

## EQUESTRIANISM

# Kiwi relishes busier life in Lingfield ahead of 2012

By Kaylee Seckington

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IT is easy to understand why so many Britons emigrate to New Zealand every year, mesmerised by the promise of scenic mountains, plentiful wildlife and a calmer pace of life. However it is harder to imagine why anyone would want to do the move in reverse.

But that is just what Lingfield-based Joe Meyer has done.

Born on the North Island of New Zealand in Masterton, Wairarapa, Meyer moved to Surrey more than a decade ago, and says life is very different in England.

"I like it here, it's just busier. Where I grew up was in the middle of nowhere, you never locked your house, always left the keys in the car and it's a little bit different here. There are people everywhere," he explained.

"It took me a little bit of getting used to the planes from Gatwick as well.

"The first night that we were here, at five o'clock in the morning there are all these planes going past keeping us awake and I just thought I'd never sleep again.

"Then of course we realised we had double glazing and we should probably just shut the windows, then it was fine.

"Now I get to the airport and wonder where all the planes came from."

The reason for this somewhat unfathomable move is of course the greater amount of eventing in Europe compared to the insulated quantity of competitors in Australasia, and the rider, who owns the Churchill Stud, relishes the harder events.

"We didn't specifically choose Lingfield as a destination," he said. "We decided we want to live in England because of all the events. The eventing here is so good and then it's so easy to travel to Europe as well. And there are just more people to compete against.

"Then there is two reasons why we chose Lingfield, firstly it needed to be somewhere that was commutable for my wife to travel to the City everyday and also it was all we could afford at the time!

"Going to events like the recent one in



OLYMPIC EVENTER: Joe Meyer, based at Newchapel, competed in the 2008 Olympics as an eventer for New Zealand

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Portugal would have been near enough impossible if I was still based in New Zealand.

"For instance, I go to Belgium four times a year for training and it only takes an hour and a half to Dover and then an hour the other side of the ferry."

Meyer has always been around horses and has been competing since the aged of just six.

His parents own the successful Ma-

maku Stud in New Zealand where horses such as Tira Mink, whose offspring include Mark Todd's Olympic Gold winning horse, Charisma, were raised.

Horses are just a normal part of the family for Meyer and he admits he does not remember life without them.

"I've always been on horses, probably since the age of two. There is a photo of me somewhere in a child's walker thing, but it's a special one that goes on top on a

horse," he said. "I did show jumping on ponies from the age of 10 and when I left school, I started to event.

"I went to watch the New Zealand national team at the World Championships one year and decided I would quite like to do that, and that was that really."

In 2008 Meyer completed a life-long dream when he competed at the Beijing Olympics, finishing fifth, and with a couple of horses well on their way to

being ready, he is confident of his chances in London 2012.

"Beijing was good experience to have," he said. "The thing with Beijing was it is harder that you think to make everything go well on the day. The horse I took was a competitive horse, he could have finished higher than he did, but the heat got to him. It's just a case of getting everything right on the day.

"I think my chances in two years are pretty good. We are in our own country and I have a couple of good horses lined up, so I'm confident but saying that; I have a lot of work to do."

The Olympian has a clear idea of what is need for a medal in two years time, but admits the world of eventing is constantly changing it's goalposts.

"It needs a good rider and a good horse to win a gold medal," he said.

"Eventing had become a lot more technical now, where it has changed from an endurance test on a very fit horse to more of a test of skill and training.

"Well trained horses and good riders do very well.

"You can sometimes have an exceptional horse and a not as good rider or the other way around.

"The partnership though is the key. You can take a good horse and a good rider but they might not necessarily have that partnership.

While most people would consider the proximity an advantage, Meyer is not looking forward to the London Olympics being held on the doorstep of his Newchapel house and stables.

"The eventing for 2012 is going to be held in Greenwich which isn't far at all, but I'm a little bit nervous because it is so close by," he said.

"But there is a possibility we will have lots of friends and family coming to the house, and so I'm a little bit worried about my preparation.

"It becomes quite a big deal with the Olympics with quite a lot of hype around it, but when you are training here and then the horse goes to Hong Kong or wherever it is a lot more normal.

"There will be a lot of people descending on us, but if it gets too much I think I'll just have to go and train elsewhere."

## ATHLETICS

### In-form Dickens has holiday dilemma

RACHEL Dickens will have to cut short a holiday if she is to compete in the English Schools Championships in Birmingham in July.

She races at Saturday's Surrey Schools Championships among the favourites for 300m glory at U17 level.

Having made the national championships as a 200m at U15 level last year, the daughter of 1984 Olympic 400m athlete Roy is full of confidence after becoming South of England U17 champion.

There, she set the third fastest time this year in her age-group, 39.31 seconds. "I was really proud," said the Tatsfield resident. "I wanted to go something like 39 seconds [under 40 seconds] but I wasn't expecting 39.3."

The Oxted School student was encouraged to switch events by her father, who noted her long stride.

Over the winter, the Blackheath & Bromley Club athlete also switched coach to John Blackie - and bases her success on pure hard work. She said: "I've just been doing lots of hard work running up sand dune and up hills."

Dickens could face competition over 300 metres for the Surrey title from Jessie Knight, of Epsom & Ewell Harriers. A year older, she has nearly as good a personal best, 39.57, but has not run under 40 seconds this year.

"I know Jessie Knight," said Dickens. "I came up against her in the South of England indoors when I beat her and beat her in the London Indoor Games."

Dickens' best is inside the 41.40 needed to compete at the nationals, but she said: "I didn't know when that was, I might be on holiday. We might come back early."

### Grant steps aside so friend can compete

TWO Reigate Priory Athletics Club youngsters who have already achieved goals set for them by coaches will lead the club's charge at Saturday's Surrey Schools Championships.

Caitlin Haine is running in the 100 metres because Isabelle Grant, who also has a good time over the distance, has chosen 75m hurdles, demonstrating the good team spirit amid the sprinters at the club.

Haine had a target of 13.4 seconds for the season and already has a time of 13.1, run at Sutton a few weeks ago.

She is a first year U15 who was fifth in her semi-final of the Surrey Championships in early May with 13.4.

To qualify for Surrey's team going to the English

Schools Championships, athletes would have to have the qualifying standard, in this case 12.80.

Grant, 13, is also a first-year U15 and has run 12.5, but needs 11.9 to qualify for the nationals.

Rachel Woodman, 15 at the end of June, competes in the U17 triple jump.

She has leapt 9.36, while fellow Reigate Grammar School pupil Sarah McKeivitt, of Mole Valley AC, has 9.71.

● Bletchingley's Oliver Newport, of Oxted School, will compete in the long jump. The Crawley Athletics Club jumper has a best of 6.71, set at the Surrey Championships in early May, when he was second behind the nation's leading leaper Elliot Safo of Croydon.

See next week's paper for news and pictures of the weekend's Surrey Schools Championships

### Holland at their best

IN the Holland Sports/Dorking & Mole Valley third fixture in the Southern Men's League at Bracknell, the team produced their best performance finishing second.

Graham Hewett won both the 400 metre hurdles in 65.3 seconds, and the 5,000m in 18 minutes one second, finishing second in the B400 (57.4), fifth in both the A string shot and discus with 7.29 metres and 19.25m respectively. He also ran in both relays.

Sam Knight improved his PB in the 800m with 2:13.4 for fourth and was fourth in the 400m (61.0), as well as in the 200m (27.9).

Tom Rady won the B 400m hurdles in 69.8, was second in the high jump (1.50m) and won the triple in a PB of 10.79m. He also helped the 4x 100 team to second.

Greg Ames comfortably won the long jump with 5.95m and was second in the 100m (11.8) and the B high jump (1.20m).

Evan Erskine Thomas won the B 800m (2:14) and was third in the A 1,500 (5:05.9).

Rob Russell was second in the B 1,500 with 5:12.4 and third in the 3,000 metre steeplechase (12:43.0).

Gavin Olsson was third in the B 100m (13.3), fourth in the B 200m (34.3) and second in B long jump and triple (4.62m and 8.49m).

Graham Pullen put the shot 4.76m (5th) in the B event while Kevin Burnett threw the hammer 10.72m for fifth spot, the javelin 14.40m for fourth in the A and 13.91m for fifth in the B discus.

Nigel Bongers, in the B events, threw the javelin 14.16m to take third and the hammer 8.28m for fourth. Howard Jones hit the kerb and twisted his ankle with two laps to go in the 5,000m B race.

In the 4x 100m relay, Ames, Olsson, Rady and Hewett cut the club record by 0.3 seconds with 48.6.

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