



New Zealand Olympic Ambassador

# Heelan Tompkins

**Olympian number:**  
964

**Discipline:**  
Equestrian

**Specialist events:**  
Eventing  
(Team and Individual)

Heelan Tompkins was born in 1978 in New Plymouth. Taranaki, one of New Zealand's farming regions, was the perfect place for horse-loving Heelan to grow up. She has ridden for as long as she can remember, starting horse-riding because her mother ran the local riding school. Heelan and her sisters Jean and Claire all became national pony club eventing champions.

Heelan rode on to the New Zealand equestrian scene with talent and skill, impressing judges at a series of competitions. She was quick to achieve international success in eventing, one of the three Olympic equestrian disciplines. In 1997, at age 19, Heelan came third in individual eventing at a Trans-Tasman competition in Australia. She repeated this placing at the same event in 1999. In 1997, she also travelled to Kentucky in America, to compete in her first four-star event on her family horse Masterpeace. Despite being the youngest rider and the oldest horse in the competition, Heelan and Masterpeace placed eighth overall.

## Quick facts

**Favourite food:** French toast and maple syrup

**Favourite movie:** Anything scary

**Favourite music:** Macklemore, Ed Sheeran

**Childhood hero:** Michael Jordan

**Current favourite athlete:** Usain Bolt

**Most rewarding moment in sport:**

Becoming World cross-country champion in Germany

**Talents other than sport:**

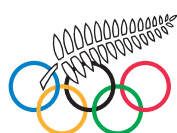
Cooking, gardening, talking too much (is that a talent?!)

**Biggest injury:** Shattered both wrists and broke both elbows at the same time

**Biggest sacrifice:** Having to sell my favourite horse – broke my heart

**Job outside sport:** Worked for five years on Classic Hits as a breakfast host, 6am–11am

**Other fun facts:** Love travelling and meeting new people. I have a pet pig called Zeus who weighs 160kgs, a dog called Jeffery, and a cat called George



**New Zealand  
Olympic Education**

Heelan's Olympic dream almost became reality when she was 22. She was named as a non-travelling reserve on the New Zealand Olympic team, and only just missed out on competing at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. This increased her determination and she continued to achieve impressive eventing results in other competitions. She went back to Kentucky for another top ten finish in 2000. In 2002 Heelan was part of the New Zealand team that came fifth at the World Equestrian Games in Jerez de la Frontera, Spain.

Two years later, Heelan was selected for the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. Heelan was ready for the challenge of competing in the three-day eventing. Her beloved 18-year-old black thoroughbred Glengarrick, known as "Nugget", was the oldest horse to compete at the Games. After the second stage, the cross-country, Heelan and Nugget were in tenth place and raring to go in the final stage. In an interview before the final stage, Heelan said the more difficult show jumping fences were better for her and Nugget (18 August 2004, [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=4&objectid=3585124](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news/article.cfm?c_id=4&objectid=3585124)). Heelan and Nugget didn't disappoint – they came seventh in the individual eventing, making Heelan the top New Zealand rider at Athens. Heelan was also part of the New Zealand eventing team that came fifth.

Heelan and Nugget are the perfect example of the importance of a good relationship between horse and rider in a successful equestrian career. In the years following Athens, many people told Heelan that Nugget was too old for competing. However, Heelan said that she knew her horse best, and she and Nugget continued to rack up an impressive list of national and international successes. They travelled the world together, competing in Spain, Holland, Scotland, America, Australia, and England, and at the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen.

Nugget was ready to retire from top-level competition in 2007, so Heelan gave him to her young cousin who lived in Havelock North. When he turned 25 in 2010, he returned to Heelan to live out his retirement.

## Career highlights

<b>2008</b>	Beijing Olympic Games: Eventing team (Fifth)
<b>2006</b>	Aachen World Championship: World senior cross-country champion
<b>2006</b>	World Equestrian Games: Eventing team (Sixth) and Individual (Seventh)
<b>2004</b>	Athens Olympic Games: Eventing team (Fifth) and Individual (Seventh)
<b>2002</b>	World Equestrian Games: Eventing team (Fifth)
<b>2000</b>	Sydney Olympic Games: Reserve for the New Zealand team
<b>1998/99</b>	World junior champion
<b>1997</b>	Top ten finish at Kentucky (America)
<b>1996–2000</b>	Swarbrick Trophy for New Zealand Young Rider 3DE Champion
<b>Throughout her career:</b>	Top ten finishes at Badminton (England), Kentucky (America) and Adelaide (Australia) on several different horses



Heelan trained and competed with several horses throughout her career – in the lead up to competitions she would often work with five horses, including two called Major Difference and Sky Whistler. In 2008 she won the FEI World Cup Eventing Qualifier in Kihikihi on a new horse called Sugoi. That same year, she and Sugoi attended the Olympic Games in Beijing (although the equestrian events took place in Hong Kong). The eventing team came fifth, matching their Athens placing.

In 2010, Heelan sold Sugoi because a few injuries prevented him from competing. She searched for a replacement that would help her get to her third Olympic Games in London. Several years earlier, Heelan had bought a horse on TradeMe, called Cortaflex Up N Go. In 2010, she rode Up N Go in the Puhinui International Three-Day-Event, where they came fifth.

Heelan and Up N Go missed out on going to the London Games but Heelan continues to compete at the top level. In May 2013, she rode her horse Watkins in the CCI1 horse trials in Taupo. Heelan is always on the hunt for her next Olympic horse.

During her equestrian career, Heelan studied sports psychology at Massey University in Palmerston North and worked as a breakfast radio host in New Plymouth, where she still resides. She has also worked as a television presenter. In 2013, Heelan was named a New Zealand Olympic Ambassador for the New Zealand Olympic Committee.

## Honours

<b>2005 and 2006</b>	Named a female role model by the Hillary Commission
<b>2004</b>	Taranaki Sports person of the Year
<b>1998</b>	NZ universities sportswoman/person of the year
<b>1997</b>	Sportswoman of the Year, Blues Award
<b>1997</b>	TV2 Young Achiever of the Year Award

## Links

Heelan Tompkin's Olympic Museum profile:  
<http://imuseum.olympic.org.nz/museum/athlete/profile/514>

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Official Olympic Sport

# Equestrian

Equestrian first featured at the modern Olympic Games in 1900, with four events: horse high jump, horse long jump, grand prix jumping and polo. It was then withdrawn from the programme. Equestrian was brought back at the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games, with dressage, show jumping and eventing. Equestrian has been an Olympic sport ever since.

It is the only Olympic sport where men and women compete against each other on equal terms. Aside from the show jumping section of modern pentathlon, equestrian is the only Olympic sport that involves a rider and a horse. Both the horse and the rider are considered athletes.

## The course

The dressage course is a 60m by 20m sand-based arena.

The show jumping course is an arena with 10 to 15 removable timber obstacles or fences located in an enclosed arena. The obstacles have poles on them that can be knocked down.

Eventing takes place in the dressage and jumping arenas, as well as on a cross-country course that has mixed terrain and obstacles.

## Olympic events

- Team eventing
  - Individual eventing
- 
- Team dressage
  - Individual dressage
- 
- Team jumping
  - Individual jumping



## The basics

Dressage consists of three rounds in which horses have to perform a series of movements, such as different trots, canters and walks. In the first two rounds, they have to perform a compulsory programme in a set order. They finish with a freestyle round, in which the rider chooses the programme and sets it to music. Five judges give points based on how accurate the horse's movements are, and how calm and supple the horse is. The winners are the horse/rider team with the most points.

Show jumping involves the horse and rider jumping over obstacles or fences. The aim is to complete the jumps on the course in the designed sequence and with no mistakes. Competitors are penalised if they knock down any part of an obstacle, if the horse refuses to jump over an obstacle, or if they do not complete the course within a set time. The winners are the horse/rider team that finishes with the fewest penalties or faults in the fastest time.

Eventing is the most demanding equestrian discipline, as it involves doing show jumping, dressage and a cross-country course over three days. The first stage is a dressage test, which takes place in an arena. The horse and rider must complete a set sequence of movements. One or more judges watch and award points for balance, rhythm and the horse's suppleness and obedience, and how well the horse and rider work as a team. The points are then converted into penalty points. In the next stage, competitors complete a cross-country course, jumping over natural obstacles. Competitors are given penalty points if they take longer than the set time, if they stop at any obstacles, or if the rider or horse fall. The third stage is a show jumping test. This is a single round, in which competitors attempt to clearly jump all the fences on a course within a maximum time. The fences are lower than at top-level show jumping, because the horses competing in eventing are not show-jumping specialists. Competitors are given penalty points for knocking down fences or going over the maximum time. The penalty points from the three stages of eventing are added together. The winners are the horse/rider team with the lowest overall penalty score.

## Important points

- The bond between rider and horse is extremely important in equestrian. The stronger the relationship and understanding between the two athletes is, the better their chances are.
- Eventing and show jumping riders must be 18 years or older and dressage riders must be 16 years or older.
- Horses must be at least 8 years old for dressage and eventing and 9 years old for show jumping.

