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## Here comes the hotstepper



Tiyasha Vathul with Dazzling Gold. Photo: M. Karunakaran

### **Meet Chennai city girl Tiyasha Vathul, who won gold at the recently-held Under-14 National Equestrian Dressage Championships**

There's a poet who said that horses deserve at least once in their lives to be loved by a little girl. I meet one such in 10-year-old Tiyasha Vathul. She walks into the office with a folder full of certificates and the poise and confidence of someone who clearly spends her time around horses. The Class V student of Sishya School, OMR, however, goes back to being a child as she tells me the story of her quest for gold.

"I've always loved animals. When I was around four, growing up in Delhi, I came across horses at a riding school and was drawn to them. When we relocated to Chennai, I learnt to ride at the Chennai Equitation Centre where I've been mentored by Isabelle Hasleder, my Austrian coach over the past few years."

She shows me pictures of her horse, the prophetically named Dazzling Gold, on whose back she rode to glory, competing against nearly 100 riders from across the country. Under a brilliant blue sky, Dazzling Gold's chestnut brown coat shimmers a dark gold. So why did Tiyasha choose the more formal event of Dressage and not opt instead for the excitement of Show Jumping or the greater challenges of the Cross Country?

"In Dressage, you spend more time with your horse. It teaches patience, helps build the tools you need as a rider," says Tiyasha, speaking of the sport that was initially meant to train cavalry

horses. Not an event for the timid, Dressage is a kind of horse ballet where the horse performs a series of pre-determined movements to the commands of the rider. It calls for fine balance from horse and rider as both go through the canter, trot, piaffe and the pirouette.

As Tiyaasha describes how 15-year-old Dazzling Gold executed the diagonal cross of the ring, the reversing to one corner, and the final goose-step before the judges, I take in her carriage.

Her white-gloved hands rest gently on the reins, she is togged out in white breeches and a black coat with a stock tie around her neck and black dress boots. And her small yet determined face reflects all the drive it takes to get the horse to execute a canter pirouette.

The competition, organised by the Equestrian Federation of India, was held across four zones in the country and judged by two international riders — Eva-Maria Vint-Warmington from Estonia and Nataliya Petukova from Bulgaria. Open for riders between the ages of 10 and 14, this is the first year that Tiyaasha has participated, one that has come after rising at 4.30 every morning and riding an hour before school. Says Tiyaasha, “I practise on Dazzling Gold and on Zia. Most of the events are held around weekends, so I don’t miss out on school much.”

Tiyaasha’s other pursuits are that of any child her age. “I love Tintin. I hope to get to read the complete edition. I help as a teacher’s assistant at a playschool for two to six-year-olds. I’m learning to play the guitar and I’m a sprinter. I love spending time outdoors,” she says, adding that in another two years from now she hopes to do her first scuba dive.

Until then, this hotstepper will be making music with her horses.