

Dawson to take on the world's best at FEI Children's Challenge

Lali Stander

JOHANNESBURG (6 December 2011) – All clear in a slick time was just the ticket to guarantee that 14-year-old Cameron Dawson from Fourways will start the New Year with a bang.

The St Peter College learner will embark on the most exciting journey of his young life after winning the local FEI Children's Challenge to book his place in the World FEI Children's Classic Challenge in Hong Kong from 10-15 January 2012.

In qualifying during the KEP Horse and Hound Show, Dawson not only rode his fierce gelding La Audience in faultless rounds to win with a clean slate, but also set the fastest qualifying time world wide in the international competition.

The teenager is chomping at the bit to test himself against 15 other top riders from around the globe who have all qualified for the most prestigious children's championship in the world.

But, as much as he is looking forward to the competition, he knows it's going to be a big ask.

"I am really excited to be competing against the best riders in the world, but unfortunately it won't be on La Audience," he explains.

"All the riders are required to jump on borrowed horses and I will have to select my horses from a pool supplied to us for the competition."

"It takes time to get to know a horse and for the horse to adjust to the rider. We will arrive in Hong Kong before the championship starts and have time to have a good look around, so hopefully I will have a good match and we can mount a strong challenge."

As was the case with the South African qualifier, the riders - aged 12-14 years - will all jump the same course, which will be designed and set up to world-class standards.

"The course for the SA leg was also set up to stringent international standards," he said. "We have tried to keep to those standards in my preparation and I do feel well prepared, but it all depends on the horses I draw once we get to Hong Kong."

Although the grade eight learner held off one of his greatest rivals, Taryn Rault on Scooby Doo, to win biggest prize in children's showjumping, Rault also qualified for the championship.

"I am thrilled that Taryn also qualified. Hopefully together we can fly the flag for South Africa," he said.

Dawson, who has been riding since he was four years old, is chiefly trained by mom Michelle, who also competes at the 1.20m and 1.30m open classes and, as an instructor, has helped several children and juniors reach the top levels in their show jumping. Dad Andrew is the moral support and motivation coach, who helps him set goals and makes sure this teenager stays firmly grounded.

He also receives coaching from top South African showjumpers Gail Foxcroft and Lorette Knowles-Taylor and equitation lessons with Yvonne Bolton.

In the last 12 months, Dawson has been reeling in the trophies.

Last December he won the Penny Place PR 1.10 Championship and Victor Ludorum and continued his winning run with victory at the Pony Rider Derby, the Victor Ludorum 1.00m Pony at SA Championship, the Gauteng Horse Society Championship 1.20m PR event, the Soweto Classic Championship 1.10m, the Higher Grade Inter-Regional 1.10m championship. He placed second overall in the FNB Tri-Series Equitation series and was selected for Gauteng Open Equitation and Jumping. He also represented South Africa in the International Classic here at home against New Zealand and Australia in October.

At the end of November Dawson underlined his growing stature by holding off all the major winners of championships this season to win the Champion of Champions title on La Audience.

And this past weekend he put more silverware on the mantle by winning the Penny Place Championship for the second year running on pony High over Chelsie and the Victor Ludorum on La Audience, sired from the great stallion Lindenberg.

"La Audience and I have been together for about two and a half years now," said Dawson, who mainly rides the 1.10m class on La Audience and Charlie Davies, while riding Victors Pride in the 1m class.

"In our first year together, I struggled somewhat with the technical aspects. It took me a while to come to grips with it, but we have made some great progress in the last 18 months."

Away from the show grounds, Dawson is like any other teenager and enjoys reading, listening to music, watching movies and socialising with friends. In an exercise at school, his class mates described Dawson as humble, modest, kind and gentle, quiet and smart, someone who never boasts and handles his problems well.

Committed, ambitious and planning a future at the very top of his chosen sport, Dawson combines his competitive spirit and will to win with genuine talent and a natural flair with ponies

And his love for horses always comes first.

"I love our sport and the friendships I have made," he said. "It's not often that the people you compete against are the ones shouting and cheering for you from the side.

"Riding gives me a great deal of freedom, when I am on my horse nothing else matters all challenges fall away it's just me and my horse, I also love the fact that the sport is a great leveller. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor as the horse doesn't care, if you treat it well it will do the same in return!"



Cameron Dawson holding the Holding the SA Pony Rider Derby Trophy; Cameron Dawson and La Audience

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