

# SHARON HUNT

## AN OLYMPIC BRONZE EXPERIENCE

[www.sharonhunteventing.com](http://www.sharonhunteventing.com)

By Sue Akehurst, England



Congratulations to Sharon Hunt and Tankers Town, who on the British Eventing team won the Olympic bronze medal in Hong Kong. "It's been the most amazing experience and I couldn't be more proud of 'Jasper' and the team. I can't wait for London now!"

Sharon born October 11th 1977 is the youngest of Great Britain's Eventing team. She began riding at the age of 7 and got her first pony at the age of 11. Since then many young horses have been bought and educated by Sharon hoping to find a superstar.

Tankers Town (Jasper), a 16.2hh Chestnut Irish Sports Horse, is 14 years old, with 1,090 points, and owned by Mr & Mrs Terry Hunt & Sharon. Sharon bought and solely produced him from the age of 4 right through to international eventing success. Sharon has also bought and produced Good Sport II to win the Burghley Young Event Horse final in 2000. Sharon is currently ranked 25th in Great Britain and 47th in the world.

**What's it been like since you got back**

▼ *Cross Country at Badminton, a 4 Star Event, the highest grade & one of only 5 such events in the world*



**from the Olympics?**

I've been back for just over 3 months now and it's been great. Tankers Town is really good - I've just started working him again and I also have some other fabulous horses on the yard so I am working hard for next season, the European Championships in 2009 and the World Games in 2010. The whole Olympic experience has made me even hungrier and I am keener than ever to be the one standing on that podium with a gold medal and the national anthem playing! As such I am training really hard and everyday is focussed on upping my game.

I've had some real highlights since I've been back - celebrating with friends and family, going to the Olympic Parade in London and I am also really looking forward to going to Sports Personality of the Year in December - but my real focus is on the next event.

**Were you pleased with Team Great Britain's bronze medal?**

Being my first Olympics, I was really pleased. I think the expectations for Team GB were slightly higher but we had very difficult competition with the Australians and Germans and we hadn't beaten the Australians all year so I think a bronze was realistic. Obviously we'd always want to do better and certainly for London we're aiming for gold.

**When did you first know you were going to the 2008 Olympics?**

In May I competed at Badminton where I finished 5th and I had the phone call a couple of days after that. I couldn't believe it and, for a couple of weeks, I was extremely ecstatic and a bit nervous! Actually some nerves are good and after the last World Equestrian Games, I got a real taster of coping with the pressure of competing at a top international level and so it was just a case of focusing on the job in hand.

**Explain what's involved in preparing for**

**the Olympics?**

Obviously, in one sense it's a whole lifetime of preparation - every hour spent training, every minute in the saddle you hope will culminate in a chance to represent your country in the Olympics. Nevertheless, there are no guarantees and it takes a tremendous amount of work and dedication to train even one horse up to 4\* level. Even then, the Olympic team only requires the top 5 horses and riders, and even if you make it that far, it can be hard to keep the horse sound - poor Zara Philips had a tough time with that right before the 2008 Olympics. That's why it is so incredibly important to try and establish a yard with more than one horse at the very top level but for me, that takes a combination of all my time, energy and commitment combined with backing and sponsorship. So while it's immensely rewarding for me - and the owners of my horses - it's also hard work!

On a day-to-day level there was a lot of preparation to get ready for the Olympics.

Basically no stone was left unturned and nothing was left to chance. I have always liked to keep myself fit and all the riding obviously keeps me in good physical shape but prior to the Olympics, on top of my usual riding schedule, I also undertook a fitness regime to ensure I, like my horse, was in absolute tip-top condition. I cycled, ran, swam and thanks to Life Fitness, who lent me a cross trainer, I worked hard on the cross trainer too! It was sometimes hard to fit everything into a day but it was absolutely worth it and luckily I am someone who thrives from being busy!

**What was it like for you when you arrived in Hong Kong?**

We had to fly out earlier in order to acclimatise myself and the horse. When we arrived, despite being in Hong Kong and not Beijing, what struck us was the enormity of it all. When we landed we got

a bus to the Olympic village and then we went to check on and ride the horses. Tankers Town flew separately; I had to put him on a plane and seeing him get packed off in a cargo plane was most peculiar. When I got there I think he looked quite pleased to see me! Horses are very resilient and he was exactly the same as he was at home really - I was quite surprised.

### **What was it like being part of the 2008 Olympics?**

There was a real air of excitement about the whole event and while it was phenomenal, I'm pleased to say that I never felt overwhelmed by it all. It was amazing to be part of this incredibly talented team and we all got on so well, so it was really special - all my team mates were extremely supportive and helpful. I also received incredible support from my own team, owners, sponsors and family so it was fantastic and I am proud to have shared it with all of them!

If there was one slight down side, the fact that we were in Hong Kong - and away from Beijing, the opening and closing ceremonies and all of the other athletes - did detract from the experience a bit but that's just made me more determined than ever to compete at London 2012!

### **What was it like competing at the Olympics?**

I did my dressage test on the Sunday morning at 7.30am, which was pretty early but still the arena was completely full, which was amazing! We then did our cross country the next morning. As soon as we'd had our briefing we walked the course. We'd been told that it would be the equivalent of a 4\* but sometimes they make it a little bit easier for some of the other less experienced nations to make sure they can get round but it didn't seem much easier to me! I am usually quite confident but I have to admit on the first walk I thought: "oh my goodness, it's quite hard!" but it always gets better the more you walk it, and when you know where you're going. It was such a twisty and turny course, which made it very difficult to remember exactly which line to take so I really had to walk it and walk it so I knew exactly where I was going.

It was fantastic to ride although it seemed a little bit surreal because of the pressure and everything.

### **What was the show jumping in the Olympic stadium like?**

The show jumping was the most phenomenal experience because the stadium was completely full and the atmosphere was just electric so it was very special and really good.

### **What was it like standing on the Olympic podium and collecting your medal for Team GB?**



▲ Sharon Hunt & Tankers Town, Olympic show jumping

It was absolutely unbelievable really and I felt very emotional. It was such a happy occasion and it was great to do it with such a fabulous team of people!

### **What training have you had to do to get where you are?**

I do remember my very first riding lesson and while I must have had some natural talent, it has certainly taken a long time to train and to be where I am but I've still got a lot more to learn. Basically it's a 7-day-a-week job and it's really early mornings and although my parents are involved they are not there everyday so it's really a case of self-motivation. It's been really good for me and I get out of it what I put into it. On an everyday basis, I work very long days in all weathers. I tirelessly aim to improve my own performances and also those of every horse on my yard, for the benefit of my career and my owners.

### **What are the greatest challenges you face?**

It can be difficult finding new owners and people who are willing to back you but it's a great opportunity for them because to follow their own horse and the progress it makes is really rewarding both as a lifestyle pastime and financially too. We go to the most beautiful settings - Badminton and

Burghley - and obviously if the horse is good enough to go to the Olympics and all these different events, it really is fantastic for owners. I am also always looking for sponsors - I currently have seven sponsors now, which is very good. I had sponsors before the Olympics but obviously that's helped as it definitely raises the profile. It's important to keep attracting owners and sponsors as I need to work with a large base of young horses.

### **What's the plan for the next four years until London 2012?**

Tankers Town will be too old by then - he'll be 18 unfortunately so he's got a couple more championships ahead of him - the European Championships and the World Games but I am now producing my other horses so that they will be at his level by the London Olympics. I currently have about 5 horses that I think will be suitable and that's a good number to have to potentially be the next Tankers Town.

### **What are your ambitions?**

To win medals at the European Championships and World Games and to win individual and team gold at the London Olympics in 2012. HT