



Adelaide Equestrian Festival

New Champions and a defining week for Australian Eventing

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There is a distinctive narrative to the Adelaide Equestrian Festival; shaped by the history of the five-star event, embraced by the rolling Adelaide Hills and encapsulated in an atmosphere that grows in depth, emotion and pride every year.

At Adelaide, there are rarely clear favourites. We may not have the likes of Ros Canter competing down under, but what Australian eventing does offer is an incredibly inter-connected and

competitive playing field, where the underdog often has just as much chance as anyone else. This year was no exception, with the inter-generational camaraderie on full display throughout the week.

Adelaide delivers, perhaps, where a lot of other five-stars miss the mark...



The 2026 event truly reflected what makes Adelaide so special and I think Atalya Boytner described it best in her article for Eventing Nation last year: Whilst the “pomp and splendour (of the European and US five-stars) are undeniably exciting, here (Adelaide) I find myself reconnecting to that old excitement: this sport is for *everyone*... the doors to glory are open if only you have the grit and gumption to get to them”.

It seemed that this year in particular, with the absence of three-time winners and history makers Hazel Shannon and Willinga Park Clifford, it was all to play for anyone in the field, right down to the last fence on show jumping day.

The Oceania Championships returned to Australia this year, running alongside the Adelaide Three-Day Event and bringing together rider representatives from both Australia and New Zealand.

Australian U25 Team Chef d'Equipe Hamish Cargill described the Championship as “an opportunity for these young riders to perform in a team environment, with the pressure and atmosphere of a championship event that we don’t often get in Australia.”





The CCI3*-L class sponsored by Racing SA, featured 35 riders, 19 of which were Young Riders, who ultimately dominated the competition.

Notably, the top ten after dressage, was occupied mostly by Young Riders, with all three leading combinations producing sub-30 tests.

Cross-country day saw plenty of movement in the CCI3*-L class, particularly in the top 10, with fast and accurate combinations being rewarded on Mick Pineo's challenging course. The entire 4-strong Australian U25 team all jumped a double clear, a very commendable achievement, with the exception of Tahlia Pursell's unfortunate watch malfunction.

The show-jumping designed by David Shoebridge, for all classes this year, proved influential. Less than a rail separated the final top five, highlighting just how close and competitive the CCI3*-L field was. It was a fairy-tale finish for Adelaide-first timer Tahlia Pursell on her own Astro NZPH, with a text-book clear-round they finished in the top spot on 31.2, helping to also secure the win for the Australian U25 Team in the Oceania Championship. Finishing in second, a singular penalty separating them from the win, was teammate (and newly minted four-star rider and winner, at the time of this article's publishing) Lamoza Velisha on Ophelie Van Prinseveld, adding nothing to their dressage score of 32.2. Olivia Shore rounded out the top three, riding the stunning thoroughbred gelding 'Dreamcatcher', just 2.2 penalties behind the leader. The Australian U25 Team claimed victory on home soil on, on a score of 105.8 Team in the Oceania Championship, the New Zealand Team finishing on 161.2 penalties.



The Horseland CCI4*-S was filled with compelling stories and campaigns. With two Australian riders only days and weeks away from embarking on individual international campaigns, the class quickly established itself as one full of "the ones to watch", making for an exceptionally exciting competition.

Shanae Lowings and Bold Venture looked to be taking an early lead as they started their weekend on 25.6, however the veteran 4-star combination withdrew before the cross country, leaving the top spot wide open.

20 riders contested Clayton Fredrick's notoriously demanding cross country course, with the time proving near-impossible to chase once again. Just two riders made the time: New Zealand's Carys McCrory and Australian Oceania Senior Team representative Sophia Hill – one of the fastest ranked event riders in the world currently, thanks to her five-star mount 'Humble Glory', who was awaiting her arrival in the US just days after Adelaide, to compete in the Kentucky 3 day event (we don't quite know how Sophia does it all!).



On the final day, Jess Sommerfield triumphantly claimed victory despite adding a rail to their score. The combination climbed from ninth after dressage to secure their first 4-star win, marking a deserved new career milestone for Jess, who credited the achievement to the large, dedicated team behind her.

Sophia Hill and Tulara Baltango secured second place, leading the Australian Gold team to victory in the Oceania Senior Championship following a flawless clear show-jumping round. At just 10 years old, Tulara Baltango continues to emerge as one of the most exciting horses for the future of Australian eventing, expertly piloted by Sophia Hill. Queensland-based Oceania Championship Team rider Andrew Cooper on Ocean Eight finished in third on 44.6.

While it's not the absolute 'pinnacle' of eventing, the Olympic and World Championship standard is the CCI4* level and we see expected fluctuations in entries year-to-year between four-star and five-star, as riders pursue their individual pathways and goals. However, this year's Adelaide Horseland CCI4*-S was a showcase of depth and calibre and a reminder that the level stands firmly on its own.

Now about that pinnacle... the Adelaide CCI5*. The class comprised of a mere 13 riders this year, made for a nail-biting contest that saw all of the upset, elation and jeopardy that we expect from the top of eventing.

The singular Kiwi rider: Madison Seivwright on Waitangi Pinterest made a break for lead early on dressage day, they were the only combination to score a sub-30 test. Behind them on 30.6 was five-star debutant, FEI U25 World Number 2, Oliver Barrett on Sandhills Briar. Oliver opted to withdraw his second ride, Sandhills Gem before the cross country.

The Cross-country designed by Mike Ethrington-Smith – renowned for his work at the Sydney 2000 and Beijing 2008 Olympic games – saw horses and riders gallop through the parklands for just over 11 minutes. With the ground at Adelaide being some of the best quality we've seen in years, it proved to be a fast, technical and influential phase for the small field of five-star combinations. Just two riders made the time: Sam Woods on SS Eight Count, finishing right on the optimum time, stealing the lead from Madison Seivwright (who moved into second with 6.4 time) and Victorian-based rider Sam Jeffree on Santoro. Oliver Barrett sat quietly in third after the second day of competition.

The show-jumping atmosphere was electric. You could only imagine what each combination felt riding through the archway into the Gillian Rolton Main Arena as the crowd fell silent in anticipation. Poles dropped across the field, with clear, careful rounds rewarded in the final placings. Ultimately, it was the twenty-two-year old, five-star first-timer, Oliver Barrett on Sandhills Briar whose composure and performance could have been compared to a veteran at the level... pure class. Sandhills Briar was certainly expected to go clear on the final day – the horse having zero show

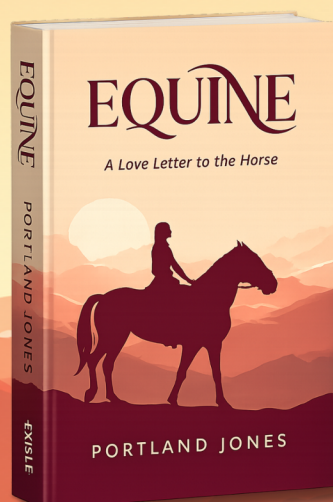


jumping rails in its entire FEI career but it was Sam Wood's unfortunate mid-round rail that saw the top spot open for the Young Rider to secure the greatest achievement of his career yet (emphasis on the yet – this is just the beginning for this combination). Sam Woods finished in second, followed by Andrew Cooper on the dazzling Sharvalley Thunder. A horse that certainly looks to have matured greatly since his international campaign.

The story of this year's Adelaide five-star winner reflects what Adelaide has always represented: a fundamental part of Australian eventing and a stage where generations of the sport continue to shape its future. Coming from one of Australia's most recognised eventing breeding and performance families, Oliver Barrett & Sandhills Briar are a testament to the Sandhills program developed by parents Craig and Prue Barrett, whose influence can now be seen across multiple levels of Australian eventing. There were even jokes throughout the week that it may have been the first time a family had "bred both the winning horse and the rider".

It's not lost on me what it takes to put together an event like Adelaide, let alone in a country as detached as Australia is from the rest of the five-star world. The hours of planning, organisation and care required to deliver an event of this scale were evident throughout the week.

That attention to detail was particularly reflected in initiatives such as the Education Hub, which added another layer of depth and engagement to the event. Across the three days, figures including Andrew McLean, Amanda Ross and Equestrian Australia High Performance staff delivered engaging seminars that helped bridge the gap between elite sport and public understanding. Opportunities like these should not be underestimated, not only for grassroots spectators and the wider public learning more about the sport, but for the younger generation who may one day find themselves riding through the Adelaide Parklands too.



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