Education and Inspiration at Woodend Pony Club.

Pony Clubs all around Australia are where most equestrian interests are fostered and nurtured. As a youth movement, Pony Clubs do a great deal to give junior equestrians basic horse care lessons and riding instruction as well as many of the important lessons in life that ensure the development of responsibility and purpose.

There are many examples of world-class Australian riders who have made their mark at the highest level on the international competition circuit, having got their start at Pony Club.

On Sunday the 18th May 2014, the Woodend Pony Club (Victoria) added an extra rally to their program and made it an opportunity for education and inspiration. Woodend is a pretty leafy town in the foothills of the beautiful Macedon Ranges and the spectacular autumn colours added to the ambiance of the day.

The club invited former club member, Tayla Desmet to give a demonstration and talk about her journey through 6 years at the club to a path that she hopes will lead to representing her country at the Olympic Games sometime in the future. Tayla’s busy competition schedule makes it difficult to maintain active membership, however, she still considers herself a “Woodend” girl.

14-year-old Tayla rode her Arabian/Warmblood gelding Coldstream Eastern Ridge (aka Liam), a handsome brown gelding bred at Wendy Ansell’s Goldstream Park Stud, and by the imported Arabian stallion Shahwan Gasb from a Warmblood mare. Tayla’s mentor and instructor Leigh Dunstan showed the enthralled group how the pair warm up and prepare for competition at Prix St Georges level and Tayla then rode through the test. Tayla is also an active and accomplished runner and when she cannot ride, she keeps fit with cross country running in her team at Melbourne Girls Grammar in inner Melbourne.

Tayla’s parents Donna and Phillip Desmet watched on and would have been enormously proud to see where their long-term commitment to equestrian sport had taken the family. Phillip Desmet spent his teenage years on the family property - St.Acheul Stud in Yarrambat (Victoria) and Phil’s dad Jean-Claude Desmet imported the Warmblood stallions King and Duellschutz who were foundation sires in the early days of warmblood breeding. Their bloodlines live on in many of today’s top performers and the Desmet’s are delighted to see how Australian horses have improved to make perfect partners for our world class riders.

About 60 members, instructors, committee and parents of the Woodend Pony Club watched in awe as Tayla showed where hard work, love of the horse and the help of a dedicated mentor can take a talented rider. The members loved to see where their interest may take them and were on a “high” for the rest of the day.

Saddleworld supports many Pony Club activities and is proud to see Australian youth progressing in their pursuit of excellence.