

Fiona Bigwood

Date of birth:	24 April 1976.
Lives:	Bergish Gladbach, Germany.
Major achievements:	<p>Fiona was a member of the British team at the 1993 Junior European Championships and the Young Rider European Championships from 1994 to 1996, all with Pablo Picasso.</p> <p>In 1996, 21-year-old Fiona was the youngest British rider ever to be selected for a Senior European Championships with Dance & Fly. That year she also took the British National Elementary title with Afrikka.</p> <p>Fiona was short-listed for the 1998 World Equestrian Games with Dance & Fly and Macho and, in the same year, was ranked number one in the British Puffa International Rider Rankings. In 1999, 2005 and 2007, she was a member of the European Championship team.</p>
Current competition horses:	<p>Habana 3, a 16.3hh German-bred chesnut mare by Hyllos out of Judith, born 1988 and owned by Fiona's mother Penny Bigwood.</p> <p>Nector Van Het Carelshof, a 17hh Belgian-bred bay gelding, born 1990 and owned by Penny.</p>
First competitive experience:	"It was an elementary test when I was about seven or eight. I had this fantastic little pony on lease. Halfway through the test I was exhausted. I didn't realise how much was involved in riding a 6min test. He knew the test backwards and just carried me round, perfectly on the bit, and we won."
Trainer:	"My partner Anders Dahl."
Superstitions:	"I have a stock pin and a black hair scrunchy."
Most admired riders:	"Holland's Anky van Grunsven because she has produced two gold medal-winning horses, which is not easy. And riders who train horses through praise and rewards to achieve the maximum they and their horses can."
Qualities looked for in a dressage horse:	"Temperament is important. When I look at a horse I have to really like it – fall in love – I have to have a special feeling about them because I work with them every day and tend to keep my horses for life."
Favourite dressage venues:	"At home, Hickstead, abroad Stockholm World Cup qualifier show and Aachen in Germany."
What other career would you have chosen:	"Animal welfare. I have about 10 rescue dogs. If I could have fitted it in with my riding career, I would have trained as a vet and gone out to a third-world country to help."
Favourite meal:	"Whenever I come home, the first thing I have to do is go to a pub and order a cheddar cheese ploughman's. Very British."
Favourite drink:	"A glass of Pinot Grigio after a hard day's riding."

Fiona started riding aged seven at a local riding school and was given her cousin's naughty 11.2hh Welsh pony to ride not long after. Fiona's mum, Penny, was having weekly riding lessons from Marion Larrigan and eventually persuaded her to break her rule of not teaching children.

"Mum just nagged her endlessly. Marion is an amazing teacher and I can never repay her for what she did for me. She made dressage fun, so you didn't want to walk away from horses at 16 as so many riders do," says Fiona, who has always concentrated on dressage because of Marion. "It used to take an hour to travel from home in Kent to Surrey and, on the way back in the car, we used to have dinner and do my homework."

Aged 10, Fiona was given the ride on Marion's daughter's grand prix horse Salute.

"I was lucky that Salute was being retired that year. It was such a good way to learn piaffe and passage by just playing," she says.

When Fiona was 19, she moved to Denmark to train with Hasse Hoffmann for three years.

"It was a completely different side of life. I went from looking after and riding my three horses at home to a big dealer's yard," she says.

Then Fiona moved down to Germany to train with Jan Bemelmans followed by Dieter Laugks. She ended up buying her own yard in 1998 with 54 boxes, which she runs together with her partner, leading Danish dressage rider Anders Dahl.

Fiona and Anders had a baby girl, Mette Clare, in the summer of 2006.

