

Sydney 2000 Olympics



20 years ago Sydney had the privilege of hosting arguably the largest sporting event in the world – the Olympic Games and the Paralympics.

It feels like it was only yesterday!

10,651 athletes, 199 nations, 28 sports and 46,967 volunteers!

There were so many extraordinary moments and so much national pride and unity.



The excitement of winning the bid to host the games and those words from the IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch

“And the winner is Sydney”



The unbelievable run by Cathy Freeman as she beat Lorraine Graham and Katherine Merry to win the Women's 400m final in that high-tech running suit that inspired an Australian designed space suit



That spectacular Opening Ceremony



The record-breaking gold medal performance by our 3DE team

20 Year Anniversary Celebration



The battle between Anky van Grunsven on Bonfire and Isabell Werth on Gigolo for the dressage gold medal with Anky ultimately proving the victor

Centreline has been fortunate to secure interviews with some of those people who were integral to the wonderful Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and who have generously shared their recollections and special memories – **Rachael Downs** (Dressage Team Rider), **Franz Venhaus** (Equestrian Games Manager), **Mary Seefried** (Member of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games Ground Jury for Dressage), **Jan Geary** (Member of the Sydney Para Olympic Equestrian Ground Jury), **Prue Spurrett** (owner of a loan horse for the Para Olympics) and **Toni Venhaus** (Olympic Games volunteer).

Thank you all.

Our Aussie dressage team of Kristy Oatley-Nist (Wall Street), Rachael Downs (Yardley Aphrodite), Ricky MacMillan (Crisp) and Mary Hanna (Limbo) performing in front of a massive adoring audience and placing 6th in the world, not to mention Kristy Oatley-Nist achieving a ride in the freestyle.

The Australian dressage team all performed with distinction and thanks to Franz Venhaus Centreline has videos of their rides



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[CLICK HERE TO SEE THE PARALYMPIC DRESSAGE RESULTS](#)

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[2000 OLYMPIC GAMES \(A SELECTION OF GREAT REPORTS FROM EURODRESSAGE\)](#)

[EA REPORTING ON THE GOLD MEDAL WIN BY THE AUSSIE EVENTING TEAM](#)

Sydney 2000 Olympics

A View from the Saddle of Rachael Downs

Olympic dressage team member Rachael Downs took the time to share some of her memories of Sydney 2000.

The Lead Up

The leadup to the Sydney 2000 Games was one of the best times in Australian dressage. The shows were incredible and expectations were high. Competition moved up to a level not yet seen in Australian dressage. Riders were extremely supportive of each other whilst vying for the privilege of competing in the world's biggest and most prestigious sporting event that was to be Sydney 2000. Every level of administration worked together and every hurdle was overcome together. It felt to me as though the entire equestrian community across all Olympic disciplines was working as one.

My Horse

My horse Yardley Aphrodite was the sweetest, most honest of partners. She certainly punched well above her weight. She was a 16.2hh bay mare bred by Jan and Peter Fowles at the Northern Warmblood Stud. She came to me as a 2-year-old and stayed with me for her entire life. She was a part of the family. Her strengths were flying changes, canter pirouettes and passage. Her weakness was piaffe. Many jokes were made at our expense over piaffes but she always managed to pull out just enough on competition day. Her favourite snack was sugar cubes but she would insist on trying anything that you were eating. Aphrodite went on to represent Australia at the World Equestrian Games in Jerez, Spain in 2002. I made the decision to retire her in late 2003 and she lived out her days with Yardley Charisma looking after weanlings and young horses.

SIEC

SIEC was the quarantine site for teams entering Australia prior to the games but our dressage team quarantined at Judy and Clemens Dierks stables prior to entering the Olympic venue. This was a time of great team bonding, maintenance of our training schedules and fine tuning. SIEC itself was very well resourced for both horses and riders. Once our horses were moved to SIEC the riders moved into the Athletes Village and our awesome grooms moved into accommodation at SIEC. It was a lovely 'bubble' world where not much else was of concern except tapering towards competition day.

The Home Crowd

Performing at the Sydney 2000 Olympics in front of a home crowd was incredible. There is so much support leading into such a major show as the Olympics and that support grows and grows throughout the event. There is truly nothing like it!

Highlights and Lowlights and Laughs

There were so many highlights during the games and not all were horse related. The biggest highlight for me was the definitely Opening Ceremony. There were athletes from every corner of the globe and from every sport sharing their emotions and coming together as a worldwide community to be a part of the amazing vibes of the opening ceremony. Words simply do not do justice to that awesome experience.

As for lowlights – there were none.

There were however lots of laughs along the way. The best way to relieve tension ever!

Am I Ready?

My preparation is done, both my horse and I are fit and healthy and I will do the best I can at this point in time.

Special Memories

There are many, many memories that will always stay with me. And so many people who helped me make my dream come true through the countless ups and downs. But most of all I cherish the memory of having a ride at the Sydney Olympics on a home-bred horse who gave her everything and produced an amazing test. Having the opportunity and the ability to qualify for and to compete in the world's biggest sporting event on Aussie soil, where every equestrian supporter and everyone who ever had the dream of owning and riding a horse could be a part of the journey to the Olympics was indeed miraculous.



A View from the Top

Sydney 2000 Olympics Equestrian Games Manager Franz Venhaus

WHERE DID IT ALL START

My adventure as the Equestrian Games Manager of the Sydney 2000 Olympics began in September 1996, four years before the Games.

I was working as Personnel & Industrial Relations Manager at Mitsubishi Electric Australia and also held the position of Hon. Treasurer on the EFA National Board when I was approached to apply for the position with the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG).

It seemed like no time at all between submitting my CV, to being interviewed, to being appointed initially as a volunteer to go with the SOCOG team as an observer to the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, which was a tremendous experience in itself. In Atlanta, I had also frequent contact with the Australian Equestrian team.

Attending the Atlanta Olympic Games with the SOCOG delegation was a great experience and quite demanding. The Equestrian venue was at Conyers, a fair way out of town. Sometimes I got a lift or had the use of an Australian Equestrian Team car, but on some days, it meant getting up at 3:30am and using public transport.

As "Observers" we had access to most areas and were able to interview Games staff, take photos and watch the competitions. We had questionnaires to complete for SOCOG, and my report received a lot of praise because it was so thorough and comprehensive. I can't remember the number of rolls of film I had to have developed.

After returning to Sydney, Toni and I managed to have a week's holiday, and this was to be the last of these until after the Sydney Games.

THE LEAD UP TO SYDNEY

I started full-time employment with SOCOG in September 1996. Equestrian, sailing and athletics were the only sports, whose Competition Managers started in 1996 due to the huge logistics requirements for these sports.

Gradually I built my team. If memory serves me correctly Rod Hoare was appointed Quarantine Manager in late 1996, the Veterinary Services Manager Nigel Nichols in 1997 and Discipline Managers Vince Roche, Deb MacNicol and Jenny Sheppard were appointed in 1998 with growing involvement, particularly in the run-up to the Test Event in September 1999.

We had talks with the FEI regarding giving Australian judges their opportunity to upgrade, and we also had input into the composition of Ground Juries and Appeal Committees. We sent a team of vets to the 1998 Rome WEG to gain experience and encouraged the EFA to hold courses to train more technical officials.

I was involved in the development of the venue from 1996 onwards, taking part in planning meetings, reviewing various design iterations, fighting to retain design features in "Value Engineering" meetings (basically cost-cutting exercises) and so on.

THE FOOD and the ACCOMODATION

As far as eating during the Games is concerned, the food was always good and varied. There was a Staff tent where a hot lunch was served. Sandwich/fruit/snack packs were available for people on "postings". Once the horses had arrived there was a Mess Tent near the stables for the grooms, riders and other team personnel with a variety of self-service spreads and soft drinks. We often ate there, sitting with a range of people. There was always a great atmosphere, as teams or riders, officials and grooms mixed (and had a beer or two).





There was also the Olympic Family Tent where I had lunch on occasions with FEI staff and officials.

The OCA placed 50 four-bedroom portable housing units on the venue to accommodate the over 200 grooms and other venue staff. Ten of these units are still there and in good use during major events.

THE NITTY GRITTY of being the EQUESTRIAN GAMES MANAGER

As I said earlier, full-time work started in September 1996 after the Atlanta Olympic Games observation trip. At this time the first requirements schedules were put together and draft competition schedules and other timelines drawn up. There was a lot of contact with the FEI to clarify (and argue about) their requirements for the Games and to work on the Olympic Regulations for the sport.

One of the other major time and work commitments was the planning of the transport of horses and their quarantine, which involved lots of meetings with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS). I was appointed Chairman of the SOCOG Quarantine Advisory Committee.

The final arrangements of two weeks (minimum) isolation before arrival at the horses' home base and two weeks (minimum) post-arrival quarantine at the venue (a quarantine zone by itself) were generally accepted by riders and owners but a couple of top jumping horses did not make the trip to Sydney. Losing out on prize money for up to eight weeks was just too much for them. Eight weeks you ask? Because one had to allow for five days of transport each way (around 50 horses in a Jumbo over five days) in addition to the two quarantine periods counted from the arrival date of the last horse.

I gave my first report at the 1997 FEI General Assembly in Puerto Rico, having dragged – in addition to my own luggage - a 200 Litre garbage bin full of printed SOCOG materials from airport to airport. Since I had a stop in New York on the way, the CEO of the American NF Kate Jackson, a former Equestrian Competition Manager (Los Angeles and Atlanta), kindly took care of the bin and had it transported to San Juan.

Reports to the annual FEI General Assemblies then became a regular thing for me. At the last two meetings the managers of the companies arranging the flight transport of horses from nominated hubs in North America and Europe also attended, together with horse feed specialists, who provided feed samples and took special orders.

SOCOG "PROGRAMS"

My work at SOCOG had as its first challenge the task of explaining the special features and requirements of "Equestrian" to the managers of other "Programs" in the organisation. Their numbers grew over time, and there were also changes in personnel.

Each "Program" took care of their specific responsibilities for ALL sports and other venues. There were over twenty-five "programs". The ones I had most dealings with were

Accreditation: to define what access privileges different people had at what time, including transport, catering etc. It also meant defining the various zones at the venue. Later during the Games, Accreditation was mainly concerned with the issue of Day Passes and for "Upgrade" Passes, which allowed for wider access than the base accreditation provided. All this asked for specific procedures and guidelines. Other accreditation and access issues concerned "personal coaches", additional team vets, etc.

Procurement: This Program was basically like a Purchasing Department, just more complicated as a result of Value-in-Kind deals with sponsors. They got involved with the purchase of horse feed, dressage arena sides and markers, jumping obstacles, field-of-play floral decoration (arena and cross-country), furniture for the venue and more. Thank goodness, the cross-country course, roads and tracks and the steeple chase were handled by the Olympic Coordination Authority (OAC) which looked after the venue construction and was much easier to deal with.

Catering: We needed to work out what food would be offered to whom "back of house" and what catering would be available to the public and when and where. This was a major job as catering at the Equestrian venue was quite different from that at virtually all other venues.

We had grooms and some venue staff staying on site and athletes spending long hours at the venue and this necessitated full catering services. We also had to provide for officials and volunteers with numbers varying every day. Members of the "Olympic Family" (IOC and NOC members, the FEI big shots, VIPs, senior officials, etc.) had a special dining area with the highest standard of catering.





Ceremonies: The Olympic medals were the same across all sports but we required ribbons or sashes for the horses and stable plaques that needed to be designed. Also, since the medal ceremonies involved horses, running them at the venue became a little more complicated, and we found that the Ceremonies people needed some “assistance”. After the first two ceremonies, I asked Frank Kemperman (who runs the Aachen CHIO and was an FEI Steward at the Sydney Games) to march in with the medal winners and make sure the teams and their horses were positioned in the right order and that the riders dismounted and were ready to mount the medal dais when they were called up. That had not gone very smoothly during the Eventing Team medal ceremony!

Accommodation: This was mainly for Technical Officials, both National and International. ITOs stayed in hotels and NTOs in school dormitories or similar. VIPs like International Federation Presidents and Secretaries-General, diplomatic staff and other dignitaries stayed in the best hotels in the city. The program also arranged accommodation for SOCOG staff when they went overseas.

On site we had 50 portable housing blocks for the grooms and some ground staff. 10 of them were retained for use after the Games.

Transport: Here lay the responsibility for the movement of athletes, team support and technical officials to and from the venue. When, how often, bus or car, chauffeured or self-driven, the assignment of cars with or without drivers, on-site parking and the list goes on. The total numbers of 4WDs jumped drastically for the two Three-Day Events, and, of course, we had ambulances for horses, riders and the general public, the latter managed by “Medical”.

Doping: As you know, in addition to athletes, horses are tested for prohibited substances in Equestrian.

Language Services: Which interpreting services would we need not to mention the translation of publications like explanatory booklets and team manuals.

Look: This department oversaw the design and placement of venue decoration with banner and flags plus the design of uniforms and merchandise. They were also involved in the design of the stable plaques and the rosettes and later involved themselves in the “design” of the Jumping obstacles (see below).

SOBO: The Sydney Olympic Broadcasting Organisation took care of how the competitions were televised. This involved the positioning of such things as cameras and booms, cables and motorcycle lanes, all which had to be signed off by Technical Delegates.

Media: There was a special tent for journalists and photographers and specific arena positions and seating for them, including television commentary facilities. We had to arrange for films to be collected, transported (by motorbike) and returned developed with some prints to the photographers. Media also controlled the “Mixed Zone”, where athletes (riders) could be interviewed after their effort.

C3: Command, Control & Communications: The communication across the venue, channels required on various days (most complex on cross-country days), number of radios issued, repeater stations required. Who could issue which orders when, emergency arrangement, etc.

Uniforms: Assessing the requirements for all involved in the Games, including the design and procurement of quarantine gear (overalls, rain gear, etc).

Results System: This was one of the most exacting and time-consuming activities. The IOC had decided to establish ORIS, the Olympic Results and Information System, as a legacy for use by future Olympic Organising Committees. As a result, every detail had to be documented covering all possible competition occurrences and outcomes in the three disciplines. There were meetings and tests in Sydney and at IOC headquarters in Lausanne, and final testing with the software people in Madrid.

Apart from having a fine dinner with the FEI representative in Madrid’s oldest restaurant, I also won bets with the FEI Head Honchos over the application of particular Dressage and Jumping Rules in the results system. It had turned out that I knew the rules better!!! I shared the champagne with the group.

Ticketing: We were involved in setting ticket price levels for the various competition days, the packages being offered, sales to the Equestrian community and so on. I should mention here that the first session to sell out from all sports of the Olympic Games was the Dressage Freestyle to Music competition. For the Three-Day Events, there were over 50,000 spectators on the Team 3DE Cross-Country day and over 38,000 on the Individual. The tickets there were discounted "community tickets", but the numbers were astounding!

A quote from the Sydney 2000 Report:

However, an unexpectedly large number of spectators used their own vehicles to arrive at Horsley Park, the equestrian competition venue. Of the 50 000 attending the (team) cross-country event, 37 000 travelled by car, backing up traffic on the M4 motorway. Another unexpected jam occurred at the park-and-ride at the Australia's Wonderland theme park, where at one point, more than 5000 stood in the queue for shuttle buses. The Olympic Roads and Traffic Authority (ORTA) announced that it would revise its plans for the facility, while reiterating its advice that spectators should travel by train.

The Venue and the Olympic Construction Authority (OCA):

I was involved with the design of the venue right from the beginning. The venue budget had been a gross underestimate and as costs exceeded budget by more and more there were review meetings after review meetings, with me trying to prevent cuts to what I thought were essential items for the operation of the venue after the Games. It was a constant fight, and many cuts that were made ultimately cost three or four times as much to rectify after the Games compared to their original cost.

Appointment of Officials: OCA was also the agency involved in the tender processes for the Jumping and Cross-Country Course Designers and the "Footing Expert". This was because these positions had expense budgets relating to the venue (surfaces, cross-country jumps, "show-jumping" jumps).

Leopoldo Palacios from Venezuela became the Jumping Course Designer (John Vallance became "Co-Designer"). Our decision to appoint Mike Etherington-Smith ("MES") as Cross-Country Course Designer was controversial; however, it proved to be right decision.

The Overlay: This is the addition of temporary facilities that were not part (or would not become part) of the permanent venue. This included the spectator stands, the gates, fencing in various areas including quarantine zone fencing, temporary buildings for venue and competition management staff and those from certain other "Programs" (e.g. Accreditation, Ticketing, Transport, a large SOBO complex, etc.), electrical, communications and TV wiring and cabling and much more.

Special Issues:

1. Roads and Tracks

The Roads and Tracks section of the 3DE went along the Sydney Water freshwater canal. I don't know how much time we spent on making sure that the water would not be contaminated by

horse manure and that horses and riders would not fall into the canal. A special horse recovery cage was constructed and tested with a mobile crane. Crews of special volunteers were trained and instructed to collect horse droppings. A bridge across the canal was part of the obstacle course. Even that required a safety assessment and consideration of horses being too frightened to cross it.

2. The International Supporters' Tent.

This gave fans of the sport an opportunity to book tickets to an area that offered a live Olympic feed to 10 or 15 TVs, a bar and food service, and outside seating to watch the equestrian competition directly. Having first struggled to get SOCOG approval for the idea, it took me quite a while to convince the NSW Branch of the EFA to take on the task. Ultimately it was a huge success and proved extremely popular with both international and national fans.

3. The Olympic Family (OF) Lounge

At an Olympic Games the International Technical Delegates are treated like gods with personally assigned cars and other privileges. At Atlanta the Ground Juries were seen as more "second-class".

I was successful in changing this for Sydney so members of the various Ground Juries could enjoy the gourmet food in the OF tent and relax with a drink after completing their daily duties. They also had a chance to mix with other members of the Olympic Family, which included HRH the Infanta Doña Pilar de Borbón, IOC Member and FEI President.

4. The Stables and the Grooms Accommodation

This was another one of those battles. The Chief Operating Officer of SOCOG at one stage was insisting on temporary stabling and tents for the grooms. In the end the OCA took over but even then, getting what I would call reasonable quality took a lot of doing. The stables are still standing, including the higher walls put in especially for Ulla Salzgeber's horse Rusty, who had the knack of climbing out of stables that were "only" 2 metres high.

5. The (Show) Jumping Obstacles

Members of the SOCOG "Look" Committee had visited the Test Event in September 1999 and had seen the Jumping course. There were 'amazed' by the jumps, particularly by the "Butterfly Jump". This led them to express an interest in the jumps being built for the Olympic Games. I had to make a formal presentation about the show jumps and got a lot of flak from Chair Mr. Donald McDonald (also Chairman of the ABC) and one or two other Committee members (something like "If you needed to define what kitsch is, this is it!". I don't want to repeat the other comments here). There was a request to review all designs. When I said that this was a "Sport" matter and that, in any case, the construction contracts had been awarded, Mr. McDonald apparently reported the matter to the SOCOG Board.

There were memos and meetings to keep the excitement up and a review committee established involving a number of "Programs": Sport, Communications, Venue Management, Aboriginal Relations and Protocol, Sponsorship (to ensure there are no sponsor conflict issues) and Media Relations.

In the end, we made some minor modifications to the paintwork, logos and other aspects not really impacting on the basic design, and everyone seemed to be happy (but were they ???).

THOSE MOMENTS!

It goes without saying that there were amazing moments but there were also the not-so amazing moments such as:

- o When "staff" did not follow agreed procedures. This sometimes resulted in rather embarrassing situations like the failure of the music recording for German dressage rider Ulla Salzgeber, when the required backups had not been made.
- o Some of the medals to be given out to International Technical Officials as a memento of the Games disappeared.
- o The name of one of the International Technical Officials was badly misspelled in the official Results Book, and the name of another had not been included at all.
- o The arena surface presented some problems despite the appointment of a "Footings Expert". Basically, the level beneath the top layer had hardened and virtually sealed off, preventing the draining of water into the drainage system underneath. We had a lot of rain before Day 1 of the Grand Prix and the arena had large areas of surface water. We scraped a lot of drainage channels under the arena sides to let some of the water escape, but it definitely did not look good. Luckily, the weather improved.
- o A request to let HRH Princess Haya of Jordan enter late, with special arrangements for her horse. This involved late-night phone calls with the Australian Embassy in Amman. Many riders were unhappy about the special treatment. Princess Haya later became FEI President.
- o In the Paralympic Games, some of the results software (different from the Olympic Games software) had not been tested properly against "paper results", and the requirement to validate the first two test results against the judges' sheets was ignored, so we ended up awarding medals to the wrong individuals. I had to cop the fury of team chefs and of the diplomatic staff of the countries that had to hand back their medals. A new medal ceremony had to be arranged.
- o Not to mention the use of a fake parking pass by a prominent rider of a European Dressage team
- o When the Games had ended there was some pilfering and theft, including one of the number plates on my car (EQ2000) and the large bell brought by Swiss Timing that had been used for the Jumping competitions. I have been told where these items have been spotted.....

THE HUMOUROUS MOMENTS

The Water Jump: Show Jumping Course Designer Leopoldo Palacios was a hard man to get hold of due to his many international commitments and so we had trouble confirming the specifications and positioning of the "permanent" water jump in the main arena. The engineers pressed ahead with it but once the concrete had dried enough to fill the jump with water, we realised to our horror that they had made the sides of the jump go with the slope of the arena so that the water level on one end was higher than on the other end. And yes – it was fixed!



The Crash Landing: a couple of weeks before the Opening Ceremony a restored Messerschmidt fighter plane had taken off from a nearby airfield and crash-landed on the cross-country course. This was a major attraction for SOCOG staff. Being of German origin, I became the target of many jokes for a few days.

A FINAL SAY

The whole Olympic exercise was a once in a lifetime experience. Overall, I had a great team of people working with me to get the work done.

The job gave me – directly and indirectly - the opportunity to attend five Olympic Games, several World Equestrian Games and many other major events around the world, including FEI General Assemblies.

And as for watching our riders (and horses) performing at an Olympic Games in front of a home crowd, not to mention some of them standing on the medal podium – it was amazing!! And I never failed to feel proud of our Olympic athletes nor of the fantastic Olympic Games that Sydney had conducted – truly "The Best Games Ever"!

Reflections on the Sydney 2000

Mary Seefried - Member of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games
Ground Jury for Dressage

Could you tell us something about the lead up to the Sydney 2000 games and any preparation you had to do?

Once I was appointed I was fortunately invited to several important CDIs in Europe during 1998-2000 to get to know fellow panel members better and also to obtain experience, which certainly wasn't sufficiently available in Australia at that time. My fellow panel members were Volker Moritz - a great teacher, Eric Lette, Jan Peeters and Axel Steiner. Mariette Withages helped with these invitations as she was a show organiser in touch with many people and of course Eric Lette was of great assistance. I distinctly remember judging at Munich CDI for the first time and I was not sure whether it was the cold of the frosty morning or nerves that made my knees knock.

In some respects it is still the practice now- once panels are selected for major championships including World Championships the judging panel gets a chance to judge sometimes together or sometimes just in twos and threes at significant shows which will have a spread of the nations and horses, and especially be invited to Aachen to judge. This is what the team managers want - to expose their potential team members to the judges in question. And of course judging is team work - it is great to be at a show to discuss in detail with your fellow team members.



How did you get the appointment onto the judging panel?

The appointment was made by FEI headquarters on recommendation from the FEI Dressage committee. As it is usual to have a judge from the country or continent where the OG takes place, I guess I was the right person at the right time at the right place.

What about the time spent in SIEC leading up to and during the competition?

I flew down a few days beforehand - I think at least three - and my husband drove down from Queensland as it is very important to have extra transport over and above what was provided by the Organizing Committee especially if you wanted to do something on the day off or go out in the evening. Our accommodation was in a rather "normal" motel in Liverpool - nothing like the nice accommodation that Toni Venhaus provides for us now at the Mercure Liverpool. Liverpool was at that time not a very upmarket area! So not luxury, but acceptable. We ate once at the Chinese restaurant next door to the motel or had toasted sandwiches provided by the hotel itself. The food on the grounds themselves was superb but it is not a "gravy train" that's for sure.

We had a memorable evening after the medals had been awarded in Sydney itself, travelling in by train to Darling Harbour. Olympic Games are huge events and one cannot believe the accommodation and the number of beds needed for officials of all sports, for teams of all sports and all countries, for volunteers from international and outside Sydney - it is simply a huge logistical task.



We did get to meet some of the riders after the judging was completed. Its always best protocol to stay on the judging side of the fence until it is over unless there is an official function where riders and judges can freely mingle publicly. The Sydney 2000 Olympics was the time of the great fight for the individual gold medal between Isobel Werth on Gigolo and Anky van Grunsven on Bonfire. Anky won the gold individual. The Dutch were keen for us to go on their entertaining boat, The Duyfken - which was moored in Sydney Harbour. That was a great night!



How did it feel watching our Aussie team performing at an Olympic Games in front of a home crowd? Was it difficult not to get goose bumps seeing the Aussie riders in a home games and what were the highlights and special memories of the games for you?

Of course, I was filled with national pride to see our team performing at SIEC in the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. They looked the part and of course in the Teams we were eventually placed 6th. Kristy Oatley was a standout on Wall Street and did so well to get to the final 15 in the Freestyle. Rachel Downs, Ricky Macmillan and Mary Hanna did so well and certainly weren't overawed by the occasion. Kristy had a great freestyle music which had some Australian themes. Interestingly the individual medal was made up of the GP, GPS and Freestyle scores. In Tokyo in 2021 the GP will be the qualifier for the Freestyle Individual medal.

I was so proud of the whole of the Sydney Olympic Games, such a friendly and successful Games meeting all of the Olympic ideals. Franz Venhaus had done a terrific job as Equestrian Manager and with so many Australians on his team it was just like going to a local show!! SIEC looked terrific and all of the competitors were so impressed with everything particularly

the openness of the stables and the feeling of freedom. The stands were absolutely packed and such a great atmosphere for the competitors was created by the enthusiastic audience. This will be my memory – bright sunshine and a crowd of equestrians sitting on the tiered seating really enjoying themselves watching top sport.

I still think those stables are some of the best I have seen for a major Championships, so horse friendly and open. 20 years later they are still just as good.



One of the most memorable moments was when Ulla Salzgeber's music stopped in the middle of her Freestyle. Eric Lette was C judge and he handled it so calmly and precisely. Ulla herself was also very cool headed. Eventually she was able to start from the point at which the music stopped and ended up with the Bronze individual medal!

My husband and my sister (a showjump rider) had bought tickets to watch and Franz Venhaus kindly arranged for my husband to be able to use the officials lunch facilities. My husband was so impressed when he was standing in the queue behind the King of Sweden!!

Overall, those Olympics are one of the most important highlights of my judging career!

A Coffee with Jan Geary

Member of the Sydney 2000 Para Olympic Equestrian Ground Jury



I was fortunate enough to be able to chat with retired dressage judge Jan Geary about her reminiscences of judging at the Sydney 2000 Paralympics.

Jan has been a judge at many international para dressage shows including Paralympics and World Equestrian Games – she truly has led an extraordinary life and the Sydney 2000 Paralympics ranks highly amongst her memories.

She was invited to be a part of the para dressage panel about 12 months prior to the games and spent preparation time in England at the Hartpury Dressage Festival.



During the games Jan lived at the Olympic Village along with the other judges. The riders were also accommodated at the Olympic Village although they were in a distinctly separate area to judges. The meals were served in a “mess hall” and Jan remembers the food as being better than average, and the catering provided for the many different cuisines and dietary requirements that befitted a group of international athletes.

The accommodation was also better than average Jan recalled. Interestingly the apartments that serviced the Olympic Village were constructed so they could be sold and relocated after the games were over.

Whilst we were talking Jan told me that the international dressage para riders were provided with loan horses. This was the last Paralympics where loan horses were used.

The chairman of the EADC, Prue Spurrett, was the owner of a loan horse and Centreline chats to Prue about this experience.

I was astounded when Jan showed me her Sydney 2000 judge’s uniform complete with hat and scarf – surely a special memento to be proud of!

When asked about her special memories of the Sydney 2000 Paralympics Jan replied without hesitation that the performances of Lee Pearson, British Grade 1 para rider were the highlight for her. Lee Pearson won 3 gold medals at Sydney – Grade 1 Dressage, Freestyle Dressage and Team Dressage.

And as you would expect Jan was thrilled to be a part of our very own Sydney 2000 Paralympics.



Prue Spurrett

Memories of the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games

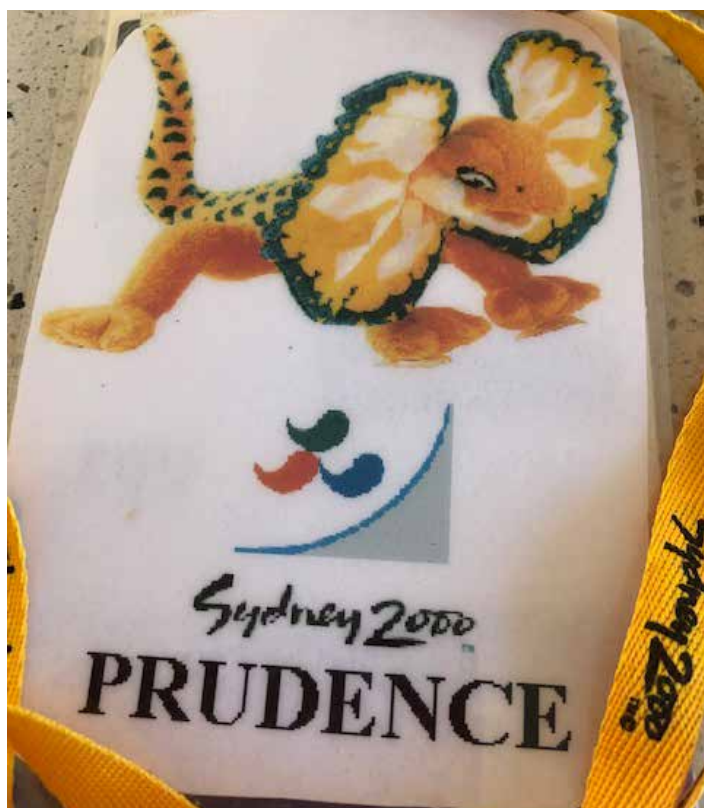


The Sydney 2000 ParaEquestrian was the last Games where the dressage horses were loaned to international riders. Those of us who had answered the call and made the 'short list' rolled in to SIEC for what can only be described as a mass Hollywood casting call in the main arena. We cantered our horses around whilst the international teams sat looking down on us making their selections - maybe it was more like a Roman amphitheatre!

My lovely grey, Northern Lights was chosen by Team Japan. Super!!! I could speak Japanese albeit a little rusty but was back up to speed pretty quickly over the 2 weeks of the ParaEquestrian preparation and competition. 20 years and the memories are still so fresh although I never want to spend another night in a SIEC cabin. It was 24-hour lockdown on site for the duration and the pressure was pretty intense. I remember ringing up my husband John in tears one day begging him to come to SIEC and take me on day release to lunch somewhere – anywhere...

I am still a long time Facebook friend with Chiaki Hanaumi Nakajima. Jackie was the Japanese teams Chef d'Equip. We met up again at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta when I was on the Equestrian Appeals Committee and Jackie was overseeing Team Japan.

Sydney 2000 Paralympics was definitely up there with the "Best of Times."



My Time as an “Oly Voly”



MY ROLE

My function at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games was Assistant to the Equestrian Competition Manager, Franz Venhaus.

I officially started as a volunteer the week before the Games, however I unofficially started doing the odd hours here and there a few weeks before that. I was located in the Competition Management Office, situated in a great spot above the Main Stadium. My job was to assist Franz when/where needed – keeping his files and office in order, doing administrative jobs plus odd jobs that he needed a gofer to do and more. I also assisted in the office Secretariat and helped Deb MacNicol (Dressage Manager) and her assistant Kate with the dressage part of the Games.

I had a great time – worked with and met some really nice people, learnt a lot, saw the best competitors in the world across the three disciplines (but the dressage was obviously the best for me). What more could one ask for.

It's hard for anyone to imagine just what is required to run an Olympic Games, even just the Equestrian sport. The logistics and complexities are enormous.

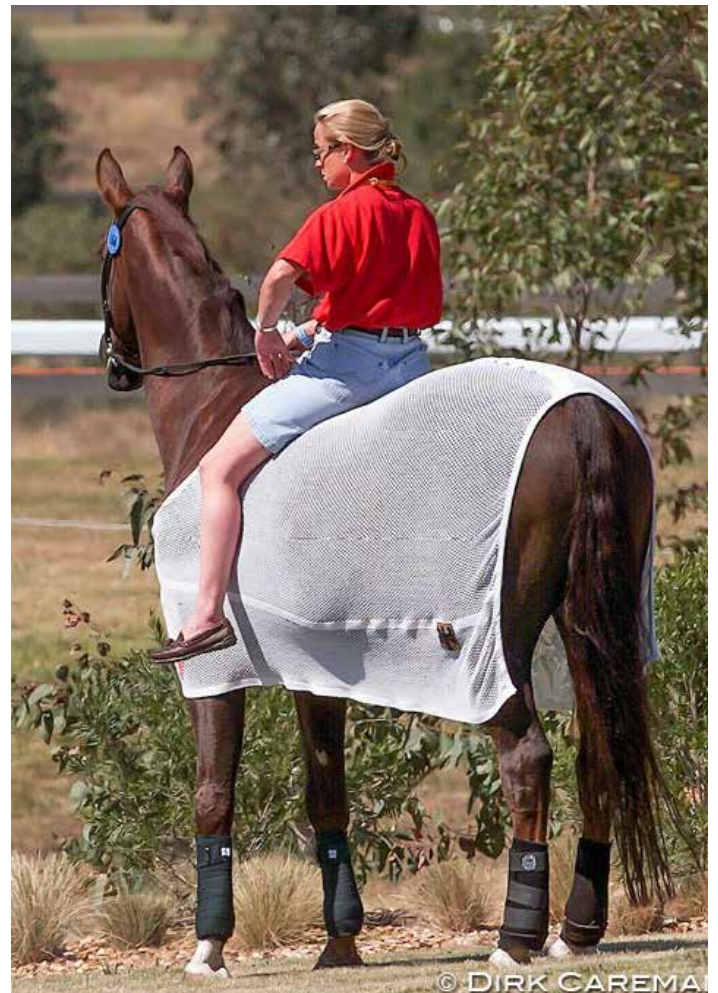
My first few days at Horsley Park were during the Horse Arrival and Quarantine period. As I walked up through the warm-up arenas heading for the office I had to pinch myself as it was difficult to believe that it really was Bonfire or Gigolo in the arena. Everyone felt the same – we were really excited and privileged to be a part of things.

The overseas horses started arriving late in August and all arrived in good health. I felt that horses I had seen previously in Europe looked much better here in Australia. The conditions seemed to agree with them and they were all blooming when they left. Must be the healthy air and lifestyle!

The first few weeks during the quarantine period the horses were lightly worked and the mood was really relaxed and friendly. The overseas grooms and riders were delighted with the set up. One of the Spanish commented after waking up the first morning after arriving the night before with the horses “Is this where we are really staying – is this the Olympic venue?” They were amazed at the open surroundings, the bush, the space, the clean air and general ambience of SIEC. It made for a great start and thankfully their happiness continued to the end, with a few tears shed when they left.

A few incidents happened during the early period. One of the British eventers, Rodney Powell, broke his ankle after falling off his horse whilst talking on his mobile phone! Bonfire unseated Anky one day and she bit the dust.

Things started to hot up as the start of the games came closer and more and more overseas Team Officials, Technical Officials and riders started to arrive. The office got busier and busier but we had a good team of staff and all worked fairly smoothly behind the scenes. A steady stream of people came into the office requesting the much sought after car passes. Isabell Werthe came in one day and quietly introduced herself to the



girls in the office and sat down and chatted to them whilst waiting to speak with Franz. The girls were thrilled. Rodrigo Pessoa and other members of the Brazilian Team were regular visitors – usually for Franz wanting more day passes authorised for their families.

During the Quarantine period a 'Friendly Dressage Competition' was held for the Eventers. Jessica Ransenhousen (Chef for the USA Team and International Judge) along with Gill Rickard judged the competition. I wrote (pencilled) for Jessica. It was a good day. We had a few laughs and the practice day seemed to have worked because the performances of some combinations improved on the actual competition days.

On the Sunday after all the overseas horses had arrived the main arena was open for all riders. At one point there was about 50 horses in the arena. What a sight it was to see the world's top horses across all the disciplines all in the arena together. The same thing happened again when all the Aussies, Kiwis and the USA horses (who had arrived earlier in Australia) arrived. They were joined by some of the riders (jumpers) who did not come with their horses in the early period and so had not had the opportunity to ride in the main arena.

All Olympic volunteers were offered a ticket to the Opening Ceremony dress rehearsal so I took up the offer (not thinking that we would end up going to the real thing a few nights later) and went in on the train with Sicca and Dirk Dijkstra. It was fantastic as you all know. At the last minute Franz and I attended the real Opening Ceremony and even though I had attended the rehearsal I enjoyed it just as much or even more because of the athletes, the crowd and the atmosphere. Did anyone notice that Anky carried the flag for the Netherlands?

THE 3 DAY EVENT

The competition started with the Team 3DE Dressage and we were off and running. While the dressage was going on in the Main Stadium the officials and others associated with the cross country were in over drive and the office was a hive of activity. Running a dressage event is a piece of cake compared to staging a big 3DE. I helped get things ready for cross country day and the aisle way leading to Franz's office looked a sight with rows and rows of boxes set up for the jump judges containing score sheets, timing equipment, whistles, flags and all sorts of things. On Cross Country Day the number of vols and others needed rose to around 1500 compared to other days when around 400 were involved. It was fortunate that there was a TV with continuous live coverage of the equestrian events located in the office. This allowed us to keep in touch with the performances and the results.

On cross country day I stayed mainly in the office except for a short time out on course as a driver. I was taking the Princess Donar Pilar de Borbon (President of the FEI), her PA and her son on a drive onto the cross country course. Franz was busy at the time taking Michael Knight on a tour.

One other brush with fame I had was during the dressage of the Team 3DE. I was helping out with stewarding near the main arena and the collecting ring. A crowd of people with a fellow in a suit rushed up to enter the collecting ring. I stopped the man in front and asked nicely to see his accreditation when a 'very proper' voice from behind said that this fellow was the Manager of the British Team. I looked up and saw that the voice was Princess Anne. Of course I let them through. Heath Ryan was looking on nearby and had a joke with me about it afterwards.





It was fantastic to witness the final of the Team 3DE. A full house for the showjumping and the atmosphere was electric. The stands were full of Aussie fans in great voice, wildly waving banner and flags. I was standing next to a Frenchman who assured me when Andrew was jumping that we had it in the bag – could not lose – but we didn't believe it until he crossed the line. I had the job of getting the rosettes on the horses before the ceremonies. It was mayhem in the collecting ring after the win with not many dry eyes around. A great day for all and fantastic to hear the first national anthem at Horsley Park being the Australian one.

The EFA Federal hosted a small celebration in recognition of the Aussie 3DE Team Gold Medal on the evening of 25 September in the ISP Pavillion. This was the evening of Cathy Freeman's Gold Medal run, and for me this was just as good as the 3DE Gold Medal.

After the 3DE Team event we did it all again for the Individual 3DE competition. On the morning of the Individual Cross Country Day the main arena was open to the dressage riders for arena familiarization. This was a morning I enjoyed and I was finally able to see lots of the horses while helping with supervising the session.

THE DRESSAGE

At last the real dressage begins. Before the Grand Prix, Di Jenkyn and Snowy River Blackwood rode the Grand Prix test whilst Roger Fitzhardinge did a running commentary on what the test was all about and what the judges would be looking for. Before the Grand Prix Special Rozzie Ryan and Excellent did the same thing. Although I did not get to see all of the dressage I managed to watch who I wanted as well as catching snippets on the TV in the office. The performances have been widely covered in other publications so I will not report on the rides except to say that it was a marvellous experience to watch the German and the Dutch riders as well as many others. Our Aussie competitors did what we had all hoped and finished in the top six as a Team.

A full house of 20,000 enthusiastic spectators watched the dressage and they were not disappointed. It was wonderful to have one of our own riders, Kristy Oatley Nist and Wall Street do so well to finish in 9th place overall. A real boost for Australian dressage. The Grand Prix Freestyle on the final day was always going to be a big one and the spectators loved every minute of it. The starting order could not have been done better. It was a real draw in lots of five riders with the top five going last and it just happened that Anky and Isabell were the last two to be drawn. The crowd were to be kept in suspense right to the end. Not all of the 20,000 who attended the event were 'dressage followers' and I would say that we have attracted a new audience to the sport. Watching the two champion horses Bonfire and Gigolo was emotional and awe-inspiring. To see these two super horses in their last performances before retirement was a great experience. Anky was so happy and delighted with finally achieving the Gold with her partner Bonfire. When she left the arena and entered the collecting ring at the back of the stadium she was heard to say "I love Sydney".

Complimenting the Individual Medal Ceremony was the noisy Dutch supporters 'Heineken Band'. All dressed in orange and singing the Dutch anthem loudly and playing Dutch songs well after the Ceremony was over. They returned the next day to cheer on and celebrate the Dutch showjumping victory.

There were tears of joy at the press conference after the ceremony. Isabell was a true champion. She said she did not see it as losing the Gold but as winning the Silver medal. She shed a few tears as she thanked her trainer and mentor Dr Shulten-Baumer.



Kristy and Wall Street were the first Australians to qualify for the freestyle and she did not disappoint her new found fans. After the Freestyle Kristy commented:

On her choice of music

"I knew nothing about the music. I just did a home video and gave it to the guy who did Isabell (Werth) and Nadine (Cappallmann's) music. Only got it two and a half weeks ago and that was the first time I have ridden it on Wall Street. I only practiced it once at home because I didn't think I'd get into the Freestyle. They (my trainers) were all at me to prepare a freestyle and there was a bit of hesitation because Wall Street didn't know what was coming at all. This will be my freestyle now until I get sick of it. I'm so proud of him – he coped so well. I think he was thinking what is she doing now?"

On her performances with Wall Street

"I wasn't as nervous today as I have been. I just enjoyed myself."

THE SHOWJUMPING

Expectations from the Showjumping community was high. There were some problems with the footing early on and considerable work was done on the arena after the qualifying competition. Although not perfect the jumpers found the going acceptable. The weather for the jumping competitions went from one extreme to the other. First day wet, then to hot and sticky finishing off with high winds for the final day. The arena looked a picture with the plants and decorations matching the creative jumps really well.

As predicted Germany won the Team Gold Medal, Silver to Switzerland and Bronze to Brazil following an exciting jump off with France. Our Australian showjumping team did a lot better than some had predicted. The best performer after the first days was Jamie Coman and Zazu however they did not make the cut for the final day. Geoff Bloomfield and Money Talks made it through to the final round which was a great result.

The Individual competition was exciting down to the last ride. Rodrigo Pessoa was expected to win gold but was eliminated when his horse had three refusals. There was a jump off to decide the three medals: Gold to Jeroen Dubbledam and Sjiem (NED), Silver to Albert Voorn and Lando (NED) and Bronze to Kaled Al Eid riding Kashn al Aan (KSA). The Dutch Gold and Silver medalists were beside themselves with joy. The Dutch Team Officials were delighted as well as it had been quite a number of years since the Netherlands had won an Olympic Medal in jumping.

ALL OVER

The competition over – what happens next? A few drinks at the 'Volunteer Farewell' then back to the office for our own little celebration. Some headed off to the Closing Ceremony, others to their own private parties. Sicca and Dirk Dijkstra were heading off to dinner with the Dutch team in Windsor. So, along with Roger Fitzhardinge, Deb MacNicol and others we joined them. Franz and I were both exhausted and really should have gone home. But our social life had been non-existent during the Games so we took the opportunity to enjoy an evening with people we did not have a chance to talk with during the Games.

The following day work continued for some of us. Horses still on site, things to be finalized and so on. The first load of horses departed from SIEC on the evening of the final showjumping day. The flights out continued all week with one or two loads departing each day. I was around to wave goodbye to Bonfire and the other Dutch horses. One of the grooms (Jeroen Dubbledam's) came to shake all of our hands as she was leaving and through her tears she said how much they had enjoyed the Sydney Olympics.

For the OC it was a relief that all had run so smoothly and that Australia had managed to pull the whole thing off so well, not only on the equestrian side. We had lots of positive feedback from Team members and Officials who were so impressed with the overall professional organization of the Games. Reiner Wendt (Team Leader for Germany) said that it was "the best ever" from their point of view. This was a real compliment. Even the Media were happy – not an easy bunch to please! The Horse Magazine Chris Hector stood up at one of the Press Conferences and thanked the Press Team and presented a bottle of champagne to Lucia the Press Manager. Roger Fitzhardinge worked in the Press Office and they have lots of funny tales to tell including this one. An American journalist made a comment about the judges' boxes "Is this where they park the horses for the medal ceremony". Obviously not a regular equestrian person!

"THE CARNIVAL IS OVER"

Having lived with the Games for the last four years it is hard to come to terms with it being all over. Time to recharge the batteries, catch up on things around the house and garden, spend time with the dogs and the horses and slowly life will return to normal.





SIEC – From Rural Hills to an Olympic Games Venue

Once the decision was made in 1996 to use 95 hectares of rural land at Horsley Park as the site for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games venue for equestrian events, the work commenced immediately.

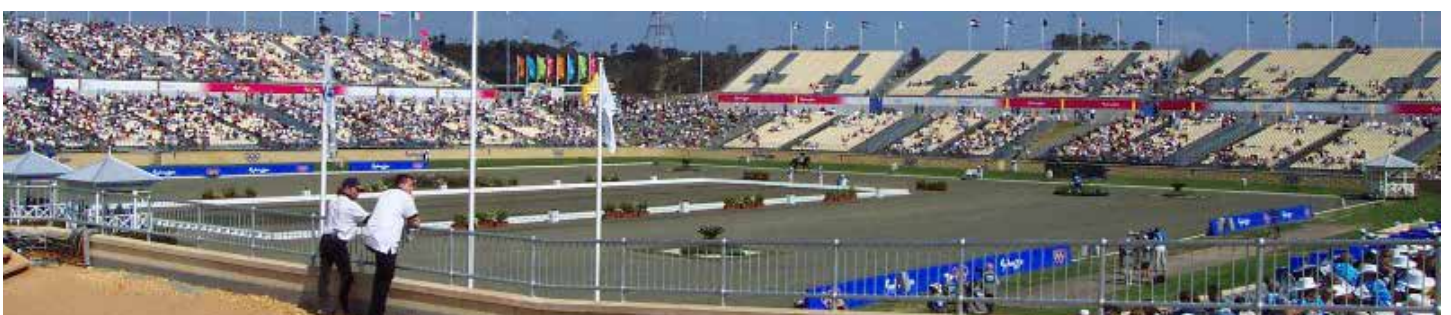
The first year or so was mainly earthworks, and what a lot of earthworks there was!

The quantity of earth moved during the construction, including the cut through the hill near the current gate to the cross-country, was approximately 2.5 million cubic metres; that would cover a two-lane road (6 m wide) to Dubbo with dirt 1 m deep.

Construction started in 1997, and Franz Venhaus visited the site frequently in his capacity as Equestrian Games Manager, often with overseas visitors. In fact, Franz was such a regular visitor that he had a master key for all the gates. As an aside, Franz was showing Toni Venhaus the earthworks on the weekend of 31 August 1997 when they heard on the radio that Lady Diana had died in a car crash in Paris.

SIEC was ready for the Olympic trial event held in September 1999, a mere three years after work started. For the Games themselves, an “overlay” of temporary structures and facilities was added, consisting of portable office buildings, a great variety of tents, cabling and drainage facilities, spectator entry gates with “mag-and-bag” inspection facilities, toilets, casual seating, and, of course, the grandstands for approximately 20,000 spectators.

Today this world class venue offers an Indoor arena and 14 outdoor arenas including 2 grass arenas, a cross-country course suitable for all levels, a steeplechase track, almost 300 stables, 40 cabins and much more. To read more about SIEC as it is today [CLICK HERE](#).





We are certainly fortunate to have this Olympic venue available for a variety of equestrian sports and other activities.

