

Media Release

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9 September 2004



Aussie Hopes for Gold at World Cup

Australia's run of gold winning equestrian performances, dashed in Athens, may be back on track next month for the Evening World Cup to be held in France.

Australia's hopes are pinned on a relative outsider – a registered Australian Stock Horse - who makes an historic debut into the final of what is traditionally a Thoroughbred stronghold.

Eventing, a combination of cross country, dressage and show jumping, is considered the equestrian equivalent of a triathlon.

After 16 of the 17 qualifying rounds, **current competition front runner** is West Australian **Sonja Johnson riding *Ringwoud Jaguar***. *The 13 year old gelding is affectionately known as "Jag"*.

Sonja, aged 36, has earned 200 points in the qualifying rounds, ahead of a second-placed Swede Linda Algotsson and third-placed Brit William Fox-Pitt. With just one more qualifier to be held this week in Belgium, Australian Olympic equestrians Andrew Hoy and Philip Dutton are ranked 7th and 9th with 120 and 110 points respectively.

Head of the Australian Stock Horse Society, Mr Steve Guihot confirmed today that *Ringwoud Jaguar's* achievement against a field of Thoroughbreds marks a real milestone for the standing of the breed. He said, "Eventing has its origins in the military which is interesting because the forebears of today's Australian Stock Horse served the cavalry in numerous international military campaigns during our early history.

"To take on the Thoroughbreds at the Cup at a time when the Society is initiating an export push could prove a very useful marketing exercise. We are all hoping that Sonja and Jag will pull it off."

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The trip to Pau in Southern France (near the Spanish border) for the World Cup final at the end of October marks the maiden overseas trip for the gelding, which until four years ago was a working horse near Albany in Western Australia.

Owners Jim and Gussie Saunders had bred *Ringwould Jaguar* to chase cattle but when he proved unsuccessful at this they began to consider other options. In a date now forever etched on their minds, on 28th December 2000 the couple took the gelding to successful eventer Sonja Johnson to see if the horse had potential as a show jumper.

The rest - as they say - is history, with Jag and Sonja clocking up a string of quick successes and awards.

Asked how she rated their chances against the Thoroughbreds at the forthcoming World Cup, Johnson said, "I wouldn't be going if I didn't think we could do the job. The horse is good enough to win. But, the Gods of Eventing can kick at any time, as I well know from Sydney," she said, referring to her unsuccessful effort in the Olympic trials earlier this year.

Ringwould Jaguar has been quarantined in Brisbane since July. On 20 September horse and rider travel by road to Sydney then fly Lufthansa to Amsterdam. From there it is by road to Saumur (south west of Paris), where they will acclimatise and make the final preparations for their historic gold medal campaign.

ENDS

EDITOR'S NOTES:

ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN STOCK HORSE SOCIETY:

1. The Australian Stock Horse Society has 9000 Members and has registered over 150,000 horses since establishing itself in 1971.
2. The Society is the largest organisation of recreation/work horses in the country.
3. Its mission is to maintain the heritage and to promote the bloodlines and high performance of the Australian Stock Horse among equestrian activities and the general public. It aims to (i) preserve the heritage and identity of the Australian Stock Horse; (ii) promote the development and popularity of Australian Stock Horses throughout Australia and the world and (iii) maximise the benefits of owning a Registered Australian Stock Horse and being a Member of The Australian Stock Horse Society.
4. The ASHS is headquartered in Scone, NSW and currently employs ten staff.
5. **For more see www.ashs.com.au**