



June 2008

Dressage In The Sandhills Celebrates 30th Anniversary

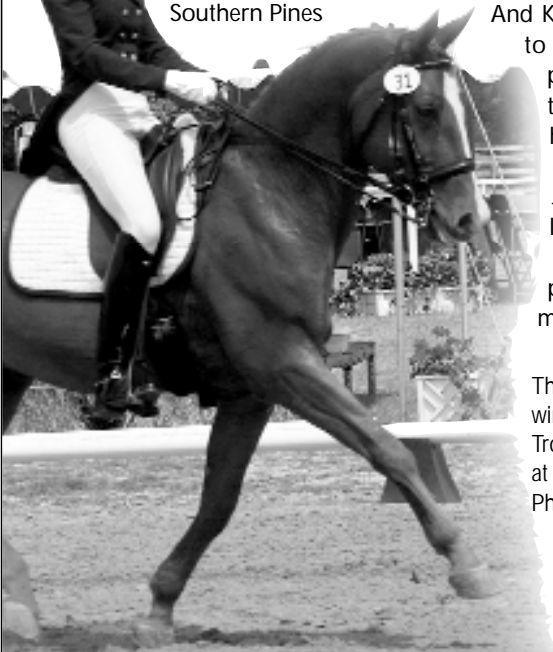
By Sue Smithson

It started on another harness track near Pinehurst, three decades ago, but the Mother's Day weekend dressage show is a sporting tradition in North Carolina with deep roots and traditions. Dressage in the Sandhills, May 9-11 at the Pinehurst Harness Track, featured many "extras" as a backdrop to the five ring, 200 horse competition.

Four teams of juniors wore matching shirts all weekend for the Team Challenge competition, exhibiting camaraderie and sportsmanship. The team of Natalie Bliklager, Molly Paris, Keni Kerin, and Kaitlin Blythe captured the top prize of embroidered chairs and saddle pads.

The tack stall competition was hotly contested. The difficult task of the judges was further hampered by attempted bribery with exotic drinks and gourmet spreads. After much deliberation, they managed to pin Annette Saunders' group first with their very original Dr. Seuss theme. Michelle Folden's tack stall was reserve champion, and Lynn Leath's placed third.

Rhonda Dretel of Southern Pines



won the Kim Shaw Memorial Freestyle award with her new Dutch gelding Titus (76%, fourth level MFS). "I never even practiced it," Dretel said. "I used the music and choreography from my old horse, and just changed around a few things at the beginning. It worked perfectly!"

Teresa Horne of Raleigh earned the Sylvia Miller memorial award for the best amateur Prix St. Georges ride on her Agathon.

Friday night's dinner was punctuated with a Calcutta auction for the six trainers in the Sport Horse Versatility Challenge, raising \$1200 to sweeten the pot for gamblers and riders. On Saturday evening the crowd swelled, the rock music throbbed, and the trainers talked strategy with Linda Hoover, SHV creator. Cricket Gentry, daughter of legendary CBS sports anchor John Derr, was a natural on the microphone with the color commentary and rider interviews. "There are more spectators here than for this afternoon's Grand Prix!" said show manager Kay Whitlock. The trainers drew mounts, and the warm up area was nearly as entertaining as the competition area. Jim Koford appeared in sun hat, hula skirt, flip flops and lei (the flip flops were denied by the judges). And Koford added further "refinement"

to his ride by talking on the cell phone while riding one-handed through the narrow. As he made his final halt, Gentry tickled the crowd by announcing "That was Jim Koford, and what a good looking lei!"

Becca Vick, in formal dress, posted a clear round with no major faults. Brendan Curtis,

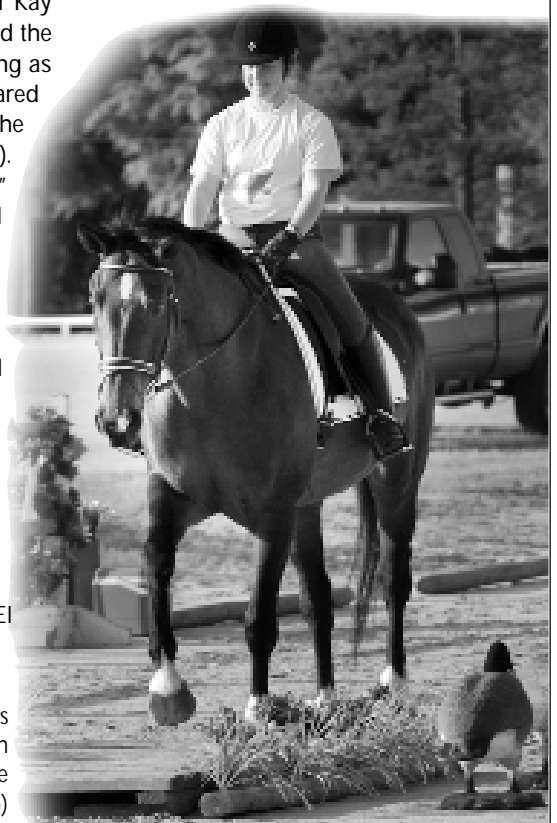
Theresa Horne and her Agathon, winners of the Sylvia Miller Memorial Trophy for the best scoring Amateur FEI at Dressage in the Sandhills. (WNC Photo)

Annette Saunders carefully places one foot over the footbridge in the SHV Trainer's Challenge (Ken Westcott Photo)

resplendent in pink tiara and Mardi Gras beads, added pressure with another fault-free round to the beat of Mission Impossible. Lynn Leath tried to influence the judging by riding in with a Mai Tai, complete with paper umbrella. Annette Saunders, the smallest rider, drew the 17 hand horse, a slight disadvantage in the "box" obstacle. Dawn Weniger's careful round was contrasted by the "Born to be Wild" music.

The tension was palpable as the scores were tallied - The two stars from Robert Dover's TV reality series America's Next Equestrian Star lived up to their billing - Becca Vick edged out Brendan Curtis by only two points!

It's these "extras" that make Dressage in the Sandhills one of the most popular shows on the spring circuit. Oh, and there were plenty of great rides in the competition arenas, too. For complete results, visit www.carolinadressage.com.



Eventing Corner



The roller coaster ride we call Eventing....or at least, my opinion of it.

By Anita Quinn

Well, here we go again...this time at Jersey Fresh, another rotational fall, another great horse sent galloping across the rainbow bridge. From the USEA blog: "The organizing committee of the Jersey Fresh CCI3* regrets to announce the death of David O'Connor's horse, Tigger Too, ridden by Lauren Kieffer, at Fence 28 on the cross-country course today." This rotational fall wasn't about horse error or rider error...or was it? According to the latest press release from USEA, preliminary necropsy showed that the result of death was a pulmonary hemorrhage that resulted in an

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All submissions must be typed and received by the 10th of the month prior. Articles by members (under 1K words) are welcomed, but must include byline, and may be edited for space and content. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the NCDCTA, its staff, or executive board.

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aortic rupture. No one is sure just when he suffered this catastrophic injury, but from the photos of Tigger Too's takeoff to the large skinny before the water, he was already struggling, with his nose firmly planted on the top of the fence. So it was neither horse nor rider error but instead ultimate physical failure? Maybe yes, maybe no. Numerous accounts talk about how the horse broke to the trot just prior to the approaching the large fence and Lauren "kicked on". Was that rider error, not knowing and reading her horse that something was definitely going wrong, or was she doing just what we have all learned to do from the very beginning of our riding careers...kick on? Breaking into the trot late in a

course can be a serious signal that something is wrong. Maybe that signal should not have been questioned, but instead should have been responded to by pulling up immediately—not kicking on. As these questions and speculations are flying around, it feels like the eventing community is spiraling out of control, almost to the point of wondering who's going to be next. Weekend after weekend, some of us watch the upper levels go cross country, cringing the whole time, wondering "Will we escape disaster this weekend?"

The Jersey Fresh accident occurs in the wake of the falls at Rolex, most notably Lainey Ashker's rotational fall on Frodo Baggins, but included Quiet Man's demise as well. All which followed the tragic weekend at Red Hills where Darren Chiacchia took a rotational fall on Baron Verdi, accompanied by the untimely passing of Direct Merger (ridden by Jonathon Holling) and Leprechauns Rowdy Boy (ridden by Missy Miller). Both died of pulmonary hemorrhage, resulting in Missy's fall at a jump. What exactly are we missing in this sport, to have riders paying the ultimate or close to ultimate price for their mistakes, and horses subjected to that price for a lapse in rider responsibility? Well, I can tell you one thing that we are not missing in this sport, and that is theories and opinions on what is wrong and how to improve it. Hop on your local bulletin board, national or local, and you can get as many opinions as you want. Here's what everyone's saying about these falls....

Long versus short format. Is it the lack of the vet box, whereby horses' conditions used to be assessed before starting out on the grueling cross country course, contributing to falls at fences? EIPH deaths have shown to play a role in rider falls, including rotational falls at fences. Is it the lack of conditioning these horses are receiving that is predisposing them to EIPH? Either way, cause or affect, some feel that these horses would most likely have been spun at the vet box under the long format. But gone are the days of the vet box if you're an upper level rider. Course design, speed requirement, and rider error can also be drawn back to the short format. Tougher, more technical courses are now required on cross country, which subsequently require a dramatic shift in momentum requiring slowing down for technical fences and speeding up trying to make up time on the straightaway. What about riders who are not experienced in the long format. Do they know their horses inside and out, know about conditioning, what a horse feels like when they're dangerously tired, the way that the old generation of CCI riders did?

Some people postulate and make theories, other just state "facts"... "Laine was going too fast", "Amy should have pulled up", "the girl on The Quiet Man should have pulled up", "Darren shouldn't have ridden that horse at that HT", "Jon Hollings' horse had a previous instance of trouble", "Tigger Two had been on rest for an injury in the recent past and might not have been conditioned optimally for a ***." No doubt, everyone's got an opinion. Then what about the proposed rules that David O'Connor and

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Minutes of the NCDCTA Executive Board Meeting

May 6, 2008

The NCDCTA Board met by teleconference on May 6, 2008. Present: Jennifer Mitchell, Donna Kelly, Lynn Leath, Becky Blikslager, Sue Smithson. Excused: Dave Stuckey, Suzanne Mullen, Anita Owen.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: Jennifer called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. with a CDI update. Entries are lighter than normal, but plans are underway for a big weekend. A fundraiser to help the Region 1 teams for the North American Junior and Young Rider Championships raise money for the trip to Colorado this summer was discussed; possibly a bake sale at the CDI.

Jennifer brought a request from show recognition chairman Sandie Dennis for NCDCTA sponsored show and clinic organizers to be prompt with their volunteer card lists.

VICE PRESIDENT: Donna is looking into the N.C. Art Museum in Raleigh as a potential site for the January Gala and Awards Banquet. Becky volunteered to help research sites in the Triangle, including the Exploris Museum. Membership is up to 722: with 434 dressage, 62 eventers, 197 both, and 69 no preference. There are currently 327 horses registered, and nearly a hundred of those opted for the \$50 fee in lieu of the volunteer card submission.

Donna moved that the NCDCTA Horse of the Year program be expanded to include FEI Ponies, FEI Young Horses, Brentina Cup, and Developing Horses, all of which will be counted at the USEF "equivalent" levels. The FEI Junior tests, which are equivalent to fourth level, will continue to be combined with the FEI Young Rider tests as they have been in the past. Jennifer seconded, passed unanimously.

The Fix-A-Test for HOY points was questioned. It was determined that this format should be considered a clinic rather than a show, due to the constrained time schedule and the fact that judges coach the participants. Sue put forth a motion that from this point on, the Fix-A-Test for-

mat will not be recognized as a show. Donna seconded, passed unanimously.

DRESSAGE: Becky is looking at dates for another Ishoy clinic, as the April clinic fell through when American Airlines cancelled flights nationwide. Lynn Kerin has agreed to organize the junior pizza party at the CDI. Becky agreed to touch base with Eliza Sydnor for an update on the USDF L program. The N.C. Horse Industry Economic Impact Survey is underway, and Becky and Jennifer both agreed to gather information on what NCDCTA can do to help endorse this project. Becky suggested an expansion of our scholarship program, but it was determined that existing scholarship funds are not fully utilized. Ways to promote and streamline the NCDCTA scholarship program will be a main topic at the Strategic Planning Meeting scheduled for July.

COMPETITIONS: Lynn announced that the Latta Plantation Horse Center declined the purchase of the two arenas which have been stored there since last fall. Jennifer will organize transport to ship the rings to Raleigh, where one can be stored at the Hunt Horse Complex storage building and the other can be offered for sale at the CDI silent auction. A minimum bid will be determined when the rings are assessed for condition.

COMMUNICATIONS: The May newsletter was late, and Sue will find out if the delay was caused by printer or mailer. A CDI promotion banner should go up on the website at the next routine update.

NEW BUSINESS: Lynn suggested topics for Strategic Planning. It was decided that the June 3 board meeting will be another teleconference and the July 8 meeting be an afternoon Strategic Planning Session followed by a board meeting, venue TBA. The meeting was adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Sue Smithson

Mitchell's Message

Message from the President

I read a quote the other day by Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh: "Anyone who is concerned about his dignity would be well advised to keep away from horses." Isn't that the truth?! Horses can humble us, that's for sure. In the saddle or on the ground...horses are not to be taken lightly. I am recuperating from a badly crushed finger (Never grab a horse by the halter...especially when they don't WANT to be grabbed!) and typing one handed. Nonetheless, I can't wait for the pins to come out of my hand and I'm back in the saddle again!

In the meantime, I wanted to update you on the latest developments of the Performance Standards proposal put forth by the USEF Dressage Committee. Due to the strong response that was received after the first proposal, the USEF Dressage sub-committee went "back to the drawing board" and have now come up with a revamped proposal. The latest draft is more detailed than the version released at the 2007 USDF convention and subsequently tabled at the January 2008 USEF convention. The new proposal allows riders to compete through THIRD LEVEL without having to qualify. Qualifying would begin at Fourth LEVEL with the new proposal. Furthermore the scores and points that would be required have been lowered from the original draft. The current version specifically addresses issues such as of the status of eventers, includes the current USDF Medal System as part of the qualifying process, specifically states who will be grandfathered in at which levels, and provides an appeal process. Scores for advance-

ment to 4th Level can be earned with any Third Level Test, rather than solely with 3rd Test 3. There is a link on ncdcta.org which provides the complete details of the new proposal. There is an online survey at usef.org where you can submit feedback on this draft. The deadline for submission is June 15. This will allow time for the survey feedback to be tabulated and summarized, so that it can be discussed at the meeting of the Dressage Committee in Cincinnati on July 1-2.

In addition to giving your feedback to the USEF, I welcome your opinions personally, as I represent you (the members of NCDCTA) at the USDF convention. It is important to note that this is a USEF rule. USDF is NOT responsible for the rule, but I imagine that there will be plenty of discussion about it at the USDF convention. I would like to hear from NCDCTA members so that I can accurately represent our organization at the convention later this year. Whether you are for it or against it, I really would like to hear from you! You can email me at JMitchell@mebtel.net, or write me at 108 Sam Snead Dr. Mebane, NC 27302.

Happy spring to you all, and here's another quote for you: "Keep one leg on one side, the other leg on the other side, and your mind in the middle," (Henry Taylor)

Jennifer Mitchell
President, NCDCTA

Eventing corner cont'd from cover

Kevin Baumgardner have handed down as recommendations for enforcement: 5 very strong and stringent rules calling for rider suspensions and loss of qualifications in instances of rotational falls. Even the Brits jumped in at that point to share their opinion on the rule changes that David and Kevin proposed (as published on The Horse and Hound website), claiming that the rule about riders and horses being suspended from competition for up to six months and losing their qualification at the level in which they were competing, following a rotational fall was "over the top" and could potentially cause even more serious falls as riders would begin to ride more cautiously, or try to stick with a horse in trouble, in order to prevent a suspension. A large outcry came from USEA body as a whole as well, claiming this was blaming the rider and punishing the rider after the fact, and left wondering if it does any good to suspend a dead horse and/or rider. None of these rules have been enacted as of yet, however, and the wording is already being modified to reflect the outcry.

I've been trying to keep tab on all the discussions that are going on in amongst the national bb, in the local bb, in some various Yahoo groups, and amongst my own set of friends. The rule proposals, the opinions being offered and then tore apart is almost staggering. It's hard watching your favorite sport starting to become divided, starting to point fingers at each other, throw around allegations, hearing new rule changes be proposed only to see those ideas ripped to shreds by others. Will continuity exist in this community again?

Everyone once in a while, a glimmer of hope remains. A few sentences that Danny Warrington wrote (as published in COTH) that brought everyone back to the same page and that all riders need to

sit up and pay attention to. Danny wrote: "You can't make enough rules to make somebody think....There's a day to pull up. There's a day to go home, and there's a day to fight again. We have to change the way the sport is being played, by the players." And there we are, full circle back to rider responsibility and rider accountability, which David O'Connor harped on over and over again at the USEA National Convention during the G10 summit.

How many times have I heard riders brag about falling off and jumping back on and continuing on course, only to find out later that they had a concussion, or broken wrist, etc. A lot, it's almost a bragging right in eventing. How many times have I heard riders brag about pulling a horse up in competition because something wasn't quite right, and walking away to try again another day. Very few. Maybe we all need to change the way we think. Maybe we need to enforce the rules that are already in place. How many of you have been a recipient of a dangerous riding violation? I don't know of any. That's not to say they aren't given out, but I think that stands to say they don't stand out enough. If we're trying to discourage dangerous riding, then everyone should be aware of what it is and what it looks like, and most importantly that it will not be tolerated. Oh yes, everyone has an opinion, including yours truly.

One positive light out of all this tragedy is that it has made the eventing community sit up and take a good hard look at the trends in eventing and safety issues within our sport. The emergency Safety Summit to be held in Lexington, KY on June 7-8th is a step in the right direction. I would encourage everyone to take part in the Safety Summit. Even if...no, especially if you are not an upper level rider. It is not "their" sport, it is "our" sport and we need to be represented. If you have an opinion, and who doesn't, you need to be there:

https://www.usef.org/_AUAIFrames/SafetySummit/Default.aspx