

# Riding high

ECHUCA-MOAMA equestrian Marissa Norris is riding high after the biggest win of her fledgling career.

But as far as she is concerned it is just the next step on what she hopes will be a long and successful journey.

Dreaming about the Olympics is pretty heady stuff, but without those dreams nothing ever becomes a reality.

Marissa sat on her first horse at three.

Now 15, she has just collected her biggest success — the PSI Dressage and Jumping with the Stars — at the Werribee-based National Equestrian Centre.

And she admits she does dream of an Olympic ride, of competing in the high-profile European and North American circuits.

Victory in the country's most prestigious young horse event is encouraging confirmation her years of hard work — Marissa is in the saddle at least five days a week — are paying off and she is headed in the right direction.

As well as her own training, there are two hours of specialist work with coach Christine Sievers every Wednesday at the Elmore Indoor Centre.

Her next event is this weekend — round one of the Elmore Equestrian Club Horseland/Baristoc championship. Round two will be run next month.

The year 10 student is pretty chuffed with the way things are going — particularly as the horse she rode to success at Werribee is one her mother bred.

"We are all riders, mum, my sister Ashley and me," Norris said.

"The horse I rode in Werribee is Envious Philino and he is a German riding pony cross standing 14.2 hands.

"We just wanted a foal but Echuca-based breaker Danny Oliver told me he thought this horse was something special from the beginning.

"After the second break he was convinced so I started working with the pony then and he is a much more focused and balanced horse, every bit as good as Danny said he would be."

Norris only does dressage, not interested at this stage in show-jumping or three-day eventing — and the risks they involve.



**Dressage dynamo:** Marissa Norris and Envious Philino on their way to the gold medal in the prestigious PSI Dressage and Jumping with the Stars at the National Equestrian Centre.  
Photo: submitted

Just doing dressage she has already put her front teeth through her lip after a spill from the saddle.

Dressage is ballet on four legs. As an equestrian sport defined by the International Equestrian Federation, it is "the highest expression of horse training" where "horse and rider are expected to perform from memory a series of predetermined movements" in an arena 20x60 metres, or occasionally 20x40 metres.

"Dressage is what I like, it is clean, precise and I am largely responsible for my own improvement," Norris said.

"At this point each step up the ladder, to higher standards, is a 12-month task until you really do have to go overseas if you want to perform at the highest level," she said.

When she is not on the horse Norris squeezes in time for jazz classes. She loves the dance and while it does not add to her balance on

horseback it does play a big role in her overall fitness.

Once the preserve of retired thoroughbreds, dressage is increasingly a specialised discipline and the horses are warmbloods and warmblood Arabians, although the German riding pony is playing an increased role.

"Envious Philino is a four-year-old by Don Philina, a German stallion which was imported by Dynamik Stallions

in WA, where he still stands," Norris said.

"When we won at Werribee we not only got a rug, sash rosette, medallion and \$200, mum was also awarded the breeding trophy for Envious," she said.

"She did a lot of research on sires before she chose Don Philino to put over our mare and it has all paid off so far."

But while she continues working to improve her overall performance, Norris also has her eyes on competing in the

grand nationals at Sydney International Equestrian Centre.

As a stepping stone to that plane overseas and then establishing herself as someone the big players in the sport will invest in with a champion horse.

Until then Marissa Norris will be working her current horse almost every day of the week, continue working with her coach every week — and continue living the dream.