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World-Class Scores for Top Riders in the Dressage at Devon Grand Prix Freestyle

September 28, 2013 (Devon, PA) Under sunshine and stars spectators at Dressage at Devon were treated to impressive rides.

FEI Grand Prix Open

Lars Petersen, an American-based former Danish Olympic rider, and Mariett (Come Back II x Zendi), a Danish bay mare, wowed the audience with an impressive 76.975 scoring ride in the FEI Grand Prix Freestyle. “The horse keeps getting better and stronger,” said Petersen. Dressage judge Axel Steiner said he was thrilled to see Mariett come back after a serious foot injury which took two years to heal.

Canadian born Ashley Holzer, a Canadian-born U.S. citizen, rode the Dutch Warmblood Breaking Dawn (Akribori x Eveline) to second place with a score of 76.5. Ashley said that she was thrilled with her horse. “Although he’s tense in a crowd like this, he’s gaining confidence,” she said.

Tina Konyot, from Palm City, Florida, rode Calecto V (Come Back II x Bahera) a 17.2 black Danish Warmblood stallion, into third place with a score of 72.775.

The Diva of Devon Says Goodbye to the Dixon Oval

On Saturday, Dressage at Devon formally bid farewell to a horse who has commanded the Devon arena and made it her dance floor—the beloved Rocher (Rolls Royce x Feranzi), also known as the “Diva of Devon.” The floppy-eared black Westfalen mare entered the Dixon Oval with her owners, Joann and Chuck Smith, and George Williams, her rider from 2001 to 2009.

Rocher was bred in Westphalia by Friederich Vekins, whose first thought when he saw the foal with oversized, floppy ears was “This is designed by God.” Those ears became known around the world and one German magazine called them the “greatest Grand Prix Ears in the World.”

In 2001 at the CDI in Germany, as an unheard of mare with a virtually unknown American rider aboard, she astonished dressage aficionados when she led the field for the most of the competition. Two weeks later at the CDI Munich Indoors, Rocher needed no introduction. At the same time, she was not well known in the U.S. and Dressage at Devon was the first to experience her magic. In 2002, she won the Grand Prix and the Grand Prix Freestyle for the first time and the crowd proudly claimed her as its own. Rocher transformed Devon freestyles that night, raising the bar with an unheard score of 75-plus percent. Her freestyle to Madonna music brought the capacity crowd to its feet with joy, and the announcer spontaneously invited the spectators down to the arena so they too could dance. And they did.

Rocher returned in 2003 to win a second time – both the Grand Prix and The Grand Prix Freestyle. After an injury prevented her return in 2004, she came back in 2005. She swept the Grand Prix and the crowd roared before she even began the Grand Prix Freestyle. When her 77.85% score, a new record, appeared on the leader board the spectators could not contain themselves. Rocher is the only horse ever to win the Grand Prix and Grand Prix Freestyle three times.

Elise Elman, who currently exercises Rocher, says “She started calling when she got off the trailer at Devon—she knew where she was.” Rocher danced energetically around the Dixon Oval and into retirement.

Axel Steiner Judges his Last CDI

Axel Steiner, who has been judging at Dressage at Devon for decades, said farewell to CDI judging on Saturday night. At age 72 he has pushed the limits of retirement age because of his love for sport and the show. “We don’t have that much tradition in dressage in the U.S., but Dressage at Devon has been a tradition in the Fall,” says Steiner. “The atmosphere at Dressage at Devon is always special, and I made sure to make room in my schedule for it this year.”

Axel started riding when he was 9 years old in Germany. Later he attended riding schools of Warendorf and von Neindorff. After moving to the USA in 1961, he competed until his military duties interfered. He received his first national judge’s license (AHSA now USEF) in 1968 and the FEI promoted him to Official status (FEI-O, now FEI 5*) in 1988. Axel has judged Olympic Games, Pan American Games, World Cup Finals, and many international and national competitions throughout the world.

Other Show Highlights

The USEF Fourth Level Test 2 Open was split into two classes due to the high number of entrants. Laine W. Hills, DVM won class 3A riding her horse, Ukarde, a bay gelding Dutch Warmblood (Sir Donnerhall x Carmina Burana). Silva Martin rode to first place in Class 3B on Zoran, also a bay gelding Dutch Warmblood (Prestige vdl x Suexlita).

Kimberly Herslow claimed the blue ribbon in the FEI Intermediaire I Open CDIW USEF HP GAIG/USDF Q riding Rosmarin, a Hanoverian (Rosentanz x Weltmeyer).

Benjamin Albright earned first place in the FEI Young Rider Grand Prix for 16-25 year olds riding Kristin Cooper's Dutch Warmblood, Toscano (Jazz x Original).

Sunday

Competition continues tomorrow with some of the focus shifting to up and coming talent. The classes include the FEI Grand Prix Special Open CDIW USEF HP, FEI Intermediaire I Freestyle CDI W, Lead Line Exhibition Class, FEI Pony Individual Test, USEF National Young Adult "Brentina Cup" USEF Qualify, Dressage Seat Equitation for Juniors, and more. And, of course, shopping, food, and exhibitions.

About Dressage at Devon

Dressage at Devon, the highest-rated international dressage competition held outside of Europe, combines world-class international dressage competition and one of the world's few complete sport horse breed shows with the family fun of an International Fall Festival, featuring food and shopping for all tastes. Visit www.dressageatdevon.org.

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Editor's note: Additional pictures are available on request.