

Nicole Tough – Extended Biography Download



Nicole Tough is an accredited Level 2 Dressage Specialist Coach, Level A National Grand Prix and Young Horse Judge and Judge Educator. She is a highly successful competitor, having trained 10 horses to FEI level, with 9 Australian titles, over 30 State Championship titles to her credit, and has held 35 spots on State and National Squads since 1994. She has been awarded Equestrian QLD Coach of the Year, Sports Star of the Year and Volunteer of the Year. Nicole has helped many of her students train their horses from the breaking in stage through to FEI level, with many on State and National Squads and onto International representation. Nicole loves coaching, making a difference to riders and their horses.

Upon leaving school in 1989, Nicole went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Graduate Diploma in Education, but chose to work within the Equine industry as a Dressage coach and trainer. In addition, Nicole taught Equine Studies at Somerset College from 1999 to 2009.

Nicole is situated in the Gold Coast Hinterland where she offers full livery agistment, private dressage coaching, dressage training and specialised "boot camps".



Where it all began...

Nicole's life long passion for mastering the art of dressage began at the age of 13, when her dad purchased a share in a racehorse with his friend and racehorse trainer, Noel Payne. Her dad and Noel then conspired to surprise Nicole with her very own horse - a galloway of mixed breeding called "Cha Chi", on which Noel's son Terry a professional jockey, took the trouble to teach Nicole the basic riding skills. Moving to the Gold Coast in 1984, Nicole and her sister Belinda joined the Mudgeeraba Pony Club. From here, Nicole went onto a (too slow) racehorse called "Rex Reebo" and then on to an anglo-arab called "Shar", who with coach, Leonie Galbraith, started her addiction to dressage! Nicole competed nearly every weekend at either gymkhana's, agricultural shows, eventing, showjumping, combined training, interschool and dressage days. At the age of 16, Nicole won the QLD State Interschool senior Dressage Championship title and the 15-17 year National Dressage Championship title. Nicole thanks her wonderfully supportive parents for what she now sees as a life long obsession.

Real Dressage

In 1990, at the conclusion of her year 12 studies, Nicole purchased her first warmblood - an unbroken Holsteiner filly called "Landerlee", from good friends Jacqui and Geraldine van Montfrans. After a 3 year break from competition (where Nicole completed 2 university degrees, married Colin and gave birth to their son Mitchell) Nicole and "Landerlee" started

Nicole Tough – Extended Biography Download



their competition career in 1994, with son Mitch in a pram and supportive hubby by her side. Landerlee became the first horse Nicole was to train to FEI and her first horse to be selected on the QLD State Dressage Squad.

International Coaches

Over the years, Nicole has trained with some of the world's best trainers including Ulla Salzgeber, Harry Bolt, Martina Hannover, Clemens Dierks, Christoph Hess, Hubertus Hufendiek, Jenny Loristan-Clarke, Steffen Peters, Carlos de Cleermaecker, Leonie Brammal, Annemieke Vincourt, Lilo Fore, Peter Storr, Isobell Wessels, Anne Gribbons, Vince Corvi, Gareth Hughes, Laura Graves and even Charlotte Dujardin at Equitana in 2014. Nicole has travelled overseas to Germany, The Netherlands and Spain to work with trainers, and travelled interstate many many times to watch and listen to 'masters' at work, either in Masterclasses, forums or seminars. Around these opportunities, and for the last 13 years, Nicole has trained under the weekly supervision of Traci Baldwin (nee Manca) and monthly from 2018-2022 with Matthew Dowsley. Nicole believes that lessons/supervision/eyes on the ground are essential, if you want to keep improving.



Turning Point

2007 was a major turning point in Nicole's equine journey, with the traumatic injury to her beloved horse, Glencoe Manhattan. This incident led to the amazing opportunity offered by Linda and Beau Dowsett, to travel to Germany and look for a horse to import, train and campaign. Nicole says - "*Beau and Linda gave me the opportunity of a lifetime - to find, ride and train an imported horse, something my hubby and I would never have been able to do*". So, Nicole and Linda went horse shopping, having QLD ex-patriot, Robert Schmerglatt in Germany to locate suitable horses to try before their arrival. Nicole rode 30 horses in 9 days and particularly liked a 4 year old called Flavio at the Gieselman's barn, a 5 year old called Dante at Holga Finken's barn and a little 2 year old unbroken colt called Finnegan at Leonie Brammel and Volker Dusche's barn. And Beau bought all 3 home to Queensland! As a result, Nicole sold all her horses to commit herself to "*this amazing adventure*".

A New Journey

Nicole enjoyed 4 and a half years of hard work, learning curves, wonderful memories and many milestones with the Dowsett family (which can be read about in "past horses"). In April 2013, after Nicole's dream of competing at Grand Prix level was realised, Dante was exported back to Germany to be sold. Nicole and Colin were able to purchase Finnegan from Beau and Linda and they purchased a new horse, Fioretta, from friends Traci and Bastion Bolt. In 2013, Nicole, with friends Traci and Bastion, travelled to The Netherlands for a 3 week training trip

Nicole Tough – Extended Biography Download



under the watchful eye of Dutch Federal Trainer, Annemieke Vincourt. Nicole says she refined so many skills, and got to study Annemieke's training philosophy in practise. As an added bonus, Traci and Bastion decided to purchase a 6 year old, KWPN gelding called Borsato, which Nicole would care for, train and campaign back in Australia. From October 2013 to September 2016, Nicole had Borsato under her care and management, and they formed a strong bond and partnership, achieving many State and National titles and accruing 4 National Performance Gold Medals. Nicole says, "*words cannot express my gratitude to Traci, for entrusting Boss' care and training to me. Together, we soared the clouds. He enriched my life and taught me so much*".



Going Solo and a Game Changer

At the end of 2016, after Borsato was retired from competitive dressage and went home for his owner to enjoy, Nicole and Colin made the heartbreaking decision to sell their beloved Furst Tyme, to purchase and import a young horse from Europe. With students/friends Marian Hutchings and Karin Gordon, the trio went to Europe to find horses to bring home. With thanks to Viola Abrahams in Germany, Nicole and Colin purchased 5 year old Hanoverian, Ferragamo (aka Favory), a 16.1 hand gelding by Furstenball, out of a Sir Donnerhall mare.



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2017 started right with the exciting prospect of starting Nicole and Colin's own imported youngster; then a devastating melanoma diagnosis in April, suddenly made them realise how lucky they were and how miraculous life is. Throughout two operations and many tests, Nicole remained focussed and with the support of Colin, her family and friends by her side, she had a great year with Ferragamo, winning another National Performance Gold Medal. In August, with the 'cancer free' news, it was decided to put a roof over the dressage arena at Nicole Tough Dressage, with construction starting in December 2017.'

The Rollercoaster

Enter one of Nicole's old students Emma Weel, who had a desire to return to the saddle after 25 years away from the sport... 5 fun filled years, including the horses Faberge and Florenz, who were under Nicole's care and training. Both horses won Nicole's heart and she had much joy and triumph developing them for their owner, Emma.

2021 saw the purchase of the just broken in, 4 year old German Riding Pony, Dumbledore, who Nicole and Colin imported in April 2021.

2022 saw the arrival of our grand daughter, Luna Rose, and property upgrades were started with the sad sale of Nicole's beloved Ferragamo.



Nicole Tough – Extended Biography Download



Time to Rebuild

Mid 2023 saw Dumbledore out due to injury and with no horses to campaign, Nicole commenced her Level 3 High Performance Coaching through Equestrian Australia and started back at University, studying Sports Psychology. In addition Nicole took up opportunities to pursue her writing passions in a monthly submission to Equestrian Hub (online magazine) and feature articles with Equestrienne Magazine (print). Nicole also joined the Ride IQ team (an online education platform) of international coaches, giving audio lessons to riders wanting more assistance and for those in remote areas without access to coaches. All the while she was keeping her eyes peeled for a new equine project.

In October 2023 thanks to Viola Abrahams, Nicole and Colin were able to purchase and import 5 year old Hanoverian mare Everdeen (Escolar / Fidertanz).

Horses are the Best Teachers

Nicole says, I have been blessed to have a life with horses, and each horse has been so special and it breaks my heart every time, when they leave my life. Each and every horse you get a chance to ride can teach you something. We just have to open ourselves up to the learning process.



From my first dressage horse, Anglo-Arab, Shar - *I learnt not to give away unnecessary marks though lack of accuracy and precision. Thankyou for the life long obsession of striving for excellence.*

From Landerlee - *I learnt not to sit like a passenger in a test. If its going wrong, make a correction like you would at home. Thankyou for our journey.*

From Northern Flamenco - *I learnt not to just buy a trot! The way the back wants to function is really important, not to mention the walk and canter. Thankyou for never letting me down in the competition arena.*

From Cherenton Armani - *I learnt not to accept half hearted responses in a test, even if it means deliberately throwing a movement in a test, to not let them get 'test smart'. Thankyou for being you, a very funny boy.*

From Glencoe Catwalk - *I learnt the balance between hot and still being in control. Discipline*

Nicole Tough – Extended Biography Download



and routine were essential to her, and she was the first mare I had to 'negotiate' with.

From Glencoe Manhattan - I learnt to practise test movements til they can't go wrong and anticipation is NOT an excuse. It just means you need more practise. Thankyou for your huge heart and always giving 100%. Sorry I wasn't good enough for you at the time.

From Flavio - I learnt the true meaning of being effective. Every aid must have a response. Another horse I wasn't good enough at the time, to get the best out of.

From Dante - I learnt how to keep them in front of the leg, honest when they are spooky, and that having a monkey grip is not an admission of defeat. Such a beautiful boy and gave me more than I can ever re pay.

From Fioretta - I learnt that mares are not for me. She hated my attention to detail, and thought what she gave should be enough. HA! A very beautiful and proud spirit.

From Borsato - I learnt the true meaning of being in balance, felt exactly what I want in an equine athlete, and that horses can have 'brain farts' too! Such a cool dude. Thankyou for 3 amazing years.

From Furst Tyme - I learnt how to take risks and not train in 'comfort zones'. Gorgeous boy, with a beautiful heart and not a mean bone in his body. Thankyou for always giving me 100%, even when you are were terrified in the Sydney indoor!

From Faberge - I learnt there are horses who say - 'pick me, pick me, I want to be a dressage horse!'

From Ferragamo, I found my favourite body mechanics, and I loved developing him. He was my masterpiece.

From Florenz - I learnt how to train a powerful forward thinking engine, and the importance of separating the effect of the leg, seat and rein aids (wish I had these skills years earlier for Manhattan).



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Goals

Nicole's goals are always to keep learning from the horses and trainers that come her way, to guide each horse to be the best athlete they can be, to keep promoting the wonderful discipline of dressage through her social media and to complete her Level 3 High Performance Coaching Accreditation, and maybe write a book!

Nicole's advice to riders is to - "Love your horse and your sport, and find a coach willing to help you achieve your goals; and to practise until you can't get it wrong".

