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DRESSAGE AT LEXINGTON; KEYBANK, BROMONT and QUEBEC CITY HORSE SHOWS

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AWAITING THE DAY'S WORK

Lisa Holman



Courtesy of the Artist

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BETWEEN ROUNDS



... WITH ANNE GRIBBONS

My "Academy Awards" For The USET Championships

Gladstone, N.J., excels in two kinds of weather for special events: freezing and melting. In November during a clinic with Klaus Balkenhol, we endured the ice clattering on the indoor arena roof, and in June, at the Miller's/ USET National Dressage Championships during the Bayer/ USET Festival of Champions, we were being steamed like clams in sun and humidity.

Other than failing (again) to control the weather, the event organizers, with Ellie Millard leading the troops, had few problems making the Festival an event that is emerging as a tradition to which we can look forward and be proud of.

Fifteen Grand Prix horses qualified to compete for a spot on the World Championship team that will be heading for Rome in October (see July 3, p. 11). Overall, the rides were of good quality, although there were a few twists in the plot that made the final list of winners one we may not have counted on.

"The freestyle displayed how much more sophisticated the riding to music has become."

Susan Blinks turned the tables in a way that may even have surprised her. Delano, her "No. 2" horse, put in a Grand Prix test I found totally enjoyable. The horse was attentive and relaxed, the test clean, supple and steady. I thought it deserved at least 2 percentage points more than it received and should have finished second on the first day. Only one judge, Natalie Lamping, agreed with this notion, however, and Delano ended up third in the Grand Prix.

While Delano had one of the best tests of his life, stablemate Flim Flam decided to take time out. Our latest European darling announced his arrival with some spectacular bucking outside the arena. There were a number of awesome bugs in the area, which may have been the reason for this display, but the incident seemed to unsettle him enough to carry into the ring.

It took almost half the test before Susan and Flim Flam had their usual lines of communication open, and then things fell apart again in the pirouettes, a very costly movement. Not until the final centerline, which was all 8s and 9s, did they look like themselves, and that was too late to save the day. Flim Flam finished sixth in the Grand Prix, although one of the foreign judges had him as low as ninth.

Graf George was a predictable winner with a correct although bland Grand Prix test. He lacked power in the extended and medium gaits, especially at the trot. The canter work, which was never the gray's strong point, has improved in quality. Guenter Seidel masterfully but very cautiously guided the Olympic veteran through the movements in a way that suggests he is saving Graf George for the bigger tasks in Europe.

Grandeur, Steffen Peter's new mount, which I saw for the first time, offered more sparkle. This young horse is "chili pepper hot" and probably a real challenge to sit on. He has a great canter and good walk, and the trot is of the fashionable but controversial "Hackney" variety. He has a lot of knee but doesn't come through the back in the extensions without an exaggerated effort. I saw one extended trot in which Grandeur did gain ground and showed some suspension, so perhaps it is just a matter of strength and time.

Of course the piaffe, because of all the natural lift and articulation of the joints, is spectacular, and the passage is also beautiful when it carries behind, which he does not yet do consistently. Though Steffen does a great job of keeping the lid on, the tension in the horse leaks out at times. That may be the reason for a diversity in the scores, which placed this horse in a range from first to fifth in the Grand Prix and first to 10th in the Grand Prix Special. Still, Grandeur ended up second in both classes.

Pikant also caused some dissent among the judges, who placed him fourth through 11th in the Grand Prix and first through seventh in the Special. The Grand Prix was not his best, mostly because he never looked truly in front of the leg. His freestyle,

however, displayed the Pikant we recognize as last year's national champion as he and Shelly Francis breezed through a difficult program with the greatest of ease.

Sunday's performances in the freestyle displayed how much more sophisticated the riding to music has become, both in the technical aspects and in the choreography and editing of the music. Most of the top contenders now have their music made to order. The days of splicing things together at home are coming to an end.

Flim Flam started the class off with a better ride than the Grand Prix, to music that appeared custom made. There was no recognizable melody, but the ABBA-inspired beat was right on, and the canter music was stirring, with crescendos in all the right places. The piaffe in the beginning went quite a bit forward, a mistake crept into the two-tempis, and the left canter pirouette changed leads behind.



Mary Proctor Photos

Anne Gribbons

Flim Flam's one-tempis changes down the centerline were perfectly straight, and the last piaffe and passage tour put a good finish to the test. Flim Flam ended up fifth in the freestyle after a tough weekend, which nevertheless showed off his wonderful natural gaits.

It's hard to remain on top throughout the year, and we can only hope that Flim Flam was temporarily "out to lunch." In any case, his buddy Delano is ready to step into his spot, as he demonstrated with aplomb. Either way we have Blinks in the saddle, and that is fine by me.

Susan Dutta showed her Guadalquivir DC off to the tunes of Simon and Garfunkel in a delightful medley. They presented a difficult choreography that worked surprisingly well, considering that the regular Grand Prix test is still a bit much for this

young talent. All the pieces are there, but when the horse has to face the entire program it sometimes seems to overwhelm him. Their very pleasing performance in the freestyle showed both horse and rider in a less pressurized frame of mind and gave us a promising look into the future.

"'Best picture' doesn't go to the Grand Prix division, but to the winner of the Miller's/USET Intermediaire I National Championships."

With Lennox, Robert Dover played on the Italian theme of the World Equestrian Games and even managed to include a dramatic snip of opera. The freestyle was reasonably difficult for a young horse, and Robert's showmanship was in full bloom. The passage is still a bit open and tends to fall into the bridle, and although the brave attempt at a piaffe pirouette faltered some, the judges liked the performance enough to award Lennox second place behind Graf George.

I think the bombastic music that accompanies Graf George is a bit much for the horse to absorb. At times it drowns him, at other times it chases him. Guenter spared no effort, though, to show his horse's abilities, including half passes in the passage and a "fan" formation of piaffe. Still, there was no doubt in anybody's mind that this horse knows his lessons and then some, and that George and Guenter are able to repeatedly present a faultless performance to anchor a team effort.

If these were the Academy Awards for dressage, I would give the long shot award to Delano, the most original piaffe award to Akeena (for doing her saddle horse stretch and still pulling it off), the most talented horse for the future award to Guadalquivir, and the most promising new Grand Prix rider award to Mary Ann Grant. And, of course, I would congratulate the five riders who will go to Europe.

The award that would correspond to "best picture" doesn't go to the Grand Prix division, however, but to the winner of the Miller's/USSET Intermediaire I National Championships. I had never seen Christine Traurig on her 18-hand Etienne before. I even missed her Prix St. Georges ride, so I was unprepared for the onslaught of engagement, suppleness and elegance that blew me away in Intermediaire.

The entire ride displayed concentrated cooperation between horse and rider. All transitions were clear, balanced and accurately placed, the horse was longitudinally and laterally supple, and the frame was elastic and correct. The judges sang in tune when they placed Etienne first with 70.41 percent, and I almost expected them to get up and applaud at the end of the ride.

Plus, as we read in "Between Rounds" (June 5, p. 10), even George Morris approves of Christine's seat. I rest my case. □

DRESSAGE



ADDY-CROW LEADS DUTCH INVASION OF LEXINGTON

Stacey Reusser

Some impressive forces deployed from Holland to take over Dressage at Lexington at the Virginia Horse Center July 10-12. On the front lines were Dorie Addy-Crow and her Dutch Warmblood contingent from Inspo, Belinda Nairn-Wertman's importation and training operation located in Kirkwood, Pa.

Addy-Crow rode three Dutch horses imported by Nairn-Wertman in nine classes, winning all of them. In his four training level tests, the 4-year-old bay Malachi earned scores ranging from 72.00 to 75.76 percent. Lexington was only the second show for the gelding by Zeoliet, who was imported for A.J. Stapleton. Addy-Crow, who rides most of Stapleton's seven- to eight-horse string, started basic work with Malachi in November of 1997.

"He has big, big movement and a really good mind," said Addy-Crow, 32. "Malachi wants you to be there for him though. He hasn't seen a whole lot yet." But Malachi need only look to his barnmates for inspiration.

Kirby, a 6-year-old gelding also owned by Stapleton, won all three of his fourth level tests with scores in the high 60s. It was only his second outing at that level. "Kirby's just the happiest horse," said Addy-Crow. "It doesn't matter if you ride him three times a day—he's got his ears up and he's ready to go. He's one of my favorites—well, actually they all are. They'll all just go forever, and that's the thing I like about them."

Addy-Crow started riding Western at age 8 when she lived in Orlando, Fla. She did Western pleasure classes, then made the transition to English through 4-H. But it took sojourns through the hunters and eventing before she settled in with dressage. "I really wanted to do [eventing] because I loved the cross-country, but it's pretty hard on the horses, and I started getting scared," she said.

In 1984, she ventured to Valhalla Farm, in Lake City, Fla., where she rode her first upper-level dressage horse and fell in love. She spent eight years there until Inspo needed some help.

"She was recommended to us independently by three different people," said Bill Wertman, the self-proclaimed "man who hyphenated Belinda." The Wertmans spend at least three months

each year in Holland to facilitate importing the 30 to 40 horses Inspo deals with annually. "You can't do that unless you have someone you trust back home," he said. "She's there all day, every day. She's like a machine. We're very fortunate because it's difficult to find people that dedicated."

Stapleton, of Centerville, Ohio, agreed. "I don't know how you'd fault Dorie. She couldn't be much better as a person. She deserves to go to the top, and I hope that somehow I can be a part of it," he said.

Bloodlines Count

Stapleton relies upon Inspo to find his horses now, having made the transition to Dutch Warmbloods



Belinda Nairn-Wertman and Scorcerer demonstrate the half-pass that helped earn them a first and second at Prix St. Georges.