness in any of the phases.

So four of these will be selected to make up the team and the remaining two will run as individuals. There are seven other combinations named with three of these to be selected as reserves, which will be done on or before July 23. The seven combinations are: Craig Barrett and Sandhills Brillaire (Craig has since withdrawn due to a minor injury), Natalie Blundell and Algebra, Chris Burton and Graf Liberty, Andrew Hoy and Rutherglen, Bill Levett and Improvise, Kevin McNab and Clifton Pinot, and Stuart Tinney and Pluto Mio.

This is going to be a good team.

*Cheers, Heath*