



# HIROSHI HOKETSU

# STILL IN THE SADDLE

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By Bridget McArdle McKinney

COUNTRY: JAPAN

DATE OF BIRTH: MARCH 28 1941

STAR SIGN: ARIES

PROFESSION: DRESSAGE RIDER

A TRUE ROLE MODEL OF PERSISTENCE, PATIENCE, COMMITMENT, AND CONCENTRATION, DRESSAGE RIDER HIROSHI HOKETSU IS STILL IN THE SADDLE AT 71 YEARS OF AGE. INCREDIBLY, THE LONDON 2012 SUMMER OLYMPICS WAS HOKETSU'S FOURTH TIME REPRESENTING JAPAN IN THE OLYMPICS AND HE WAS THE OLDEST OLYMPIAN PARTICIPATING THIS YEAR AND THE THIRD OLDEST COMPETING EVER.



Why at this grand old age with a successful business and horse career behind him, would Hoketsu return to the rigours and deprivations of Olympic preparation? It turns out that when he retired, his wife encouraged him to return to competitive riding and he took her up on her advice. This decision would mean dedicating himself completely to training and preparation in Aachen with his coach, and as a result leaving his wife and family back in Japan. He says that he is inspired by improvement.

His coaches have had a long-term leading role in his development. As he explained to HT: “Mr. Antonie (Ton) de Ridder has had the most influence on me. I am and have been working with him for nine years since I came to Germany. Mr. Lorenz Rageth and Mr. Henk Von Bergen were the ones who introduced me to European Dressage 30 years ago.” Now, that’s 30 years since Hoketsu began dressage; before that he was a champion show jumper. He competed in show jumping in the 1964 Summer Olympics – over 48 years ago!

Hoketsu also credits his mounts for his success. He lists them with pride: “I have ridden so many horses during the last 60 years. Among those the following were the memorable horses:

- a) Whisper was a jumper I rode in 1963 and 1964 who made me qualify as a member of Japanese jumping team.
- b) Balthazar gave me two silver medals for the team and individual dressage competitions at the 1986 Asian Games in Seoul.
- c) Casper won the Japan National Dressage Championship for 5 consecutive years from 1988 to 1992. He also made me qualify as a member of the Japanese dressage team for Seoul Olympics in 1988.
- d) Whisper 115 took me to two Olympic Games: 2008 Beijing and 2012 London. She also gave me several chances to listen to the Japanese National Anthem at international dressage competitions in Europe.”

He could also credit his spare and busy training regime. “I wake up at seven am”, he explains, “and do stretch exercise for 30 minutes and eat breakfast and ride two horses in the morning. After lunch, I work two to three hours for my business and go back to the stable to walk the horse by hand or by riding. After that I come home and do fitness and stretch exercise for 45 minutes and take a shower. I go out to eat half of the week and the rest of the days I cook dinner by myself. This is my routine life.” This is the life of a serious athlete.

Whatever horse or regime one has,

official support comes in handy and Hoketsu recognises the support of the Japanese Equestrian Federation over the course of his riding career, saying, “At the time of the Tokyo Olympics, the Federation owned the jumping horses and let selected riders ride them. They have stopped this type of support after Tokyo but they bear the transportation costs for the Olympics and World Equestrian Games. They also give a lot of support in the area of communications and administrative works.”

Hoketsu has been an inspiration to athletes around the world; we asked him what advice he would give to young athletes. He responded thoughtfully: “If this old man can inspire the athletes around the world, I am very, very happy. I would like to say to young athletes ‘Set your own objective and never give up. As long as you can keep motivating yourself, your challenge will be realised.’ Words of wisdom, the wisdom of the ages.

So, the big question – what about the 2016 Summer Olympics? Will Hoketsu be there? While he hemmed and hawed a bit immediately following London and said that his 15-year-old Whisper wouldn’t be going due to age, he hasn’t to our knowledge actually said ‘No’. And we would not be a bit surprised to see this ‘old man’ in Rio in 2016. 