





▲ Edwina talks to Germany's Daniel Deusser, who is based at Stal Tops, in the indoor arena

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selected to represent Australia at the WEG in Aachen. The pair made the final of the individual championship and Edwina finished fourth. “She taught me a lot, but I take something from every horse I ride,” says Edwina. “They all have something to teach you and you should appreciate every one.” Edwina’s string began to grow in strength with the addition of international winners, such as Isovlas Socrates, who won the five-star grand prix in Zurich in 2008. Then on New Year’s Eve 2007, while in Australia, Jan surprised her. “He told me that he and my owner, Cees Van Opstal, had bought Itot Du Chateau from [France’s] Michel Hecart,” she says. “I’d never ridden him and I couldn’t wait to get back to the yard to try him.” Edwina wasn’t worried about taking the ride on a horse she hadn’t tried, particularly not this one. “I’d watched him compete a lot and there wasn’t much else he could do to convince me that I wanted him,” says Edwina. “Some people were worried he’d be too strong; others questioned his ability. He was bought with the Olympics in mind, and some suggested his height would restrict him, but for

me it wasn’t an issue. “Itot has a really big stride, the heart of a lion and lots of power. He also rides up in front, so you feel like you’re riding something much bigger,” she adds. Itot - or “Itzy Bitzy” as Edwina affectionately calls him - had been hugely successful for Michel and he didn’t disappoint Edwina. However, there was one goal in mind, so glory on the European circuit couldn’t be chased with full gusto. “We were targeting the Olympics,” explains Edwina. “I had set targets, but I wasn’t trying to win anything. All the shows I went to were a stage towards Olympic preparation.” The regime paid off and Edwina was selected to represent her country in Hong Kong, her Olympic debut. Despite what his critics had said, Itot proved them all wrong and he was the only horse to jump two clear rounds in the team competition. The Australian team finished ninth overall and Itot and Edwina were equal 10th in the individual final.

LOOKING AHEAD:

After Hong Kong, in November, Itot partnered Edwina to a win in Brussels’

five-star grand prix before heading for the Olympia World Cup qualifier. Together with Late Night 16, the former ride of Germany's Heinrich-Hermann Engemann, Itot has secured his rider's qualification for this year's World Cup final in Las Vegas — Edwina is currently third in the Western European League. "I'm still undecided which horse I'll be taking to the final," she says. "Late Night has also proved to be very talented at top level, too. "Socrates has also returned after a break. This is of great benefit as the horses must help each other by rotating [workloads] in the sport." As she competes under the Australian flag, Edwina will not be able to contest the European Championships at Windsor in September. "It's a pity in some ways, but being based in Europe means I can concentrate on other competitions, while all my competitors are working towards Windsor," she says. The Global Champions Tour was set up by Jan and carries a huge prize-fund so success in the series is high

on the list of goals in 2009. But her real aim is to get to number one in the world rankings. "Last year, I was aiming to get into the top 10 on the rankings list by December, and I'd done it by September. Now, I'm aiming to get to number one, but I think that will take a bit longer," says Edwina. However, she isn't far off her goal, being ranked fifth at the moment. The support she gets from Stal Tops is key to her success. "My achievements are not just because of me," she says. "It's the result of the entire team of 30 staff working closely." Jan is a very successful businessman and trainer. He's been involved in the sales of some of the world's top horses, including Denis Lynch's Lantinus. Germany's Daniel Deusser is also based at the yard and Jan has been instrumental in the training of Rolf-Goran Bengtsson and top Swiss rider Steve Guerdat. "Jan is very motivating, and having someone like that is crucial at the top level. It doesn't matter that we are all competing for different countries,

we are working towards success for the yard," says Edwina, who has just secured a new sponsor in equestrian clothing company Kingsland. "And Jan's management programmes are key to keeping the horses in peak condition." Every horse at Stal Tops has an individual programme that includes flat and jumping work, specific nutrition, regular fitness checks, numbers of shows attended and targets." Keeping each horse very fit reduces the risk of injury, too," says Edwina. "As well as the ridden work they get in the school, we also have a treadmill, 2km track and a wood they can be walked through. Obviously, the younger horses don't get quite so much work." But Edwina's sheer determination to succeed and her passion to be the best in the sport has given other young riders hope that you can reach the top without having to be born in the saddle. "Everyone has dreams," she says. "There's still a lot more I want to do. "I've had to sacrifice a lot and it was very tough in the beginning. But if you believe in yourself and you are prepared to work for it, you can do anything." **H&H**



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◀ *Edwina with Late Night 16*

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