

NORTH AMERICAN RIDERS GROUP THE TOP 25 of 2010



NORTH AMERICAN RIDERS GROUP





Together, we can improve our sport.

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A NARG REPORT: THE TOP 25 OF 2010

By taking the time to numerically evaluate the best horse shows in America, the North American Riders Group (NARG) set out to achieve an essential goal—improving our sport. This inaugural effort took hundreds of volunteer hours resulting in an ordered list of North America's top 25 competitions.

Via a collective and unified voice of top riders and trainers, the goal of the NARG Top 25 aligns with our mission to make show jumping in North America rank among the greatest in the world. Certainly we, as riders and trainers, have a responsibility to reach and maintain the top level of the sport through our skill, commitment, devotion, competitive drive and the ability to develop top horses. However to achieve this status should not require riders to leave North America to find the best competition. It is mandatory that a select group of our North American horse shows be considered world class, not only for the benefit of our riders but also to draw riders from around the world to this side of the ocean to compete.

BEAUTY AND THE HORSE SHOW

The beauty of a horse show is certainly in the eyes of the beholder. However lets clearly define beauty and the beholder in the case of ranking the 25 top horse shows in North America. With over 1,300 USEF recognized shows, there is a show for every level of horse and rider as well as hundreds of ways to earn rewards from ribbons and championships to points in local, regional and national organizations. Essential to our system, there are 1,250 shows throughout the country where our top horses and riders build their foundation and gain invaluable experience. Plus they offer a large percentage of the sport the means to achieve admirable awards. There is considerable beauty in that important aspect of horse shows.

NARG evaluated a select group of over 50 horse shows, a small but essential percentage of high-level competition in our sport. Although some of these shows run an exclusive one-arena event, others may run multiple rings and have classes for every type of rider. Located at well-maintained facilities that are managed by knowledgeable staff, each of these top competitions offers high performance level riders the chance to earn significant prize money and valuable qualifying points. The 'beauty' of this type of select event was ranked numerically in eight distinct categories, including: Footing, Stabling, Jumps & Courses, Financial Aspects, Technical Aspects, Ceremony, Marketing and General.

VALUABLE EVALUATIONS

To erase any preconceived notions that these results are subjective, the evaluation form, scoring and process was not only the same for each of the 50+ shows evaluated, but was repeatedly reviewed by the NARG Board to assure a level playing field. Each evaluation included 44 individual criteria grouped into 8 categories. Not only were these scores tallied by category, each grouping was assigned a 'weight' pertinent to the importance and effect it had on the event overall. For example Footing and Stabling counted for 40% of the total score while the remaining 60% was split among the other six categories. The completed evaluation was then peer reviewed and discussed by the NARG Board of Directors. Certainly within our group there may be some subjectivity, but our collective mission is crystal clear - to develop better competitions and better riders. A full detailed evaluation was provided to each horse show manager who in many cases provided a response including corrective actions being taken. Again the goal is not to criticize nor complain, but to ultimately achieve the best in the world—horse, rider and show.

It is important to recognize the magnitude of the NARG mission from every perspective. NARG respects the tremendous undertaking of producing a world-class equestrian competition. Most horse show managers that currently are and continuously strive to be among the Top 25 have reviewed our evaluations and discussed the points made with an open mind. These top managements are working hard to offer superb competition and within this first year NARG recommended improvements are underway. By annually ranking the Top 25 Horse Shows NARG creates not only a standard for elite shows, but also a record of how they achieved this level. We expect that the level of quality as well as the numbers of top internationally ranked riders will subsequently increase as our top horse shows meet the marks of a world class event.

While NARG has no authority over horse show management, and the Top 25 is just a highly evaluated opinion, most managers took the feedback seriously and in the spirit it was intended. NARG truly believes this valuation process has begun to encourage meaningful improvements at many major horses shows. NARG would like to extend a sincere thank you to everyone who helped make this inaugural NARG Top 25 list possible.

SCORING: ONE RING FORMAT

CATEGORY	MAX. POINTS	WEIGHT	MAX. TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
FOOTING	30	4.0	120	24%
STABLING	20	4.0	80	16%
COURSES/JUMPS	10	4.0	40	8%
TECHNICAL ASPECTS	25	2.0	50	10%
FINANCIAL	30	2.0	60	12%
CEREMONY	30	2.0	60	12%
MARKETING/PRESS RELATIONS	25	1.6	40	8%
MISCELLANEOUS	25	2.0	50	10%
TOTAL POINTS			500	100%

SCORING: MULTI RING FORMAT

CATEGORY	MAX. POINTS	WEIGHT	MAX. TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
FOOTING	45	2.7	120	24%
STABLING	20	4.0	80	16%
COURSES/JUMPS	10	4.0	40	8%
TECHNICAL ASPECTS	25	2.0	50	10%
FINANCIAL	30	2.0	60	12%
CEREMONY	30	2.0	60	12%
MARKETING/PRESS RELATIONS	25	1.6	40	8%
MISCELLANEOUS	25	2.0	50	10%
TOTAL POINTS			500	100%

ANNOUNCING THE NARG TOP 25 of 2010

As we reveal the official list, there are some key points we want to emphasize.

On a positive note, the top events have Organizing Committees that are focused on putting on a sporting event, not just a horse show. It is crucial to note however that beyond the top five, the best horse shows in North America all scored below 80%. That is equivalent to a B- or lower. So while these horse shows can be proud of their relative ranking, one of the conclusions of this year-long exercise is that the quality of horse shows in North America has significant room for improvement. As George Morris, the Chef of the U.S. Equestrian Team, said, "The quality of horse shows in America has deteriorated in the past 25 years. The downward spiral has been self-perpetuating. As standards have lowered, so has the quality of riding. It has made us less competitive on a world stage." So we think the Organizing Committees for the Top 25 horse shows in North America should seek to not only take care of their bottom line by satisfying the needs of their mainstream customers, but also to take on the big yet essential responsibility to promote and develop the top of the sport. Many managers see this vision clearly. We want to help those committees in any way we can.

There is a blueprint to success. The top horse shows in North America understand this. Please note that although the goal is for higher scores and superb shows, it is an honor to make this list and our hats are off to all of those who make these shows possible. If a manager, exhibitor or trainer feels there is a competition that belongs here that is not included, please contact NARG. We want to hear from you. Share our vision. Each year this exercise will improve our outreach, knowledge and most importantly our mission. Read on for an evaluation summary on each of the Top 25 horse shows in North America.



2010 SHOW RANKINGS

EVENT	SCORE %	TOTAL SCORE	FOOTING	STABLING	COURSES	TECHNICAL	FINANCIAL	CEREMONY	MARKETING	GENERAL
SPRUCE MEADOWS	92%	459	38	18	10	25	25	30	25	22
SYRACUSE	87%	435	30	17	8	22	21	27	22	20
HAMPTON CLASSIC	81%	407	30	15	10	21	23	29	24	21
WEF	80%	399	35	16	10	19	19	25	19	22
XALAPA	79%	393	39	16	10	17	16	22	16	24
DEL MAR NTL	77%	386	34	19	9	22	16	23	15	18
PENN NATIONAL	77%	383	24	17	10	21	18	17	18	19
BALVANERA	76%	381	36	16	10	17	16	21	15	24
THE ROYAL	75%	374	16	14	8	23	22	24	24	23
DEVON	74%	370	31	15	7	21	19	24	19	20
PIN OAK	74%	369	31	17	10	22	16	27	11	15
NAJYRC	73%	363	29	15	10	16	18	19	7	15
HITS MILLION	72%	362	31	13	8	16	20	27	20	18
WASHINGTON INTL	72%	360	17	14	9	23	15	24	21	21
LAKE PLACID	71%	354	25	16	10	21	14	19	20	21
BLENHEIM	69%	347	33	13	8	20	15	19	16	20
KY SPRING	69%	343	38	14	7	20	17	16	10	17
CAPITAL CHALLENGE	66%	329	29	13	8	21	12	21	13	19
GOLD CUP	66%	330	20	15	10	22	15	14	9	17
HS BY THE BAY	65%	327	15	15	9	21	13	26	18	21
FIDELITY	65%	324	22	14	6	17	15	26	19	19
HITS DESERT	64%	321	28	13	7	15	17	23	11	19
SHOWPARK	64%	319	24	14	8	20	14	19	15	18
TRADERS POINT	62%	310	29	10	8	18	15	17	12	20
LA NATIONAL	61%	307	26	13	8	19	15	18	14	13
OLD SALEM FARM	61%	305	33	12	6	16	14	15	10	19

CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

FOOTING

Quality of footing in all arenas, ability to be used in all conditions, maintenance

STABLING

Location and proximity to main arena, quality and size of stalls, security

JUMPS & COURSES

Quality of jumps, courses, and course design

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Accuracy of scoreboards, timeliness, quality of officials, announcer, loudspeakers

FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Prize money offered, overall cost of showing

CEREMONY

Quality of sponsorship, prize giving, and VIP facilities

MARKETING

Advertising, press coverage, website, attendance

GENERAL

Venue, customer service, food, hotel accommodations

1.

SPRUCE MEADOWS





TOURNAMENT ANYONE?

NARG'S top pick for 2010, Spruce Meadows, stands in a league of its own scoring a 92%, on both the Summer Series & the Masters. Although this is truly the top horse show in North America, we hesitate to label it a show at all. As one of the senior managers at the event explained to our evaluator "They don't have golf or tennis shows. They have dog shows. They have golf and tennis tournaments! We are a sporting event, not a show." To clarify how true this is for Spruce Meadows, they impose a fine if anyone on their staff calls this event anything but a tournament and individual classes anything but a competition. They do this for a reason. The philosophy at Spruce matches NARG's vision—"Sport" comes before everything else. This philosophy is evident in everything they do and it is no wonder that in 2010, their 35th anniversary, they attracted record crowds. On the first weekend of the summer series, 37,200 fans watched the derby. An impressive 450,000 fans were in attendance during the Summer Series.

Most importantly, if you choose to compete at Spruce, and we hope you do, you will gain a life experience. Beyond the money, beyond the prizes, your riding will be challenged in a unique way. You will ride on grass fields, jump natural jumps, attend rider meetings where you will be taught the importance of tradition and every individual competition you compete in will feel important (and so will you).

PRIZE MONEY

With eight to ten competitions each week offering \$30,000 or more, and many with six figure payouts, no competition outshines Spruce in regards to prize money. Plus they offer a \$1,000,000 rider bonus if the same horse and rider combination wins all four of four designated competitions. And another \$1,000,000 purse is available for the taking in the Masters Grand Prix.

Ceremony is also second to none. The top ten finishers in each competition ride for amazing presentations and coveted ribbons. For major events, prize giving includes parades with coolers, color guards, and photographers—the fanfare that defines a sporting event. Finally, the venue is simply breathtaking. From the manicured arenas, ample schooling areas and the superb stabling, Spruce stands alone.

MINOR CONSIDERATIONS

It's hard to critique a management team that is constantly critiquing itself, but even the great Spruce Meadows has a little room for improvement. Most notably, the "All Canada" ring does not hold up to weather as well as the rest of the arenas.

Another area for meaningful improvement is scheduling. While the event runs like clockwork, the lack of flexibility in handling conflicts sometimes results in riders not being able to deliver their best performance. The event runs smoothly but sometimes compromises the "sport" which fundamentally opposes the Spruce Management's philosophy. NARG thinks a little flexibility in the scheduling would go a long way. Relatively minor suggestions for what are overwhelmingly well-run sporting events.

CLEARLY #1

Congratulations to Spruce Meadows on their #1 Ranking from everyone at NARG and a special thank you to the Southern family for leading the way to make Show Jumping in North America the best in the world!



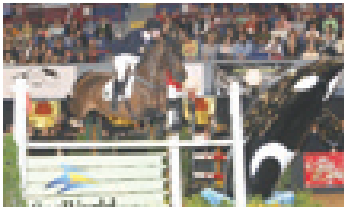
SYRACUSE RULES

Also with a solid focus on sport, The Syracuse Invitational is yet another great tournament. With a final total of 87% this indoor gem was the highest scoring event in the United States. In the case of this one arena show, the goal is all about quality not size. Organizer John Madden does a fantastic job in every aspect and concentrates relentlessly on the details. Modeling the event after the European indoor competitions, John has achieved another key goal for our country by attracting international riders. The format feels like a true sporting event from start to finish including the Championship style (World-Cup) format for the jumper divisions. Although some may not like this style, NARG supports having our riders negotiate a multi-class competition. It serves not only as a great experience for horse and rider but a solid end of the year challenge.



THAT SPECIAL FEELING

This Sporthorse Tournament feels top notch in many other ways. Examples include world-class footing, multiple commentators for major classes, high quality prizes and prize money, VIP facilities on stage and a great exhibitor party. Although show jumping is our focus, we must note how well this management runs the 'adopted' Maclay Finals. This prestigious medal final is still an important and special event amongst some high performance show jumping. Well done.



IMPROVING & EVOLVING

There was significant improvement to stabling versus prior years, albeit the FEI horses were under lights 24/7 which is a concern. Even so, the new stabling arrangement versus the previous one in the parking garage is certainly better.



The Syracuse Sport Horse Tournament is the premiere indoor event in North America. A show run by a knowledgeable horseman is always a plus. We've heard grumblings that the city is not particularly appealing, and there is not much else to do or see during the event. NARG disagrees. The city supports the event and there is little reason to venture out once you are at the horse show. And, the local community supports the event by filling the stands for the major competitions. It is hard to find a better show or a management team that tries harder and focuses on all the tough questions to improve their event each year. Congratulations to Syracuse earning their top ranking this year.

SORRY TO HEAR

We are truly sorry to hear the recent announcement regarding the cancellation of the 2011 Syracuse Tournament. A recent letter released from the Syracuse Organizing Committee explained issues regarding why it wasn't feasible for the show to continue. With the tremendous efforts made over the last eight years, NARG believes that Syracuse would continue to be a favorite for top riders. We sincerely hope to see it return.



HAIL TO THE HAMPTONS

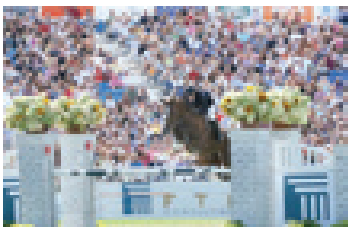
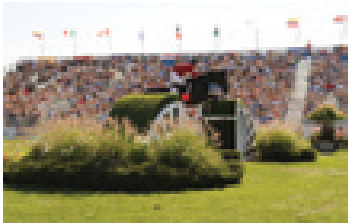
This year's score of 81% makes The Hampton Classic the third highest scoring show in North America and the highest scoring outdoor event in the United States. We congratulate the Organizing Committee. If you haven't been to The Hampton Classic you are missing a class act. Highlighted by a giant grass grand prix field appointed with natural jumps and surrounded by VIP tents, chalets and grandstand, along with a large scoreboard, the venue is fabulous. The rest of the grounds, visibility of major sponsors and a large beautifully laid out vendor area also contribute to the feeling that you are at more than a horse show, you are attending an event with an equestrian flair. Truly the culmination of the summer season in the Hamptons, the Classic attracts top competitors and a significant number of spectators, from fans to the social elite.



Last year NARG made some suggestions that we hope influenced The Hampton Classic management. Whether or not we contributed to the changes, they did make the improvements we highlighted. Namely, at great expense, they upgraded the footing in the jumper annex and the grand prix schooling area, which leads to higher quality competition. They also addressed the concern for a lack of good quality accessible food outside the VIP area. There were at least three additional quality food vendors, which enhanced the exhibitor and spectator experience.

TWO ISSUES

While The Hampton Classic was number three; there were two significant issues with this year's show, one of which was beyond management's control. The threat of a hurricane hitting eastern Long Island had management scrambling. They were ready if necessary, and likely at a financially disastrous impact, to cancel the show and evacuate. Fortunately, this was not necessary. Most barns voluntarily left the property for the night just to be safe. With feedback from NARG, the management team worked with the FEI to allow the grand prix horses to evacuate for the night as long as they were back on the grounds at least 24 hours before the grand prix. They also delayed the start of the next day to allow horses to return to the property. And most did return. They truly handled an unforeseen and potentially hazardous situation as good as could be expected. We do wonder if the horse show used higher quality stabling tents, could the voluntary evacuation have been avoided? We believe they asked themselves the same question. Given how the horse show handled this crisis, the scores for the event were not reduced in any way due to the unlikely disruption.



The other major concern, which must be addressed, was the footing in the grand prix field during the first two days of the event. We know of at least one grand prix horse who was injured, one who fell and numerous horses had major slips. Although the weather was perfect, the sod would just peel off. It seemed that the sod was only wet for the first few inches and then too dry underneath. Perhaps a result of the summer drought? We're not sure. The field was much better after the rain and maintenance crews continued to work on it through the week. We urge management to diagnose what happened and implement safeguards to prevent this odd sod situation from occurring again. To be clear, we support keeping the gorgeous grass field—it is one of the few in use at a major show in the United States. However we do maintain that this can and must be fixed for The Hampton Classic to remain in the top five in future years.

FIRST CLASS

In 2009 the historic Hampton Classic was the second show to be designated a USEF Heritage Competition. Clearly a first class horse show, this doesn't appear to be a team that rests on its laurels. Most horse shows in North America can learn from this event. Year after year they continually focus on bringing in and taking excellent care of their sponsors, as well as attracting an impressive number of spectators. We commend the organizing committee on their improvements. We have no doubt that this horse show will continue be a top event from every perspective. Once again, well done.

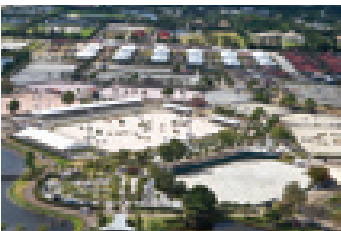
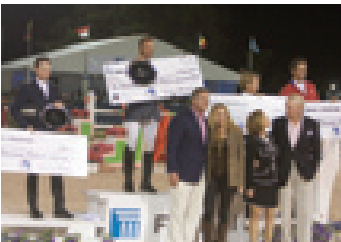


#1 IN THE SUN

NARG believes that the Equestrian Sport Productions (ESP) Organizing Committee is definitely making significant investments and by all means the Wellington Equestrian Festival (WEF) has earned its place as the number four tournament series in North America. However multiple issues still exist at this very large facility and long running circuit. The 12-week schedule is grueling, and we believe everyone from competitor to staff would benefit by ESP building in one or two planned weeks off to rest the horses. Upon our evaluation during the winter of 2010, the footing was fantastic in the main rings, but still poor in secondary rings where many meaningful classes took place. The south side of this sprawling property, previously called “Littlewood”, was far inferior to the north side. And, construction during the circuit is a real safety concern.



That said, WEF management is fully aware of these issues and, in fact, subsequent to reviewing our evaluation, has already eliminated the “Littlewood” showground to the south and moved it to the main campus and put high quality footing in every arena. They have also added additional high quality food concessions and are addressing safety issues. These changes will significantly improve the experience for competitor, trainer and spectator alike. We know of no other organizing committee that continues to invest in their infrastructure at the pace and level of WEF and by all means we applaud the ongoing enhancements. And finally, WEF certainly takes care of their VIP exhibitors, sponsors, trainers and owners as the International Club is one of the best VIP offerings in North America.



THE SUN AND THE SURE

By far the superior place to compete in the winter, it is abundantly clear that WEF is one of the premiere show jumping events in the world. And, despite the challenges highlighted during the last year’s circuit, the ESP management team does set an example for other organizing committees in the United States. One distinct reason for this is their genuine focus on attracting and entertaining spectators, which is essential for the expansion of the sport. From top competition to entertainers and much more, the list of “big events” is impressive as well as lengthy, including: Saturday Night Lights, the Battle of the Sexes, a true Nations Cup, which in 2010 attracted 11 countries, two World Cup Qualifiers, two Young Rider Grand Prix events (as of 2010 these were the only YR events at this level in this country aside from North American Junior/Young Rider Championships), Team competitions, The Pro-Am Charity, The USHJA Hunter Derby, The WCHR/USHJA Hunter Spectacular, The Speed Derby over the natural jumps at the Palm Beach Stadium, the only CSI five-star in the United States, and a combination Puissance—R&B Concert. It is apparent that WEF management makes a concerted effort to create a great environment for spectators. We believe the audience will continue to grow and return to this venue for more equestrian sport.

IN CHARGE BUT GETTING TOO LARGE?

The final score for WEF was an 80%, just a percentage point below The Hampton Classic and the best winter circuit. One might say that the scale, complexity and extensiveness of twelve weeks would put WEF in a different league than a ten-day boutique horse show. Ultimately each of top 25 events, no matter how long running, has a level of responsibility to uphold the criteria of the NARG evaluation throughout.

Equestrian Sport Productions seems, in spirit, to have NARG’s theory in mind. A long-term focus on building the sport will ultimately result in increased sponsorship, increased spectator attendance and, eventually, lower costs for exhibitors. We sincerely hope ESP management continues to head in that direction and remembers that while they justify their substantial investment they also share NARG’s goal to put the sport above all else. And not, as we fear, to keep getting larger for large’s sake. NARG recommends WEF as the ultimate place to compete in the winter and believes the improvements will continue.

5.



XALAPA ¡VIVA MEXICO!



We've raved about the northern end of North America as well as some east coast and southeast locations, now for more top notch sporting events we travel south of the border to Xalapa and Balvanera, Mexico. You will read about Balvanera later, however both of these fabulous shows made the top 10 in this year's NARG Top 25. Two of Mexico's top show jumpers, Olympians Antonio Chedraui and Enrique Gonzales, also wear show manager hats down in Mexico with their respective companies Coapexpan and EQUSPORT.

The Coapexpan Club Hipico facility hosts an elite quality show with a European feel and a top grass field comparable to Spruce Meadows. The competition footing is excellent, however the schooling areas don't quite measure up and could use some work. The 12x12 stalls are in close proximity to the arenas, the shows run smoothly, the courses are beautiful and the awards ceremonies are nicely done.

MORE POR FAVOR

NARG would like to see increased sponsorship, which in turn could increase the amount of prize money offered. We realize this can be a challenging proposition in today's tight climate but it is crucial for the sport.

We also highly recommend a strong bilingual web presence for Coapexpan. Again in today's online world it is fundamental that potential competitors, spectators and sponsors can easily find an informative, attractive and well-managed web site. Also a key aspect for promoting sponsors, the web is a powerful marketing tool.

Xalapa is the capital city of the Mexican state of Veracruz. Located away from the troubled border of Mexico, the town is safe although some say it is not a destination location. Similar to our comment on Syracuse, NARG feels that a beautiful show speaks for itself, especially one that draws a crowd. Nice hotels and resorts are a 20-minute drive away and Mexico City is also not far.

The management is very welcoming and willing to assist with arrangements for those who would like to experience the thrill of competing south of the border. Once again when experienced riders take on the responsibility of running a top sporting event, the results are often superior as illustrated by top-ranked Xalapa.



EQUESTRIAN EXCELLENCE

Our first west coast show in the top 25 this year is the Del Mar National, a boutique horse show managed by Dale Harvey. You can't beat Del Mar as an ideal location and this particular show is a local favorite, which means sold out crowds for the highlight events. Their tagline speaks for itself—'Equestrian Excellence Since 1946'.

One of the richest single purses on the west coast, the \$100,000 Grand Prix of Del Mar attracts some of the best grand prix riders in the west. Another \$50,000 is divided between the \$25,000 Surfside Grand Prix and the \$25,000 Junior/Amateur Owner Grand Prix, a 1.45m NAJYRC qualifier. Management makes a considerable effort with awards and ceremony, including literally rolling out the red carpet. Steeped in tradition, a number of perpetual trophies and special awards are presented at the Del Mar National, adding to the special quality of this one-of-a-kind show.



MAKING OLD NEW

The brand new indoor arena is gorgeous, however the footing is an old-fashioned sand and dirt mix. The footing in the outside arenas doesn't hold up under adverse weather conditions. The schooling areas on the racetrack have a waxed footing that changes consistency as temperatures change, which is not ideal but likely the only option. Although the permanent stalls with wide aisles between barns are nice, the only wash area is in those large aisles. A nice improvement would be the installation of proper wash racks.



WHERE ARE THE STARS?

With the crowds it draws and the southern California location, the NARG evaluators feel that a few extra efforts could make this one of the most spectacular events in North America. With all the years of success, where are the big sponsors to support this grand and traditional show? From cars to stars, the promotion potential seems to be untapped. Add a big sponsor and a big movie star, broadcast the evening events, increase promotion and prize money and voila! The results would be a fantastic sporting event. Sounds easy, however we know the challenges in bringing that all together. We also know it can be done, as Spruce, WEF and another boutique event The Hampton Classic clearly illustrate. They all pull high profile stars, social elite, press and spectators which is a plus for all involved from the competitor to the sponsor to the overall feeling for anyone in attendance.



Located at the Del Mar Fairgrounds, directly adjacent to the famous Del Mar Racetrack, the popular Hunter/Jumper week follows a Western week and a Dressage week, so there's a trifecta of opportunity for the three show managers from the different disciplines to come together and create a fabulous package for sponsors. Another tie in idea is potential cross promotion—Showpark, which is 3 miles away, offers nice shows before and after Del Mar making it possible to link a string of shows together as a circuit.

Del Mar is a great area for family fun with attractions such as SeaWorld, great restaurants, wonderful resorts and the ocean nearby. The weather is almost always ideal. It is truly a great place to spend a week or two or three if, when you put it all together, it is enticing enough to draw you there. Increased prize money, improved footing, notable sponsors and stars combined with the beautiful setting, great ceremony and fanfare already provided would not only raise the evaluation scores but ultimately improve our sport.



STILL A TREASURE

Nicknamed ‘Harrisburg’, the Pennsylvania National Horse Show (PNHS) used to be the first of one of three prestigious Indoor shows—Harrisburg, Washington, New York—that only invited horses and riders could participate in. Washington made the list, somewhat lower than PNHS. And New York, which is actually The National Horse Show, was once a crown jewel of shows held in the heart of Manhattan, has tried to find the right home and is apparently still looking. It is true that times have changed, issues with qualifying have somewhat muddied the honor of participating and of course the economy has effected not only qualifying but actually planning to make the trip to any of the capital cities, including Harrisburg.

However Harrisburg has held on. The show is not only proud of its history; the PNHS Board of Directors is addressing our concerns and looking into the future. The Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex and Expo Center is a great facility for putting on a major indoor horse show. The stadium is large enough to run quality classes and the stabling is large, dry and has wide aisles. The secondary arena provides an excellent location for preparing horses to be their best in competition.



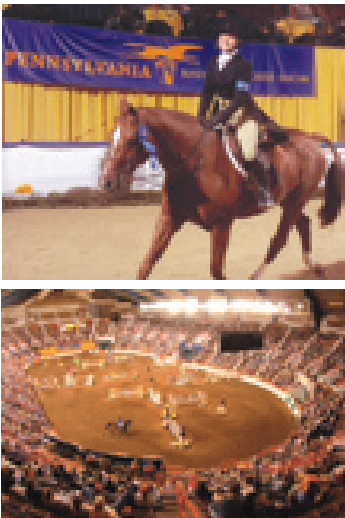
EXCELLENT EFFORTS

Previous to this year, the major problems with Harrisburg revolved around the bad quality of footing, low maintenance of schooling areas, poor quality of food and less than optimal prize giving ceremonies. While Harrisburg clearly still has some serious challenges, NARG genuinely appreciates the significant improvements the PNHS Board of Directors put into place for this year’s event. All of these issues were addressed. The new footing in the main arena and main arena schooling area were top notch and made a huge difference in the quality of competition. This was a significant investment by the Board of Directors. The ring was well maintained and the schooling areas were more frequently groomed. The food quality was certainly better and the prize giving ceremonies were vastly improved.

Suffice to say that the Pennsylvania National Horse Show was a well-run event this year. Everyone noticed the improvements, which should put Harrisburg back on track to recapture some of its previous opulence. The history of the event is evident in the banners that hang from the ceilings and grand prix and hunter victory boards that line the ring. We are delighted to see the commitment to keep those memories alive and believe riders and trainers will continue to support this historically rich horse show. We also believe the improvements made will result in more and more top exhibitors returning to this event, albeit the high performance division was already top notch. It was also good to see strong crowds on grand prix night.

However there is room for improvement. The footing in the secondary arena is poor. We acknowledge that the expense of putting euro footing in a non-competition arena is too great at this point, but that still doesn’t excuse the less than optimal footing. The big concern this year was that the footing was thick with rocks. Removal of rocks would solve most of the problem. Some type of raking is necessary prior to the event. Maintenance helped a lot but the footing did get hard rather quickly. On a minor scheduling note, some Junior Jumper classes went late at night. The rest of the schedule ran smoothly including a dramatic improvement in the length of the Medal Final.

The biggest problem we see for the PNHS is one we see at many horse shows—the lack of a major sponsor. We are certain that the horse show shares this concern and NARG would like to offer help in any way we can. A major financial sponsor would keep this event from hanging on by a thread financially. With the tradition and local spectator support, NARG thinks local big business, like Hershey or Rite-Aid, should consider supporting this traditional and local yet high-end sporting event. This would be a great way to gain support in their local community and to reach the competitors that PNHS draws from all over the country, especially if there is a solid web presence that can expand outreach considerably. Again, we thank the PNHS Board of Directors and management for working with us. Well done on this year’s horse show and congratulations on a score that placed you in the top ten of this year’s NARG Top 25.



8.



EXQUISITE EQUSPORT

As stated in the prize list, 'EQUSPORT is a promoter of equestrian events... located within the facilities of the Balvanera Polo and Country Club in Queretaro, Mexico. The objective is to contribute to the development of equestrian sport... through the organization of high quality competitions with outstanding facilities, excellent course designers and experienced staff.' NARG wholeheartedly agrees with these statements.

The Balvanera grounds are superior in many ways, including gorgeous grass fields and sand rings, permanent stabling, an exquisite VIP area, shopping, day care and villas for rent on site. The atmosphere is comparable to the Hamptons and the VIP treatment is at the level of Wellington. And that's not all. The city of Queretaro has a medieval feel similar to Juarez with plenty of shops and restaurants. The surrounding area offers a nice resort and a golf course. The predominantly American town of San Miguel is 30 minutes away.

GETTING THERE

There are a series of shows in the spring that you could string together as a circuit. The horses can fly into Mexico City, which is two hours away. You can fly direct to Queretaro from Houston and catch the Pin Oak Grand Prix on your way back home.

From October 14-30, 2011 Guadalajara will host the 16th Pan American Games. It will be the largest multi-sport event held in Mexico outside the capital. The EQUSPORT management is planning a few unique fall competitions around that event.

UP THE ANTE

One of the only drawbacks is the events need to offer more prize money to compete internationally. Possibly an increase in sponsorship could lead to bigger purses. Although the experience of Balvanera is well worth the trip, in an era of increased expenses high-level competitors need monetary enticement to head south of the border.

NARG congratulates and appreciates the gallant efforts of EQUSPORT. We hope to see more shows of this caliber in North America.



TRADITIONALLY ROYAL

The Royal Winter Fair is a great year-end final for many different breeds and disciplines in Canada. It is also one of the few horse shows in North America that has been able to maintain its involvement with a major fair event while at the same time keeping its quality and importance as a competition. Since it is connected with the fair, the spectator experience is fantastic, as is evident by the number of people it draws over the week. This also makes for a unique atmosphere and ambiance, which somehow combines agriculture and farm animals with the black tie attire of the sponsors and spectators in the main arena. None of us could claim to do it better. The tradition behind it should remain unchanged.

The one-ring schedule offers Canada's National Talent Squad Finals, Canadian Championships as well as an International Jumper Division with multiple classes, including a World Cup Qualifier. There appears to be plenty of corporate sponsors and prize money totals almost \$370,000 in Canadian dollars during the one-week schedule.

Toronto is simply a fabulous city. It is fantastic that the show is at a downtown location and yet it is still relatively easy to logistically manage the horses. We also applaud the efforts the organization makes to bring riders from Europe. This helps to make the competition special for North America. NARG would like to see more top 25 shows consider this as a draw for sponsors, competitors and spectators.

TOP NOTCH WITH ONE FIXABLE EXCEPTION

Our biggest criticism would be the outdated footing. At best it's sub-par and does not live up to the quality of the rest of the Royal experience. The material appears difficult to maintain and the result is inconsistency. It can also be slippery in the turns, which effects the competition. With improved footing, we predict that The Royal could draw even better competitors from North America and Europe.

NARG thinks it is fair to say that the footing score is the sole reason the Royal is not among the top five on our list of shows. And we hope the Organizing Committee not only considers the footing issue but continues their endeavor to have one of the best shows in North America. So many aspects of The Royal are what we need to keep the sport popular and prosperous.



HISTORICAL DISTINCTION

May 2011 will mark the 115th year of the Devon Horse Show. Truly a tradition, Devon maintains a prestige that upholds their motto 'Where Champions Meet'. From the historic blue grandstands and the ringside scoreboard to the perpetual trophies, carriage, hackney and breeding classes combined with a country fair, Devon is certainly a special event. What sets Devon apart from the others is that it scores incredibly well in a number of areas other horse shows will have a difficult time matching. Conversely, it scores low in a number of areas that are easily fixed and, if fixed, could catapult this distinctive east coast tradition near the top of the NARG Top 25.



In 2010 Devon was the fourth American horse show to be honored with the designation of a USEF Heritage Competition. The show also stands out from others by the support from the local community including great press coverage and sell-out crowds, the diversity in competition and the country fair. The cheering crowds enjoy great competition and are guaranteed a good show. This is what NARG would like to see at all of the Top 25 show jumping events around the country. It is an essential ingredient to the success of the sport.

RENOVATION REMAINS

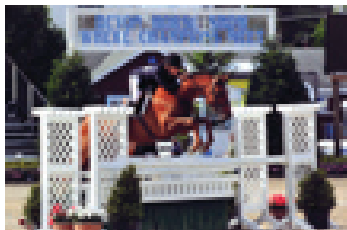
Devon went through significant renovation this year, the most important of which was the installation of world-class footing in the Dixon Oval. NARG sincerely hopes that the management understands the tremendous benefit of this investment as the ring withstood various weather conditions and still allowed improved competition from our equine athletes. Several top hunter riders were grateful for the improvements and commented that competition has never been better than this year.

On the downside, the jumps were a bit drab relative to past years, there was no video service available for exhibitors and we also urge management to consider relocating jump storage to allow another small schooling area separate from the warm-up jumps (similar to years past). However the most important change is still footing. Beyond the redone Dixon Oval, footing in the Gold Ring and the schooling area is still poor. We highly recommend that Devon management upgrade the footing in these areas as well. Completion of the footing renovation would not just improve their score, but more importantly this change would have as significant impact for competitors and their horses. We believe the lack of entries in the big classes, most notably only 21 in the grand prix, is partially a reflection of poor footing in the past. The show used to draw the country's best show jumpers, and could again. If the footing renovation was completed, NARG would encourage members to add Devon back to their show schedule. Great crowds, solid prize money, reasonable entry fees and great footing would be all the reason they need to justify the trip.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION?

A conflict with the first week of Spruce Meadows is also an issue for drawing top show jumpers to Devon, as this is a travel week for those competing in Calgary. One potential solution is to collaborate with the other heritage shows (ie; Hampton Classic, Gold Cup and Harrisburg) and offer a bonus for a horse and rider that wins at Devon as well as two of the other three premium grand prix events. This might encourage some top riders to consider a slight alteration to their Spruce schedule.

On a final note, Devon has other attributes that draw top riders and trainers from around the country in many divisions and if management makes the aforementioned improvements the event will continue to be the place where many champions meet.





SIMPLY THE FINEST

The Pin Oak Charity Horse Show in Texas was the first to receive the USEF Heritage Competition Designation. The effort to make this two-week show an “event” is astonishing, many shows could learn from the Pin Oak example. Nearly every evening they host a sponsor and/or exhibitor party. Some of the special social occasions include a Children’s (ages 6-15) Party, a Grooms Party and a “Grand Prix Cheerleaders” Party on both nights of the Grand Prix, which includes a complimentary meal and a t-shirt.

Like The Hampton Classic, Pin Oak invests a lot of time bringing in and retaining great sponsors. They take great care of their supporters from promotion to parties. They also take care of the competitors. Each morning fruit and more awaits you at the in-gates, which is a fantastic way to start the day. The stabling at the facility is unmatched. During the first week management offers “extra” divisions such as Welsh Pony, Hackney and Saddle Seat Equitation. Prize money increases significantly during week two in both the Hunter and Jumper divisions. The website is professionally laid out and the prize list nicely presented.

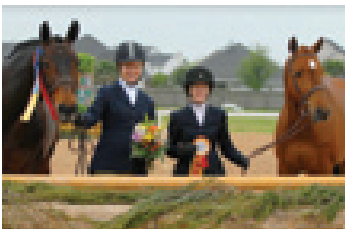


COULD IMPROVE

As with many shows, the most important improvement is an investment in footing. At this facility the footing is unacceptable and dangerous in the second annex ring and the schooling areas. Unfortunately there is no room to enlarge the schooling area, which would also be a great improvement. As good as the web site is, there are no daily updates or orders of go for the professional to use during the show. Seating for the grand prix is available in the VIP tent or across the ring for the general public. It was unfortunate to see empty bleachers next to sponsors tent not open to the general public.

COME TO TEXAS Y’ALL

This is absolutely the best horse show in Texas, and an excellent event by any standard. It must be acknowledged that the location is a bit out of the way for riders from either coast and the dates of these shows conflict with both Florida winter circuits. That can make it challenging to draw the top names in the sport. Since there are three weeks of dates (a third week is run by another management group) which constitutes a small circuit, increased grand prix money and potentially a bonus for the winner of all three grand prix events might entice more riders from Gulfport and Thermal to come down to Houston for a little Texas tradition.



12.



THE YOUNG AND THE FUTURE

Originally an Eventing challenge between the US and Canada, the North American Junior and Young Rider Championships (NAJYRC) has evolved over the last thirty plus years into a unique and challenging competition focused on the FEI disciplines of Show Jumping, Dressage, Eventing and Reining. The youth-oriented event now invites qualified riders from the US, Canada, Bermuda, Puerto Rico, Mexico and the Caribbean Islands to participate in high-level sport in a beautiful setting.

The NAJYRC gets mixed reviews from us this year. It is good sport on good footing in a beautiful venue. As a result, competition is excellent with outstanding and deserving riders representing a team as well as competing as individuals. The shame of the NAJYRC was that despite the good sport, it did NOT feel like a championship. The special feeling that we marvel over with several of the top shows was not achieved for this extraordinary event.

NOTHING SPECIAL

The loss of that special honor for this event was due to another horse show at the same venue at the same time. As a result the horse park was overcrowded. Riders in the championships were riding in both events, which prevented them from “fully” participating. Trainers and exhibitors alike were unable to watch and cheer for the competitors as they were scrambling from ring to ring. A second reason for the loss of that special feeling was the poor scheduling. The Young Rider team competition finished near midnight to essentially empty stands. No one watched the award ceremonies. Not an appropriate finish for the best young riders from all over North America completing three rounds of challenging competition.

FULL SUPPORT

NARG fully supports the North American Junior and Young Rider Championships. Truly a key event to developing future talent in our sport, we strongly recommend the USEF make the NAJYRC its own championship event or at least a part of an overall championship event. All involved from the USEF staff to the young riders who work hard to qualify deserve special recognition that comes from participating in this extraordinary event. Over the years many young riders have set their sights on the honor of earning a medal at NAJYRC, whether as an individual or a team. Several of today’s top riders excelled at the NAJYRC. We don’t settle for mediocrity in our riders, our Federation shouldn’t settle with the young rider championships.

13.

A BIG STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The inaugural Pfizer Million was certainly an event. The Grand Prix ring looked beautiful and the jumps were fantastic. HITS also hired one of the best course designer's in this country. Steve Stephens built an Olympic quality course with excellent presentation. The VIP tents, chalets and bleachers were all full of enthusiastic spectators who enjoyed both an exciting class and a great concert. From a horseman's point of view the fundamentals were all in place. The footing in both the schooling area and main ring was top notch. Even the rain before the class did not diminish the quality of the well-prepared footing.

The class list seemed diminished by management giving a few "byes" to inexperienced riders. It's hard to believe two or three top ranked or well-seasoned riders would not have come given the opportunity, this would have made for better sport. It was nice to have the class stand-alone with no other classes that day, what a treat for the riders. If the full week of showing was not included in this evaluation the class as a stand-alone event would rank much higher, though any show ranked on just one class would be able to raise their score.



STABLING STORY

The permanent stabling is great. For the Pfizer Million, they divided the horses between two different barns—the FEI barn behind the ring and Barn 6 a short distance away. There was a bit of a change in that some FEI rules and security was put into effect for the Pfizer Million horses and not just the World Cup horses as was originally intended. The show negotiated this just fine, though there was some controversy. It was resolved in an acceptable manner.

DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE DETAILS

HITS shows tend to lack an eye for detail and Pfizer Million was no exception. We hoped to see the venue a bit more dressed up for this event, not just for the exhibitors but for all the spectators who came to see a true sporting event. Also, an event of this magnitude, with a sponsor this generous and a crowd this large warrants a really glamorous ceremony. With the concert following the class, HITS had the benefit of a captive audience. People weren't scurrying to leave. Simply the perfect opportunity to have a European Style presentation with a real crowd and HITS missed it. NARG hopes this didn't take away from their chance to make a great first impression. For all the spectators, potential clients and future sponsors, we fear that HITS dropped the ball. However, our biggest disappointment is that HITS chose to host this wonderful event with the best prize money in the nation on the same weekend as the only other significantly large and established show jumping purse in North America, the Spruce Meadows Masters. Seems evident that if the two biggest money purses in North America were not competing for the top equestrian talent it would be in the best interest of all parties involved.

COMMENDABLE

All in all HITS should be commended for creating the Pfizer Million. It is encouraging to see such a remarkable event in our country, especially in the current climate of economic slow down. With EquestrianLife.com offering a free webcast, viewers from around the world could watch the class live. As we know from the large online audience that watched the WEG, this expansion can only be good for our sport. With a few more details in place this would be a spectacular top tier event. Without the Spruce conflict we believe more top names would compete, creating an excellent sporting event. This could become a top stop on the show jumping tour and raise the bar of competition not only at HITS qualifying events but in North America.



ONE RING WONDER

The Washington International Horse Show (WIHS) is another established indoor tradition that once was an annual goal for a host of riders and trainers. Since most entrants had to be ranked in the top nationally the show would host some of the best horses in the nation in the nation’s capital. This event also attracted teams of international riders who came to compete in the Nation’s Cup. Although still a prestigious event, the WIHS of today has a unique set of challenges.

Held at The Verizon Center, a major sporting venue in downtown Washington, DC, WIHS not only makes for an exciting rider experience but it also attracts spectators, which is key for our sport and our athletes. NARG commends the WIHS management for persevering under the conditions the city imposes. The WIHS team does a great job negotiating within their parameters and the hospitality is evident in everything they do. For example the exhibitor lounge and concessions available for competitors is excellent and not taken for granted.

The level of competition for the most part was quite good in the Open Jumper divisions and the relatively large crowds were treated to good sport. The Equitation event ran smoothly. Award presentations are top notch, from the red carpet to nice ribbons and trophies. The exception to this praise was the Puissance, which for the second year in a row was a disappointment. We think the course designer and jury should set this event up to succeed, including not eliminating horses for jumping the warm-up and making the triple bar before the wall easier to negotiate.



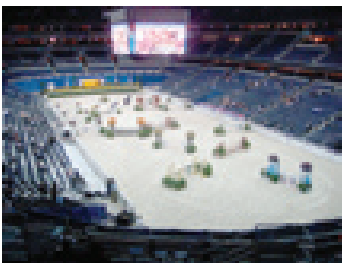
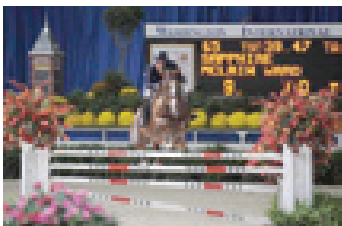
CITY CHALLENGES

Many of the negative remarks for the event are directly related to the shortcomings of city horse shows. We applaud the President of the Washington International Horse Show who truly cares about the event and its constituents. She wants this to be a world-class horse show. The indoor city tours in Europe are very successful and maybe our nation has something to learn from the examples set in the EU.

With this in mind we offer the following feedback. The limited stabling out on a city street is poor, but it seems management does the best they can with the situation. The lack of schooling and longing areas means most of the trainers and their staff are up all night riding, which makes for an exhausting experience from a horsemen’s point of view. The footing is traditional sand and horses just don’t jump as well on that surface as they do on the European footing that is becoming the top standard in show jumping at all major US competitions. And finally, the venue is likely so expensive to rent, that the horse show is forced to charge huge fees to exhibitors. With new USEF rules to limit entry fees as a percentage of prize money, the horse show countered with a \$500 administration fee. That still generated less revenue than entries in prior years but the high cost is taking its toll. Entries were down in the hunter divisions, at least from a qualifying point of view.

KEEP THE TRADITION AND MAKE IT BETTER

After discussing the details with show management, NARG feels that it is important for this event to remain at this venue despite the complications it creates. The Verizon Center offers the sporting splendor that is missing from other indoor events. It would be unfortunate to lose the wonderful and unique feel created by this prestigious downtown location. Based on the European model for indoors, the solution for Washington may be to create a smaller event. Show jumpers and equitation finals only? NARG would be happy to help make this an “event” and discuss alternatives to improve circumstances at this location. We want to encourage changes that attract a group of international riders, which is needed to truly make WIHS a place “where the world comes to ride”.





SUMMER SIZZLE

Lake Placid, site of the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympic Games, is home to two traditional and long standing events, the Lake Placid and I Love New York Horse Shows. There is a positive appeal to the grass field, the town and the incredible surroundings of this two-week circuit. Show management does a wonderful job promoting the events and draws a local and tourist crowd. From a doggie costume contest to Pony Club Day, they offer fun activities for exhibitors and spectators. The TV coverage adds pizzazz and the fact that the show is locally televised is nice for the exhibitors. The VIP tent adds to the ambience of the event and there are two CSI grand prix competitions. It is for these reasons that Lake Placid ranks as the #15 show on the NARG Top 25.



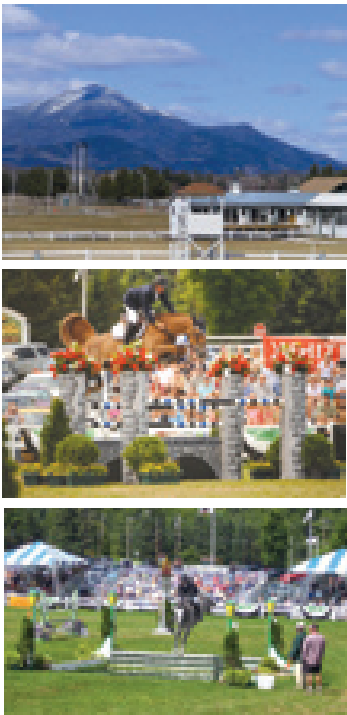
MEMORIES—GOOD & BAD

The fact is overall as competitors we love to support this show and this town. It feels good and has for those who have competed here for years. The main grass field was in great condition this year. But the footing in the secondary rings is poor and has been for many years. At times we ask ourselves why we still choose to compete here, knowing the footing is sub-par. We think the answer is great memories and no better choices. The next closest shows are HITS and Vermont, which both have poor footing and don't offer the benefits of Lake Placid. We know the management at Lake Placid really cares, so we sincerely hope they will step up and make the necessary improvements.

Another issue is that these horse shows have become more expensive yet less exclusive. The stall fees are high yet the stabling is not great. The pads in the back are still prone to flooding and there are only a few wash racks. The show schedule used to end early enough each day to allow plenty of time to enjoy the show and the fabulous community, which has sadly become a thing of the past.

WE RECOMMEND

NARG feels that the management for the Lake Placid shows is committed to putting on a great competition but has lost sight of putting sport first. It simply rests on its history and its spectacular environment. It would be easy for Lake Placid to once again be one of the very best shows in America. Put in good footing, improve the stabling and try to plan a lighter show schedule, at least on some days. The improvements mixed with the established appeal, great commitment of management, and a breathtaking venue would result in great sport.





SO-CAL SPLENDOR

Blenheim EquiSports has an outstanding management team that hosts a large percentage of the top shows in southern California. The main horse show facility, the Rancho Mission Viejo Riding Park in San Juan Capistrano, consists of a large grass area that is divided into four grass competition arenas including a Grand Prix field. That field hosted Olympic Selection Trials as well as an FEI CSI-A International. It is adjacent to an exquisite private facility that allows use of a very nice covered arena for medal finals and a World Cup Qualifier. Not to mention that the ocean, golf courses, shopping and restaurants on the California coastline are less than 30 minutes away. The weather on average is between 60-80 degrees with a slight ocean breeze and no humidity to speak of.



Blenheim EquiSports

The VIP area allows members to see three competition arenas and serves breakfast and lunch. With couches, television and computer stations it is a welcome reprieve from many riders, trainers and parents. The management keeps the show running on schedule with amazing consistency with most days ending early enough to give families plenty of time to enjoy the many activities southern California has to offer.

EVEN MORE GREEN

Although there seems to be plenty of local sponsors, securing a couple of top, big-name sponsors for a few of the biggest shows would add to the prestige and increase the prize money. Another draw might be greater Grand Prix, Open division and Jr/AO prize money at a few of the shows, potentially one per season. We realize the challenge of securing the sponsors and the cash to make this happen, but it would certainly put the icing on the cake of this already spectacular venue. Potentially the entertainment industry is the untapped well that could create not only the buzz but also the prize money at a few star-studded events. The Hampton Classic is a prime example of a show that draws in celebrities and creates an event with huge sponsor appeal and marketing opportunities.



A FEW ISSUES

Footing is always a top concern, especially if it gets slick or deep. Blenheim's footing situation is like most California horse shows that don't hold up in rainy conditions. Although rarely an issue, if there is a large amount of rain the riding areas flood and the competition stops. The main course designer is always well known and accomplished. Since Blenheim has a jump design company, the courses are beautifully built and attractive. The issue is with the course designer who does the secondary rings full time, week after week for all their series. Not only is this unimaginative but many feel the young horses would benefit from the qualification of a top designer. We feel that this one attribute can play a role in exhibitors choosing not to bring young horses. With one concession and one VIP area, at times it can be impossible to eat if you are in a far ring with no time to get away. Adding more concessions would be a big improvement considering the size of the venue.



CALI HERE WE COME

Why not venture to California post WEF, pre Spruce summer and post Spruce Masters? Many top athletes migrate to Spruce Meadows in June, July and September and adding Blenheim to the schedule could be a welcomed addition to the travel plans. Seems clear that if this show management stepped up a notch and drew in a couple key sponsors for a few of their top shows, pulled in celebrities and even invited some top athletes, they could easily host some of the best shows in North America on an annual basis. It would be important to match their schedule with other prestigious shows so it would be possible for exhibitors from all over North America to consider a California stop.



KENTUCKY HORSE SHOWS, LLC.



A+ VENUE

With the new world class outdoor stadium built for the World Equestrian Games and the beautiful setting for the other show rings, The Kentucky Horse Park is spectacular. A unique quality of this park compared to other facilities is the tremendous amount of space. From lunging to trail riding, grazing to galloping across the steeplechase course, there is ample room for everyone to enjoy the venue. The result is happy horses, which is a pleasure for all involved.

The Kentucky Spring Horse Show has created an important niche as an extremely high quality “CSI Two Star”. The event has found the right balance of classes to bring horses back into competition that have been resting since winter circuits ended, or for horses and riders that took the winter off. The prize money is fairly modest compared to our highest-ranking horse shows but it seems sufficient for the competition.

It is also worth noting that Kentucky Spring allocates prize money in line with how NARG believes is best for the sport. There is a clear progression of prize money in line with the level of technical difficulty of the competition, with the Grand Prix and Open Jumpers earning the highest purses. However this event requested and was granted special permission by the FEI to build courses bigger than the CSI** level even though they were only offering two star money which directly ties to world ranking points. NARG thinks this is a mistake. Kentucky Spring should embrace their CSI** rating and make it the perfect place to develop young horses and riders moving into the grand prix ranks. Another highlight of these two weeks are the fabulous hunter divisions.

NOW THE BAD NEWS

Like most events we evaluated, Kentucky Spring also has lots of room for improvement. While the series has found its niche, there is plenty of room to step up the quality. Potentially the management tightened the budget belt, which resulted in a lower quality event. Examples of this include cheap ribbons, no presentation coolers, low quality VIP facilities, inefficient ring maintenance and jump crews that seemed short-staffed.

The attendance at the highlight events was weak at best. With a venue of this quality, it seems an ideal opportunity to create excitement with spectators attending the highlight events. This means sponsors. Bring in some sponsors, generate more money, spend a reasonable amount on promotion and the result could be happy sponsors and spectators as well as happy horses.

Also, this spectacular venue needs horse paths leading from the stables to the rings. Horses spend too much time walking on slippery and potentially dangerous asphalt as they head up for competition.

WORTH THE TRIP

If you are looking for a great place to bring talented hunters and young jumpers to experience some solid CSI** events, then the Kentucky Spring Horse Shows are certainly worth attending. However, it will be difficult for the event to move too far up the top 25 list unless dramatic changes are made in terms of spectator attendance and financial rewards. Since we need great two star events in this country possibly the place for this series is right where it is. With a little investment by management to address some of the quality and safety issues, this horse show will consistently be a top performer on the NARG top 25.



HAIL TO THE HUNTERS

Capital Challenge is the best Hunter show in America. Winning here is more prestigious than any other show. Show management pays meticulous attention to the details of horse show pomp and circumstance with great prize giving ceremonies. Championships really mean something at this one-of-a-kind event.

Since the show is open to all entries plus has tremendous highlights for hunters and professionals, the best riders and horses come to compete. Beyond the regular divisions, this show creates excitement with unique classes including the World Champion Hunter Rider (WCHR) Emerging Professional Challenge, the WCHR Handy Hunter Challenge, WCHR Pro Challenge and the esteemed WCHR Professional Finals. The Capital Challenge has created an ideal event for these WCHR fall finales.



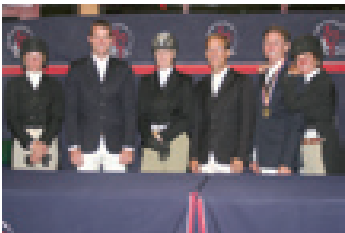
EXCELLENT FOR EQ

The BigEQ.com Equitation weekend includes the ARIAT National Adult Medal Finals and the THIS National Children's Medal Finals as well as divisions that help riders and trainers prep for indoor medal finals. With plenty of space to ride and lunge, this event offers the ability to showcase pre-green hunters as well. The Future Hunter North American Championship is another example of a special event for these young horses.



SOME SET BACKS

Though the footing is not the new Euro footing it is fine for the hunters. However it would not be top footing for a World Cup class with higher jumps and tighter turns. The very heavy rain at the beginning of the show was unfortunate and really affected the first few days. The outdoor rings do not hold up well in the rain and they had to cancel a day. However the management handled it as well as they could and were vigilant about not letting the river flood the stabling tents.



The tent stabling could use a bit of an upgrade but the stalls are close to the rings and easy to access with a truck. The permanent stabling is very nice if you can get it. It would be a benefit if the Sponsor area was more spectator-friendly. However, this show is very workmanlike in that regard, not looking to be glamorous. The exhibitor lounge with free food and drinks is greatly appreciated and thankfully open all day.

FALL FINALE

The management makes a huge effort to support the WCHR initiatives and creates a splendid atmosphere for the kick off of the fall indoor events. Most riders and trainers who show hunters feel this is the most important show of the year. The loss of the World Cup has not really hurt the prestige, as the event truly showcases hunters and equitation. In doing so the Capital Challenge creates a Top 25 event for key players in those disciplines.

19.



The **AMERICAN GOLD CUP**

BRING BACK THE GOLD

The first American Gold Cup was held during the Chagrin Valley Horse Show over forty years ago. Back in the day it was one of the greatest show jumping events in North America. It has changed locations over the years, from Chagrin Falls to Tampa to Devon and then back to Chagrin Falls. Although a number of shows have had to weather the economic storm, this event was actually cancelled in 2009. So despite tremendous efforts to make this a high quality event, the 2010 American Gold Cup was poorly attended from an exhibitor perspective. Some of the nation's top riders did compete, but overall numbers were low. Likely the lack of support was due, in large part, to the cancellation of the event last year. Not confident that the event would run in 2010, trainers made other plans.

Although it was a far cry from the days when the Gold Cup attracted the best of the best and would fill 10,000 seats in JFK Stadium in Philadelphia or sell-out the Devon Horse Show grounds, the show was quite pleasant. Throughout the weekend there were musical appearances, a Horseless Horse Show to benefit Just World International and demonstrations before the \$75,000 American Gold Cup FEI World Cup Qualifier.

While NARG doesn't presume to have all the answers, we believe this once great event needs a major shake-up to return to its original greatness. To us the answer is to move the event back to Philadelphia (The Devon Show Grounds). We believe the Philadelphia spectators would welcome the event back with open arms. With a goal of recreating this historically great sporting event, NARG would help in any way possible.



HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

This relatively new show series comes highly recommended. Founded in 2004, Horse Shows By the Bay offers several weeks of competition in a beautiful setting. The owner of Flintfields Horse Park built the facility with equestrians in mind and is fully committed to creating a great sporting event. The event organizer, Alex Rheinheimer, could not try harder to make this a quality show you do not want to miss. Traverse City is a wonderful family friendly resort town with excellent amenities. Everyone in town, local and tourist, welcomes the shows and they attend in great numbers on the weekend.



We realize that this is still a young event, but it would be great if they secured more sponsor dollars and increased the money offered in the highlight events. With a facility and management of this caliber, the increased prize money would attract the big names. The organizers make a tremendous effort to promote the event and the result is a terrific spectator turn out. Horse Shows By The Bay would be an ideal opportunity to showcase the top of the sport.

FOOTING FIASCO

Brand new footing was installed one week before the shows began this year and unfortunately it was a huge disaster this year. Aware of the problems, management did everything they possibly could to fix it. Alex assured us that the entire facility is getting new footing next year and it will be excellent. We do believe this issue will be straightened out for the 2011 series.

BRIGHT AND CLEAN

Although there is no permanent stabling the prep work for the 'wedding' tents is perfect. Wide aisles with great drainage and excellent pads, the stalls are always bright white and clean. All shows should provide nice clean stalls like the ones at this event. The area around the facility is established sod and the wash racks are permanent.

The collective hard work of all involved with this show series is commendable. Truly a terrific mid-tier choice that could easily become top tier with increased prize money in the big events.





A SOCIAL EQUESTRIAN SETTING

From the President and Chairman of the Board to the rest of the devoted staff, this boutique horse show in Hampton Falls, New Hampshire is run by a great organization. Together with a great group of volunteers, the charity aspect is well woven into the fabric of a unique social equestrian event. From a contest to win a course walk with a top grand prix rider to a traditional Ladies Hat Contest to a hill and VIP area full of people, Sunday at the Fidelity Investments Jumper Classic is a grand affair.

The Exhibitor tent is well done and very much appreciated. The VIP tent is a little far for the riders and could be dressed up a little to make it truly exceptional, however they host a well-attended gourmet luncheon on Sunday.

Their efforts to make this a must-see event are evident as they attract a great crowd, which is commendable. This spectator accomplishment seems overlooked by many other shows. Although the addition of stadium seating is preferred the hillside seating works well enough.

IMPROVEMENTS

This show has truly grown into a wonderful event. NARG feels at this point the board and management need to consider their future direction. This boutique show could be a premiere event with a few minor changes including reworking the schedule, upgrading the sand footing, improving the jumps, adding stadium seating and dressing up the VIP tent.

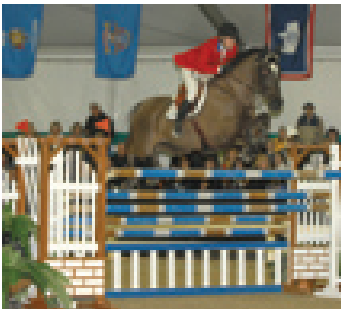
As we hope to shape show jumping in North America, shows like the Fidelity Investments Jumper Classic are well on the way. With only slight improvements and an eye toward a better future for our sport, the team behind this event possesses all the skills and dedication that we want to reward, promote and duly note. Great job!



WINTER IN THE DESERT SUN

Horse Shows in the Sun (HITS) manages many circuits year-round at several locations throughout the United States, including California, Arizona, Virginia and upstate New York. Although this large management company also runs the Pfizer Million, which ranked #13, the HITS Desert Circuit is the only other of their show series that ranked in the NARG Top 25.

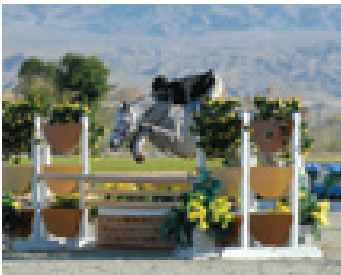
The outdoor grand prix arena and intimate indoor arena are both great, with good course designers and prize money. On grand prix day, the outdoor VIP area with a catered lunch usually draws the 'in' crowd—riders, trainers, owners, parents and friends involved in the sport—and with the local outreach the grandstands and hillside are scattered with spectators, though usually not packed. The Indoor arena only seats 1,000 but between the grandstand and the VIP, the place is full on the evenings of the World Cup Qualifiers. The main hunter ring is nice and they have good course designers and judges throughout the circuit. A good effort was made to highlight the sponsors especially the last week with Lamborghini who sponsored the final big money grand prix of the circuit.



THE AMENITIES

The stabling packages are affordable and the availability of permanent stabling is a plus. The jumper nominating fees are also acceptable, however the extra fees can add up and feel punitive. The staff makes an effort to be helpful. The show management is approachable and accommodating.

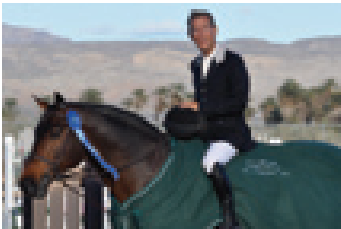
Although the location of the facility is in a rather stark area, there are good restaurants, nice accommodations and plenty of conveniences within a thirty-minute drive. The weather is consistently nice and warm, if not hot, but there is typically at least one heavy rain during the circuit.



ON THE DOWNSIDE

The footing in the schooling area for the main grand prix ring cannot handle rain. With the exception of this and the Indoor schooling rings which have good enough footing, the other schooling areas are unacceptable for a six-week show circuit this large.

This circuit changed locations several years ago and had some serious issues the first season, including footing, that they have been diligently addressing each year. The advantages are also the disadvantages, as there is plenty of acreage so the stabling is fairly far from the arenas. The show office is quite a distance from the VIP area and main grand prix arena. The facility has improved and has potential. Yet so much still needs to be done to make this venue feel important. It lacks beauty and that 'buzz' you feel from the excitement of great competition. We notice more and more top horses and riders leaving the desert for Wellington each year. As a NARG Top 25 event, the HITS Desert Circuit offers solid prize money, great course designers and excellent variety for all divisions. The HITS Team continue to address facility issues and makes improvements each year. These efforts will not only retain exhibitors, but with sponsors like Lamborghini the potential for great sport is in the air.





DEL MAR DELIGHT

As we described in the write-up for #6 ranked Del Mar National, this area of southern California is ideal in many ways. Whether for a spring or summer getaway, a combination show circuit and family vacation is easily achieved in this setting. Run by the Blenheim EquiSports show management, the Showpark series includes nice Grand Prix and Hunter Derby events as well as a World Cup Qualifier in the fall.

The grand prix field and a secondary jumper field are on grass. Replaced a couple of years ago, the footing in the main grass field is quite nice and includes a bank and hill that adds variety for jumpers and hunter derbies. The course designer for the main jumper arenas is usually excellent. Over the course of the summer months, the grand prix schedule at both the San Juan Capistrano and Del Mar locations includes a fun Kids Day with bounce houses and games.

Similarly to the other location, which is 45 minutes away, each day of the show runs with amazing timeliness. Start times are posted online and at the arenas for each class and they keep to the schedule. This is very helpful for trainers—they not only can let clients and their families know when they show, but there is often plenty of time to enjoy the town and all it has to offer.



THE PROS AND CONS

The actual show facility is compact with the main show barns flanking the warm-up arenas and vendor area, the warm up is directly next to the show arenas and the grand prix field is also close by. This adds intimacy and is ultimately a great show atmosphere; but it can feel tight at times. It would be nice to add a small concession area between the hunter rings and second grass field.

A state-run facility creates some issues that the management likely cannot address. The site is well kept but not top notch and the footing needs to be appropriate for various disciplines and activities making it sometimes less than perfect for the purpose of show jumping. Although maintained well by management, the footing in the competition and the schooling rings is only average. This year they added footing to the sand ring and unfortunately the material had nails in it. Once they discovered this situation they worked tirelessly to remove what had been added and install new sand. A tough situation, but it was resolved with great thought and problem solving in one day.

A couple notes mentioned in the previous Blenheim EquiSports write-up hold true here. The in-house course designer does the secondary rings full time, week after week for all their series. Rotating course designers and bringing in some different talent for these rings would be a big improvement. California shows are typically not designed for heavy rain, although rarely an issue, if it happens they delay or cancel the day.

CONSIDER SOCAL

The surrounding area is wonderful with a wide variety of hotels and restaurants. There are a number of activities for families including golf, SeaWorld, Legoland and of course the ocean. A nice way to spend a few weeks in a wonderful part of the United States.

24.



TRADER'S POINT

Charity Horse Show

TRADERS TRADITION

Celebrating 33 years, Traders Point is another one of our traditional country-type horse shows. It is a beautiful event with a wonderful grass field. As we've said, with fields becoming a thing of the past it is nice to still have good ones available for competition. This year, the Hunter Derby was held in the field with natural jumps including a bank.

The management works hard to make the show special and attract locals with numerous social events, a silent auction, dog show, kids day, a country fair and VIP dinners. It is also commendable to see that proceeds benefit Riley Children's Foundation. The larger amounts of prize money are spread among two Grand Prix classes and a Hunter Derby. Although not a big money event, it is a beautiful place to show.

NEEDS FIXING

Although the field is a big attraction, the other rings are average. The footing in the schooling area needs to be addressed. The stabling area is clean but limited, has narrow aisles, lacks enough electricity to run fans on hot days and is also far from the show rings.

Parking is a problem—part of it is in a field and another part on a hill. It was tricky getting in and out without 4-wheel drive on a few rainy days.

SUFFICE TO SAY

Although the prize money is lower than our high ranking events, Traders Point is still a beautiful Indiana tradition on a nice grass field with a country feel. The little town nearby is cute with plenty of restaurants. NARG congratulates Traders Point as another traditional show in the Top 25 List.



MORE LEG UP

The Langer Equestrian Group (LEG) is another show management company that handles some of the most important events for the west coast, including the West Coast USEF Talent Search Finals, two World Cup qualifiers, several grand prix events and popular circuits in northern California and Colorado. NARG evaluated the Los Angeles National, their end of the year show.

The organizers do draw a great crowd for the evening World Cup qualifier. With the new FEI recommendations, they have also made fabulous ceremonial efforts from marching bands to Friesians, making the event more special, especially for spectators.

With an experienced staff that works like a well-oiled machine, the horse shows run smoothly, with times posted online. They offer trainers a fun incentive annually with trips to Maui for those who earn the most points on each circuit. At each show management usually offers a free casual meal—a pancake breakfast, pizza party etc.

NARG recognizes the importance of those efforts, as we have said these shows are necessary building blocks for our sport. But we are analyzing the best 25 sporting events in North America and although this management group does a lot for the industry the venue falls short of being a top notch facility.



FACELIFT

The Los Angeles Equestrian Center (LAEC) is a large piece of property conveniently located on the border of Griffith Park in Burbank, CA. With everything from permanent stabling and trainers to a riding school to a rental stable to a tack shop as well as a full service banquet and catering facility, LAEC also hosts equine events for several disciplines run by a variety of specialized horse show managements. However the venue needs a major facelift in order to host an important event.

The stabling options are convenient but the entire place is dusty and lacks charm. The footing is good enough in the main arena but can get hard and cuppy. The other arenas have decent dirt and sand footing; the schooling area footing is only fair. The food options are weak at best, even when they have specialty carts. Although management sometimes dresses up the berm between the two hunter rings, there is not a VIP area to speak of. It would be nice to have an exhibitor lounge in one of the many small meeting rooms located near the covered arena, a place for owners, riders and occasionally even trainers to relax.

SO...

All in all the LA National is a nice horse show but not a world class event. After producing horse shows in this location for many years, the management does a good job. If the venue could step up there is a possibility for a top notch sporting event, as certainly the area would support it.



HILLSIDE SPECTACULAR

Old Salem Farm is also a high-end equestrian facility on 120 acres in North Salem, New York. The many amenities include numerous indoor and outdoor arenas, a grand prix field, access to trails, a renovated barn and a lounge for boarders. The facility hosts 25 horse shows each year and has also hosted events as prestigious as the Olympic Team Selection Trials. Celebrating its 28th year, Old Salem hosts two prestigious horse shows in May. From boutiques to social events, the events feature several Grand Prix classes, a Speed Derby and a Hunter Derby plus Leading Hunter Awards.

Recently renovated, the footing is greatly improved. The competitions arenas and schooling areas are rideable in any condition, rain or shine. Management also opened up the indoor rings for riding. The grass field is a significant plus, as we've noted with several other top shows. The stabling is convenient. The VIP tent is well located and well done.

COULD DO MORE

So with all these pluses there is still plenty of room to step up these shows. The jumps are old and the jump cups are not up to date. The show days are long. We recommend a scheduling overhaul with not only more class variety but also more efficiency.

We suggest management add a Young Horse division and more prize money in the Medium level professional divisions (1.20m, 1.30m and 1.40m) as well as in the highlight event.

The attendance at the Grand Prix events was poor. Apparently the tradition of this event is not enough to draw a crowd, so show management should potentially increase their marketing efforts. A true sporting event is more than good money and good riders, an excellent audience is essential. We do acknowledge this management team is driving Old Salem Horse Show in the right direction. We applaud their efforts. Keep going. You're on the right track.

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