

## My dressage year

Thank-you very much to Aberdeenshire Sports Council for awarding me a grant for 2009. I have had a really busy season with both my ponies Champagne Bubbles and Picasso X. My first major dressage competition was in February which was the winter regional finals, where I won 3 championships classes and qualified for the national championships. Dressage is quite unusual in that children compete against adults so I was thrilled to win all of these championships competing against adults which in some cases were professional riders. The national championships were very exciting, albeit a bit nerve wracking and whilst Bubbles was also a bit nervous and did not go his best we were in the prize list for all three classes. He slightly blotted his copybook in the first prize-giving by being very naughty and I had to get special dispensation not to ride him in the rest of the mounted prize-givings! I then attended the Scottish Schools combined training where I won the individual dressage, the individual combined training, and my team also won both team events. This was a real achievement for me as I don't really enjoy jumping - I much prefer to stick to dressage movements.

My first Scottish team appearance was at Cavan in Southern Ireland where the classes were huge. There were 54 in my section and I was placed in all my four individual classes which included a win and a second. I ended up second overall for the individual championship and missed out on the individual title by 0.1% to an Irish Senior International rider who then represented Ireland at the European Championships in Windsor so I was competing against top riders. The Scottish team ended up 3<sup>rd</sup> and I was the top Scottish competitor. The next team event was once again in Southern Ireland and although the competition started off well as I won the Freestyle to Music championships Bubbles was not on form and our results were disappointing. We called out the vet when we got home and after a blood test we discovered that he had a virus – poor boy – what a pity they can't tell us if they are not feeling well.

Luckily my next team appearance was with my other pony Picasso in England. However, this was a bit of a disaster as the engine of our lorry blew up on the way down. Whilst we managed to get a lift to the competition I then developed flu. As I was part of a team I was determined to compete although my scores were not as good as I could have managed if I had been well. Whilst I was pleased to receive a special award for competing when I was not well I would have been better pleased if Picasso and I had performed good tests.

As the lorry was still not fixed my trainer, Mary McFarlane, who is also the Scottish trainer, drove her lorry to the Home International in Wales which was my next Scottish appearance on the team, where it rained and rained and rained. Bubbles and I went quite well but could have done better and we ended up in the bronze medal position for riders under the age of 16 – if we had performed to our best I think we could have won gold and I came home determined to ride better.

I have since been working really hard and last weekend we competed at the Scottish championships where we won the Elementary Championships. This level of test is a step up for both of us so I was delighted to do so well. I have now been asked to try out for the GB squad and attend the viewing day which is near London at the end of September. I suspect that both Bubbles and I are a bit young to get onto the squad but it should be a good learning experience for me.

Living in the North East of Scotland is a real challenge for my competing as I cannot simply pop on a plane or train to get to my competitions – we need to travel miles in the lorry and whilst I can sleep as my Mum drives, the ponies don't rest when they travel and therefore we need to be quite careful how much travelling we do. My Mum can also only drive so many miles and as she works full-time getting to competitions and training can be a bit of a nightmare. There are obviously also huge costs involved, particularly when Mum manages to blow up the lorry engine. So, thank-you for the support, it is very much appreciated.

Carmen Gammie