

**EVENTING  
HORSEMAN OF THE YEAR**

**BOYD**



*(Kat Netzler Photo)*

# MARTIN



Kat Netzler

The buzz about Boyd Martin began the minute he stepped off the plane from Australia in 2006.

Who was this rakishly handsome, antipodean-accented 20-something bombing around Rolex Kentucky on a scrappy 7-year-old off-the-tracker? What was Phillip Dutton thinking, hiring as his new assistant trainer a kid best known for his drunken visits to tattoo parlors and horse auctions—from which he always returned with an unintended purchase? And was there any way in hell this character was going to make his pipedream of riding on a U.S. team by 2010 come true?

In the five years since then, Martin, now 31, has definitively answered all those questions, and then some. He'd had confidence in his talent since devoting his life to riding the moment the final bell rang in high school, and acquaintances like Dutton and Martin's wife, Grand Prix dressage rider Silva Martin, had watched it burgeoning for years.

But to almost everyone else—the public, the press and even some of his competitors—2010 was the year in which Boyd Martin truly proved what he was made of.

"When you meet Boyd the way most people meet Boyd, he's always happy and so cheerful, and is very much like, 'Everything will always be all right! Very much like 'a real Australian,' " Silva explained. "But when you really know him, you know he's all business. There's never a day when he wakes up and says, 'Oh my gosh, this is too hard for me.' This is what he strives for in life."

Boyd's "passion for everything he does and desire to give 110 percent to everything," as Dutton calls it, paid off in 2010 with top ribbons at the Rolex Kentucky and Pau (France) CCI\*\*\*\*s with three different horses. But his crowning achievement was his 10th-placed finish at the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games (Ky.)—the top U.S. placement and his first time on a team.

"I really felt that I'd been working toward this moment for the last 15 years, and if I bombed out at the WEG, I didn't want to lay awake at night thinking I could've done something more," Boyd said. "After I cleared the last show jump, I wanted to be able to honestly say that I couldn't have tried 1 percent harder. And I felt like I got there."

Like the professional boxers he idolizes, Boyd starts his personal preparation exactly two months before every big competition. He stops drinking, cuts his calories and ramps up his fitness routine of running and swimming to a frenzied peak before every four-star. By the time he arrived at the WEG, he'd shed an additional 15 pounds from his already lithe frame.

"I feel like unless you're sacrificing some of the pleasures in life, be it food, alcohol, sleep, or whatever, you're not really giving 100 percent," he said. "You can't live the good life and say you're trying as hard as you can. You've got to completely enthrall yourself if you want to give your absolute best possible performance."

Boyd's success in the show ring also led to increased attention out of the tack in 2010. Forgoing the publicly neutral political path chosen by many of his high performance peers, he stirred up controversy in person, in print and on the Internet by speaking out about improving the developing rider pipeline, U.S. Equestrian Federation funding shortfalls and a lack of rider fitness at the elite level.

In hindsight, he acknowledged he might have saved some unnecessary drama by taking a more direct path to the top of the USEF hierarchy, but he doesn't regret getting involved in the process and taking a stand publicly.

"I've learned this year that you can't change who you are," he said. "I believe my passion is the same as 95 percent of eventing lovers in America, which is top performance by American riders at

## PERSONAL PROFILE

**Age:** 31

**Home Base:** The upper barn at Phillip Dutton's True Prospect Farm in West Grove, Pa.

**Family:** "He's very much like his parents," said wife Silva Martin. "His mum [Toy, a U.S. Olympic speed skater] is very competitive, and so is his dad [Ross, an Australian Olympic skier], but in very different ways."

Boyd has a little bit of both in him."

**Best Quality:** "In the eight years I've been with Boyd, I've never seen him lose his temper with a horse," said Silva. "I see him ride all day, every day. He's a very impatient person with everything else, but the minute he gets around these horses, he's the most patient person I've ever met."

**Mission Accomplished:** Syndicating his WEG mount, Neville Bardos, whom he bought off the track in Australia for \$800. He now owns two shares, and the other eight are controlled by longtime supporters, new friends made while teaching clinics, and eventing enthusiasts who e-mailed him out of the blue after seeing Neville run at the WEG.

**From Pupil To Peer:** "There was more of that teacher-student relationship before, but now we just joke around a lot," said mentor Phillip Dutton. "It's been a good, easy transition. I think some people get out on their own too quickly, and Boyd was never keen to do that. I think that shows a lot about him—he wanted to make sure he knew and was sure about what he was doing."

## 2010 COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS

- 10th—Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games (Ky.) with Neville Bardos
- 4th—Rolex Kentucky CCI\*\*\*\* with Neville Bardos
- 11th—Rolex Kentucky CCI\*\*\*\* with Rock On Rose
- 12th—Rolex Kentucky CCI\*\*\*\* with Remington XXV
- 7th—Pau CCI\*\*\*\* (France) with Remington XXV
- 5th—FEI World Rider Rankings

the highest level. If I feel like there's a better way of doing something, I'd be a con artist if I just went along with what everyone else thought. I can't just turn around and start telling everyone what they want to hear."

But Boyd knows people will only sit up and listen if he walks the walk to match the talk. Once just a talented up-and-coming foreigner, he now feels the weight of being a leading U.S. rider firmly settled on his shoulders. So from here on out, he'll be working as hard every year as he did in 2010.

"I've spent tens of thousands of hours, joined up with frustration, sweat and tears, trying to learn the art of training a horse, and many, many people have contributed to my knowledge and wisdom so far," he said. "In Phillip, I've had the ultimate guide in preparing a horse for a four-star. Mirroring his training schedule was the difference for me in actually, finally getting on a team and being successful. But I'm humbled to admit that I've only learned 50 percent of what I've got to learn to be a true horseman—I'm only halfway there." 🐾