



The Race for the Cup Kicks Off

By Amy J. Daum

The race for the Cup is a hot one, with some of the country's top horses and riders jockeying for position in what looks to be the most competitive Adequan USEA Gold Cup Series to date.

The Series kicked off in Tallahassee, Florida at the Red Hills Horse Trials March 10-12. This was longtime event organizers Sallie Ausley and Sylvia Ochs swan song, and the dynamic duo made sure they ended their nine-year reign at the top, with record attendance of more than 45,000. Over the last decade the pair has developed a dedicated volunteer force (623 strong on the 2006 roster), while at the same time gaining the support of the local community. With their retirement, the eventing community is losing two of its most talented and motivated organizers, but the show will go on—several longtime volunteers have agreed to continue Sallie and Sylvia's vision and we wish them the best of luck.

Phillip Dutton of West Grove, Pennsylvania took the early Gold Cup lead by winning both Red Hills Gold Cup divisions—the Advanced (CIC***-W, also the FEI World Cup Qualifier) with Annie Jones' ten-year-old Thoroughbred gelding The Foreman, and the Intermediate (CIC**) aboard Rebecca Broussard's 11-year-old Thoroughbred gelding Lucky Stripe.

The following weekend Dutton did it again—winning both Gold Cup divisions at the Southern Pines Horse Trials, March 17-19 at the Carolina Horse Park in Raeford, North Carolina—home of the 2006 (as well as 2004 and 2005) American Eventing Championships and organizer Lefreda Williams, as well as the incredible team at the Horse Park, including executive director Gwen Parkins and director of events Landon Russell.

At Southern Pines Dutton's victories were aboard Nina Gardner's 14-year-old Thoroughbred gelding House Doctor in the Advanced division, and Suzanne Kloud's nine-year-old Thoroughbred gelding Happy As Larry in the Intermediate.



Dutton and his mounts' owners earned significant cash and other bounty, including prizes new to the Gold Cup Series for 2006—a 28-day supply (seven doses) of Adequan from the Gold Cup title sponsor (\$350 value), a pair of front and hind Nunn Finer American Style galloping boots (\$200 value), and a Mountain horse Fame jacket embroidered with the Gold Cup logo (\$120 value). The winners of each division throughout the year receive this list of prizes, in addition to \$500 in cash. The second and third place finishers in each division will receive a pair of front and hind Nunn Finer brushing boots.

Two weeks later the Cup moved 3,000 miles west to Temecula, California for the Galway Downs International Horse Trials, March 31-April 2, where Robyn Fisher of West Hills, California "pulled a Dutton," winning both Gold Cup divisions. She and longtime partner Le Samurai, her 11-year-old Holsteiner/Thoroughbred gelding, put in a wire-to-wire win in the CIC***-W division, which like at Red Hills served as the Gold Cup Advanced division as well as an FEI World Cup Qualifier.

This pair has been together for seven years, a surprise considering their introduction. "He bucked me off, so I said I had to have him," Fisher said with a laugh. She is the first to admit that Le Samurai is a tough ride on cross-country. At the intermediate level she is able to rate his speed, but at advanced he gets very strong. Prior to their partnership, Fisher had competed through the advanced level nationally, but had never done an FEI competition, not even a CCI*, so she appreciates what owning the headstrong gelding has done for her career. "He's been a good boy for me. He's taught

Above: Phillip Dutton and The Foreman accept the Gold Cup and congratulations from USEA CEO Jo Whitehouse. Below: Robyn Fisher and Le Samurai show stellar form winning the Galway Downs CIC*-W.**



me a lot, probably more than any other horse ever will.”

Fisher and Lady Calido, her ten-year-old Holsteiner mare, won the CIC**/Gold Cup Intermediate division on their dressage score, which at the time put them into the lead on the Gold Cup leaderboard. They later dropped to second.

Longtime organizer Robert Kellerhouse and his team put on yet another successful event, which this year took place alongside the Pet Expo at the Downs which included conservation groups, demonstrations, and more than 70 trade fair vendors—all attracting thousands of equine and canine enthusiasts.

The final leg of the spring Gold Cup events shook up the leaderboard and took place at The Fork Stables in Norwood, North Carolina during their BB&T Heritage

Days. Despite some uncooperative weather, owner Jim Cogdell, with his staff and cadre of volunteers, did a marvelous job of putting on a first-rate event, the site's first CIC***-W. The BB&T Heritage Days included retriever and archery demonstrations as well as falconry and trick shooting exhibitions. Thousands of spectators made their way to The Fork to enjoy the event, including local grade school and senior citizen groups, many of whom were introduced to the sport for the first time. Kudos to Jim Cogdell and everyone involved with the event for making it a priority to promote the sport to the public!

Darren Chiacchia and Windfall II, Timothy Holekamp's 14-year-old Trakehner stallion, put in a wire-to-wire victory in the CIC***-W FEI World Cup Qualifier, which also served as the Gold Cup Advanced divi-

sion, finishing on their winning dressage score of 33.8.

Due to weather concerns, the schedule was flip flopped so that show jumping took place Saturday and the weekend ended with cross-country. When they headed out to tackle Captain Mark Phillips' imposing course, Chiacchia and Windfall II had just a 0.9-penalty lead over their 2004 Olympic bronze medal winning teammates, Kim Severson and Winsome Adante. They put barely a foot wrong and finished right on the optimum time, leaving the other competitors no option except to try to keep their placings. Their performance made up for an unfortunate tack malfunction several weeks earlier at Red Hills, when coming down a hill on cross-country one of Darren's reins snapped in half. Darren was able to hop off, "MacGyver" the rein together, and still manage to finish the event in 13th place, even with 44.8 time penalties.

"Those things happen," he said after the event. "It's part of the game. The horse still went fantastic, and that's what the game is about."

About Jim Cogdell stepping up to the plate to fill a hole in the calendar this year and offer a CIC***-W, Chiacchia said: "It was really a lot to ask. Jim embraced the concept and his entire crew put on a fantastic event." He was especially impressed by Cogdell's passion for preserving open space. "Jim has shown how well you can develop a marriage between our sport and preserving countryside. His competition really serves as a model"

Chiacchia's and Windfall's performances put them in the third spot on the Adequan USEA Gold Cup Advanced Leaderboard with 365 points, followed by Severson and Winsome Adante in fourth position with 330.

Chiacchia had nothing but praise for Windfall: "Obviously he's been very good to me. What this horse has done for me as a rider and Tim and Cheryl [Holekamp] as owners, and what he has done for the Trakehner breed, is already beyond any of our expectations or wildest dreams."

Chiacchia and Windfall will have their work cut out for them to catch up to the practically indomitable Aussie, Phillip Dutton, who with House Doctor currently sits atop the Gold Cup Advanced Leaderboard with 630 points. Their win at Southern Pines Horse Trials followed by a third place finish at The Fork, on their



Shannon Benjamin

Darren Chiacchia and Windfall splash through the water on their way to a win at The Fork CIC***-W.



Shannon Brinkman

Left to right: **Jim Cogdell, owner of The Fork farm, celebrates with Karen O'Connor, Gina Miles, Darren Chiacchia, Kim Severson, Amy Tryon, Will Faudree, Phillip Dutton, Heidi White, Kristin Bachman, and Becky Holder.**

dressage score of 39.1 bumped them into the lead.

House Doctor, an exceptional horse that won team Olympic gold and placed fifth individually at the 2002 World Equestrian Games, was missing from the eventing scene for several years. "He's been in work on and off for about a year and a half. We sort of held off competing him until pretty much this year," Dutton said. "The Gold Cup Series suits him. This is a good way to get him out and give him good competition experience."

As the reigning 2005 Gold Cup Advance champion, Dutton was philosophical about his chances in 2006. "It's always good to set some goals. It [the Gold Cup] has developed into a good series. Hopefully we can be successful."

They are followed on the Gold Cup Leaderboard by Heidi White and Northern Spy, her 13-year-old Thoroughbred gelding, in second position with 425 points accrued after a fifth place finish at Red Hills, and an eighth place finish at The Fork. Those competitions served as preparation for three weeks later when the pair placed second at the Rolex Kentucky CCI****.

It was relative newcomer, Kate Luce, a student of Chiacchia, who won the Intermediate Gold Cup division at The Fork with her ten-year-old Hanoverian gelding Tia Lusso. This was a very competitive division, with the top six scores separated by less than two penalty points. Luce and Tia Lusso earned the fourth position on the Gold Cup Intermediate Leaderboard, tied with Phillip Dutton and Happy as Larry with 205 points.

But it is Stephanie Butts and Zydeco, Gretchen Butts' 14-year-old Thoroughbred-cross gelding, who hold the top spot with

260 points after an eighth place finish at The Fork and a ninth place finish in the Red Hills CIC**. They are followed by Fisher and Lady Calido in second position with 225 points.

Fisher has a special fondness for her very talented mare, who she bought just two years ago at the age of eight. "She had just had a baby and had been a broodmare all of her life." For a horse that had spent most of her life in a field, Lady Calido took to eventing immediately. The pair did one novice event, spent about six months at training, went preliminary all of last year, and moved up to intermediate this spring. "She's special," Fisher said. "The harder it is, the better she goes. She has the best work ethic of any horse that I've sat on."

While stablemate Le Samurai is on trial to be sold to one of the country's top riders, Fisher said Lady Calido is permanently off the market. "This one will *never* be for sale. I'm already looking at embryo transfer [so she can produce foals while still competing]."

Butts, 22, took over the ride on Zydeco from mom Gretchen, who over the years has ridden the gelding at several top events, including the Rolex Kentucky CCI**** in 2003 and 2004. "She's being cool about it," Stephanie said of her mom's reaction to the new partnership.

Stephanie and "Z" made their debut this February in an intermediate division at the Rocking Horse Winter Horse Trials placing seventh, improved that to second finish at the Pine Top Horse Trials in March, and then moved on to the Red Hills CIC** where they finished ninth out of 49 starters. The points from that finish, plus their eighth place at The Fork, earned them the top spot on the Gold Cup Intermediate leaderboard.

Eventing is certainly in Butts' genes. Not only does her mother compete at the four-star level, she is also a licensed TD and eventing judge, and runs the family's farm Waredaca, in Laytonsville, Maryland with husband Robert, a licensed cross-country course designer. "I don't think there's any way I could *not* have become an eventer," said Butts, who currently trains with Karen and David O'Connor.

Butts has three-star experience with prior mount Bungee, and plans to make the move up to advanced with Zydeco this summer, which would likely put her out of the running for the Gold Cup Intermediate Champion title at the end of the season. While she's determined to make the move up, she added that she would miss having a shot at the title. "I think the Series is a great idea. More money and sponsorship in the sport is always a good thing. Even people not in the sport take notice of the Gold Cup Series."

After a two-month break the Race for the Cup picks back up in July, first in the Midwest at the Maui Jim Horse Trials July 6-9, followed by the Cosequin Stuart Horse Trials in Victor, New York July 20-23 in the Atlantic Division, and The Event at Rebecca Farm in Kalispell, Montana July 21-23 in the Pacific Division.

The USEA is pleased to welcome back many of our 2005 sponsors, including Title sponsor Adequan, Presenting sponsors Nunn Finer, Amerigo, and Nutrena, and Contributing sponsors Cover-All and UlcerGard. Two new Contributing sponsors, Premier Equestrian and Wellpride have joined us this year, along with Patron sponsor, Mountain Horse.

This December at the 2006 USEA Annual Meeting and Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, a grand prize Gold Cup trophy and Amerigo saddle will be awarded to the rider from each division with the most points at the end of the year. In addition, the Gold Cup champion at the Advanced level will receive a check from the USEA for \$6,000, and the Intermediate champion receives a check for \$4,000. Both winners will also receive an additional supply of Adequan. The second placed rider at Advanced wins a \$3,500 Bit of Britain gift certificate, and their Intermediate counterpart wins a \$2,500 gift certificate.

For more information on the Gold Cup, visit the USEA website (www.useventing.com) and click on the Gold Cup logo on the home page. 🐾