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*Polo Quarterly*



# Florida isn't just about Polo

**Equestrianism forms the heart of the state and the purest discipline of all is in full force: Dressage. USDF Gold Medallist Mary Ann Grant is based in Wellington and spoke of her family background in the sport.**

"I do come from a family of dressage trainers. My mother (Carole Grant) has been on the United States World Championship Team, and won a double gold medal at the Pan Am Games. My father (Chuck Grant) was the second inductee into the United States Dressage Federation Hall of Fame. He was one of the first dressage trainers here in America, and he is considered by many to be the Father of American Dressage."

## WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF DRESSAGE AS A SPORT?

"It is the oldest recorded equestrian discipline. We have writings on dressage theory which go back before Christ by the Greek commander Xenophon. The fundamental theory has not changed. It is a French word meaning "training," therefore, the basis for all equestrian disciplines. Through the years it became a sport, but originally it was used to create a superior battle horse. They had to do a lot of movements which required flexibility, suppleness, strong core muscles, strong haunches, and at the same time quick reactions"

## HOW HAS THE SPORT EVOLVED IN THE USA?

"Evolution of the sport came originally to America from two different sources. Dressage was already very developed in Europe because of the military schools and courts. When some of the military personal migrated to this country they brought with them there horsemanship skills. Also, European circus families performed dressage movements on tours exposing the American public to dressage. Our very first civilian dressage competition was in 1949, so not very long ago. Over the years we have progressed, and are very competitive on the international level"

## WHAT IS THE ANNUAL COMPETITION CIRCUIT?

"The competitions are year round. If you are trying to qualify for the Olympics, World Cup, World Championships, Dressage Masters, or Pan Am Games you have to go to were the CDI competition qualifiers are offered. Wellington, Florida has more CDI's than any other location in the country. This brings a lot of international riders here in the winter. Championships



are at major cities around the globe, so there is a lot of traveling involved."

**WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE PRIZE IN DRESSAGE? THE OLYMPICS?**

"I would say that making an Olympic team is definitely a defining point of any dressage rider's career. But it only comes every four years, so there are other events which are equally important. The Reem Acra FEI World Cup, which highlights the Grand Prix Freestyle is held annually. Each qualified country is allowed two rider/horse combinations. The Alex Johnson Group Dressage Masters is held annually consisting of 3 to 6 major cities around the world. Each competition offers EUR 100,000.00 prize money. The Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games is held every 4 years in different locations, the last being Lexington, Kentucky. These events distinguish our top competitors. In addition, the FEI, our international governing body, publishes a ranking of dressage riders based on current international placing."

**IN TERMS OF VENUE - WHAT HAS THE MOST HISTORY AND THE MOST IMPORTANCE?**

"I would say that Aachen, Germany is probably our best facility as far as competition, and nostalgia. It is very old and prestigious, having had many great riders and horses on it grounds. It is our Palermo."

**HAVE YOU EVER DONE SHOW JUMPING?**

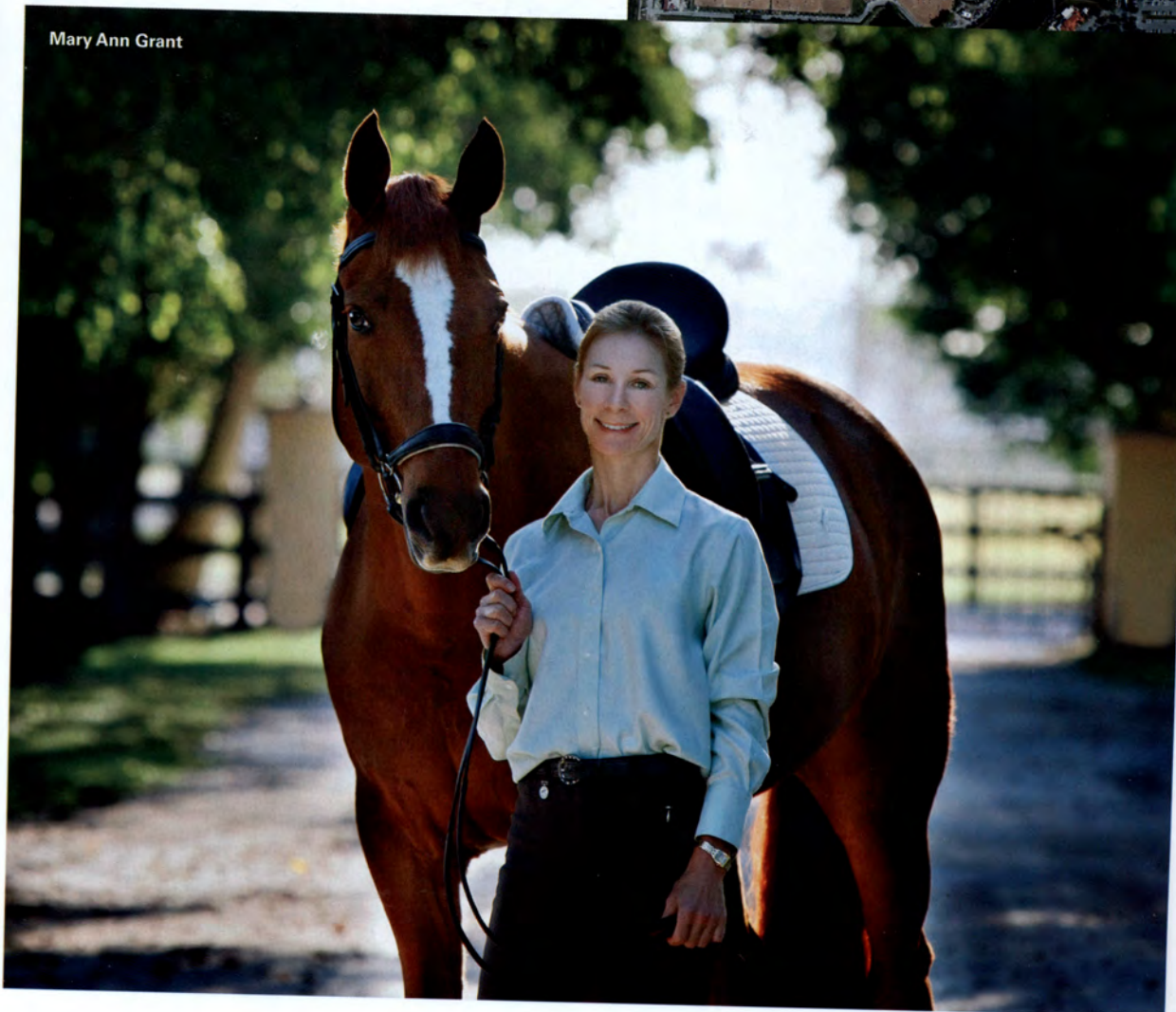
"Yes. Before I decided on dressage, I rode hunters, equitation, and jumpers."

**WHAT ARE THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCHOOLING THE HORSE FOR DRESSAGE OR FOR JUMPING?**

"Of course there are differences, but the foundation is the same. Top horses have to be able to cover ground and collect while keeping the bascule. This requires gymnastic development. They also have to turn well and listen to their rider's aids. They need a rider whom they trust and gives them confidence."



Mary Ann Grant



Jumping horses have to jump many different types of obstacles. The rider has to use slightly different aids depending on what type of obstacle they are jumping, such as a wide oxer, a narrow plank, or water. In dressage we have at least 32 different movements at the Grand Prix, such as pirouette, passage, piaffe, half pass, and flying changes of leg every stride. We strive to perform them like mirror images to the left and to the right. You can imagine how clear we have to be with our aids to accomplish this."

**CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ALSO ABOUT THE SHOW JUMPING IN THIS COUNTRY?**

"Jumping is a very important sport here, and has played a leading role in developing equestrian sport in our country. They have developed a strong system of competitions which attract sponsors, and reward winners with large purses. Internationally they have been at the very top and now we are in a place where we need to rise up again. But they are still very competitive."

**WHY DO YOU THINK WELLINGTON HAS BECOME SO POPULAR IN THE LAST YEARS?**

"Originally, Wellington was developed as a horse community by Bill Ylvisaker for Polo. They had some jumping shows here, and dressage shows as well. People came for the season to find relief from the cold weather. Now it is really the place where equestrian have to be to succeed."



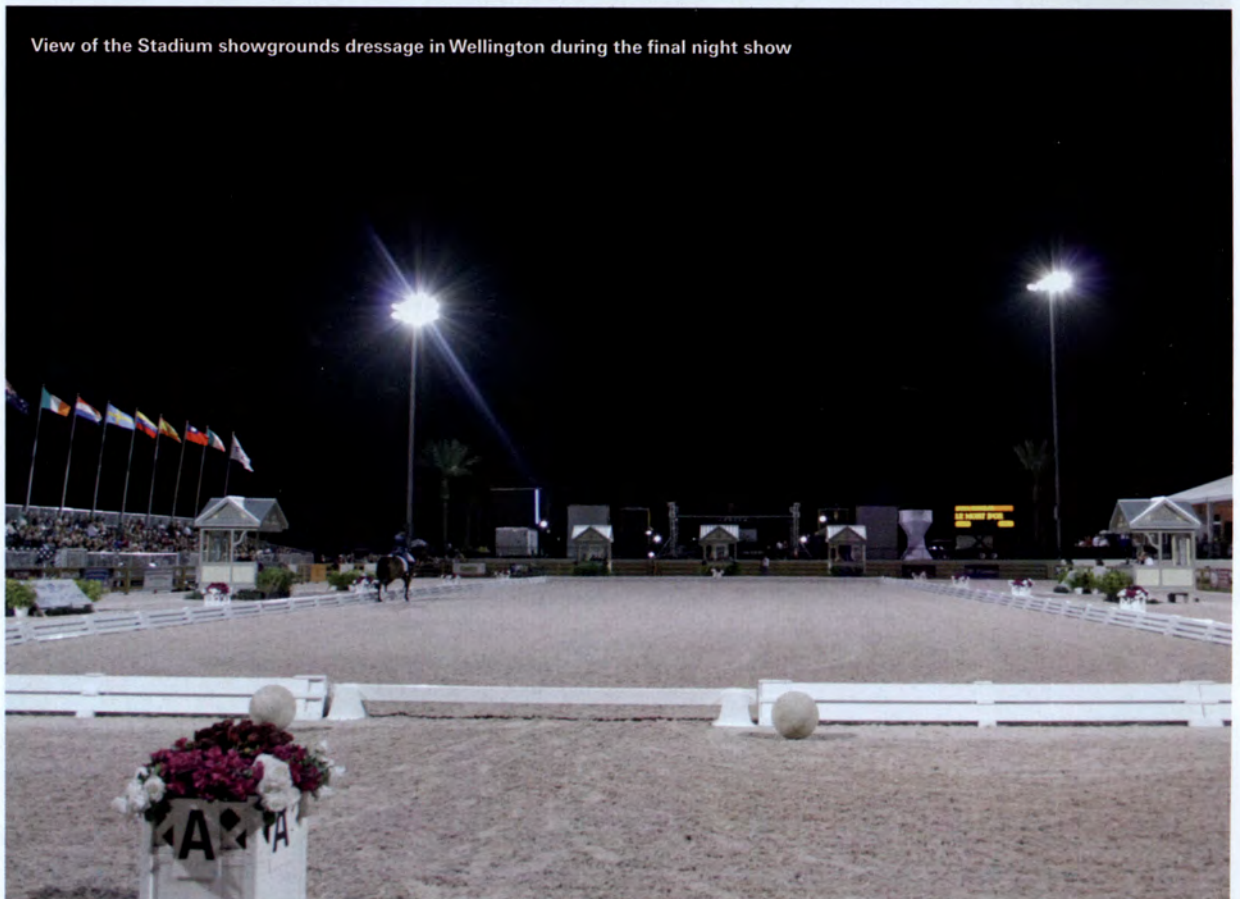
Final competition at the West Palm Beach Global Dressage Festival on March 30th



View of one of the Equestrian Stables next to the showgrounds



View of the Stadium showgrounds dressage in Wellington during the final night show



**SO IN THE USA, IS WELLINGTON ONE OF THE PLACES TO BE IF YOU WANT TO BE COMPETING AT THE TOP LEVELS?**

"I would say it is the place to be in the winter time if you want to be on the top level."

**YOU ARE TRYING TO GET ONTO THE OLYMPIC TEAM. HOW MUCH WORK HAS IT TAKEN OVER ALL THESE YEARS?**

"I'm involved 100% in riding at a high level. It involves physical and mental development for both horse and rider which can only come day by day. Building the relationship with the horse is very important, you can imagine, as we have to be so specific with our aids. Of course, of high importance is having athletic, willing, and intelligent horses."

**PQ** then heard from Chrystine J Tauber, Secretary of the United States Equestrian Federation.

**WHY DO YOU THINK WELLINGTON HAS BECOME SO POPULAR IN THE LAST FEW YEARS?**

Wellington was developed as a polo community by Bill Ylvisaker. They started to have some jumping shows here, and the dressage shows as well. Now it is really the place where everyone comes to compete. Major qualifiers and championships, great facilities and prize money, these are what bring equestrians. And the sunny weather helps!



Central showground arena ready for the final day of the season





Polo Player and Show Jumping rider Robert Jornayvaz