

Mogelvangs Zidane

"We were a great team in the competition arena, but also we were just a great team".



Emma and Zidane representing Australia at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Photo: Australian Equestrian Team / Jon Stroud.

We are all aware of the healing powers of horses, but for Paralympian, Emma Booth, Zidane was a life-changing and life-saving purchase. Timing is everything and the timing was right, as Zidane carried Emma to the Rio and Tokyo Paralympics and the 2018 Tryon WEG and this is his tribute.

Zidane, a Danish Warmblood was foaled in 2002. He was by *Blue Hors Hertug* out of *Valdivia* by *Manstein*. He was purchased by *Petra Lee* who imported him to Australia and trained with *Lone Jorgensen*. "I was looking for a horse and a good friend in Europe told me about Zidane," explains Petra. "I actually never went to see him. She went and rode him, we had him vetted and brought to Australia. I competed on him successfully quite a lot, but eventually it was clear that he was not what I needed. I decided to sell him, which was very hard because he was such a sweetheart. Lone told me about Emma who was looking for an international Para horse and she thought Zidane would be a good horse for her and that it would be a good home for him. I always kept in contact with his Danish breeder and we are both thrilled with what he and Emma have gone on to achieve. Zidane never said no, he was so kind-hearted."

"After I had my accident in 2013, the Rio Paralympics was a goal I had set for myself," says Emma. "We went to Europe to look for a horse. I tried a lot of horses over two trips and there were a few horses that I probably came close to buying for Rio. Lone had coached Petra for about two years with Zidane, so she knew the horse well and I had done a little coaching with her through the Victorian Para Squad. Lone knew I was on the hunt for a horse for Rio and she made the match and put us together. I was very lucky he was not put on the open market, as I probably would not have got him.

"I tried a lot of horses in Europe and in Australia and in the end, I found the horse of my life just down the road. What made Zidane the right horse was a feeling really, more than anything else, and he gave me that feeling more than the horses I came close to buying in Europe. I only got him three weeks before the second Rio qualifier at Boneo Park. The only thing we didn't have on our side was time, but I knew the moment I got in the saddle that he had everything I was looking for. He was the right size, the right build and he had the exact paces I needed in walk and trot. Also, he had the temperament and the personality that really tried to understand what was going on. From the moment I got in the saddle, he was

figuring out my style of riding and how best to respond to that. He was very clever and willing and all that made him the perfect Para horse for me. We had such an emotional and mental connection, as well as a physical one. Often when I was riding him, he felt like a mind reader. There were times when I felt I just had to think something and he would do it; it was very special.

"Zidane never said no, he was so kind-hearted."

"I got him on Christmas Eve in 2015 and we had three weeks before our first-ever event together and eight months before Rio. At the CPEDI at Boneo, he came out and we got a PB there, 79% and from there he continued to get the highest scores of all the Para riders and we were ranked first of the Australians going into Rio. We went to Europe in July 2016 and had four weeks in Holland before we went to Rio and we were there ten days before competing.

"Rio for me was such a huge deal because it was so soon after my accident. To actually be there and doing it with that

incredible horse and an incredible team around me made it special. However, it was my inexperience that let me down in the first test, but we changed a few things and in the second test he put in a super performance and looked after me completely. We were second last in the first test and fifth in the second, just 0.8% behind the Bronze Medalist. At that point, he really showed that we were a competitive combination, but we just lacked a bit of time and experience.

"We knew what we had to do moving forward to future championships, but we had our ups and downs on the way. He had colic surgery in 2017 when we nearly lost him, but he was such a strong horse and a real fighter that we got him through thanks to the South Eastern Equine Hospital. Right on 12 months after his colic surgery, Zidane was on the other side of the world competing at the WEG in Tryon. That was a credit to what kind of horse he was, as not every horse would have been able to do what he did. Our preparation for Tryon was exactly what you wouldn't want it to be. He had a few ongoing issues going into Tryon that were managed by me, Lone and my vet Mike Tweedie. I think I only managed to sit in the saddle five weeks before we competed on the world stage. He was fourth in the Individual Test and he just tried his heart out. I was disappointed with the judging confusion over the Freestyle, as I thought there was an opportunity to come home with a medal.



Emma and Zidane sharing a moment. Photo: Stephen Mowbray.

"The improvement in horsepower from Rio to Tokyo was amazing. The standard is so impressive and not at all the quiet Para horses people imagine. Also, for us, we didn't need that extra COVID year, as the

Emma and Zidane representing Australia at Tyron WEG in 2018. Photo: Australian Equestrian Team / Cara Grimshaw



difference between 18 year olds and 19 year olds can be remarkable, especially when you are up against seven and eight-year-olds that benefited from that extra year. We had to manage Zidane very carefully going into Tokyo. Again, that was a credit to Mike Tweedie, my vet here in Australia and Lone who was very mindful of the work we did and how much to do. And once in Tokyo, Lone helped manage how little we had to do. She gave me confidence. You know each other so well, she said, you don't have to ride him for 40 minutes, just 10-15 minute sessions; you know what you have to do. That gave me so much confidence and it was a team effort.

"Zidane was a showman too. He loved to perform and always rose to the occasion for me. I loved Tokyo and we knew long before the Games that it would be his last championship and that he would retire from international competition after it. I loved our Freestyle and for me, it was the highlight of Tokyo, with Zidane bowing

out knowing that he tried his hardest. I don't think we could have done any better. We were fifth, competing against younger and more athletic horses. Physically, he just wasn't at the same level, so to come fifth was the best we could have done. For me, the feeling was as good as winning a medal and it is a moment I will never forget. Zidane's performance was a testament to his strength, his attitude and his willingness to always do his best. He had such an emotional strength, we gave each other confidence.

"He had a few months off after Tokyo, not spelling in the paddock, but doing a lot of road walking each day to help with his suspensory issue behind. We brought him along really slowly until he was able to work in the arena. I rode him five or six days a week and my aim after Tokyo was to do at least one Open Prix St Georges test with him. We were really close to getting to that point with a competition just a month away in March last year.

Emma and *Zidane* competing at the Tokyo Paralympics in 2020.
Photo: Australian Equestrian Team / Jon Stroud.



Emma and *Zidane* competing at the Tokyo Paralympics in 2020.
Photo: Australian Equestrian Team / Jon Stroud.

“At the time he had a cracked front tooth. It was x-rayed and it was decided that it needed to be removed. Just a standing procedure under mild sedation. However, tragically whilst under sedation he had two seizures, and during the second seizure his heart stopped. It was not a reaction to the sedation, it was just one

“There were times when I felt I just had to think something and he would do it; it was very special.”

of those things that will remain uncertain. Mike Tweedie looks back and wonders if *Zidane* had been having slight seizures during the night because a couple of times we arrived in the morning and he would have a fresh bump on his eye and another time with some skin off his nose. How did he keep getting those little injuries? Mike thinks that there was something in his brain due to his age that caused the seizures. Cameras in the stables would have told us what was going on and I am going to put them in. It won't do *Zidane* any good, but it might help my horses in the future.

“It was a shock, to say the least. He went in for minor tooth surgery, there was no question of him not coming home. It is not the phone call you want to receive. A good friend of mine, Sarah Bertram is a nurse at South Eastern and they were devastated and it was a shock for her and everyone involved. Sarah suggested they ring mum to find out where I was and what

I was doing before they told me. I felt he had earned a long retirement, but maybe he decided it was time.

“*Zidane* was a particularly special horse. I will continue to compete at an international level, but there will never be another horse that will be able to replace him and what he did for me. He came into my life at just the right time and we achieved everything that we wanted to achieve and that we could have achieved. After my accident, *Zidane* changed my life and gave me a sense of purpose and meaning. Not only did he enable me to travel around the world several times representing Australia, but he was also a healing aid for me. He really helped me after my life-changing accident and I think my life would look a lot different now if it weren't for *Zidane*”.



Article: Anna Sharpley.