



Sonoma County Events

Dressage in the Wine Country

Written by Joan Rasmussen, Treasurer | Photos: Marcie Lewis



Ladies' sidesaddle with Erika Jansson

A celebration of the Sport Horse took place on September 7 as the Sonoma Chapter of the California Dressage Society presented Dressage in the Wine Country. A heat wave did not deter the crowds from attending this year's show at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds. The gates opened at 1pm to an equestrian shopper's paradise, with vendors from several states offering saddles, jewelry, art, riding attire, and even equestrian underwear. In addition to shopping, several clinics were offered, covering topics ranging from the practical (saddle fit, horse-shoeing) to the whimsical (Can your horse paint with wine?).

Attendees were treated to Western Dressage demonstrations, presented by Campana Ranch Training Stables with Sher Bell Boatman. Western Dressage melds the principles of Classical Dressage and Western horsemanship. The result is a solid foundation for the Western horse and horseman in disciplines such as Cutting and Reining, as well as working cattle on the open range.

The Equi-Ed Wounded American Veterans Equestrian (WAVE) Project gave a driving demonstration with its Haflinger pony, Mike. Equi-Ed is a local therapeutic horsemanship center whose mission is to use the therapeutic power of the horse to enrich the lives of individuals with disabilities. Carriage driving provides an alternative to riding, allowing many to enjoy horses who would otherwise be excluded due to physical or mental challenges.

The beer and wine tasting opened at 4pm to an enthusiastic crowd. The combination of the shaded site and refreshing beverages were a hit on this hot day! Anything chilled was particularly popular. Over twenty wineries and breweries offered up tastings of their finest, including the equestrian-themed Red Mare Wines and 14 Hands Winery.

The heat of the day gave way to a rare balmy Sonoma County evening, and at 7pm, the show began with the much-anticipated

demonstration of jousting by La Compagnia del Cavallo (The Company of the Horse). Riders in full armor demonstrated jousting techniques as they competed for the hand of fair Justine. Justine, dressed in Renaissance garb, was mounted sidesaddle on her own trusty steed. Announcer Riyad Koya explained the technicalities of the sport to the crowd. In days of old, jousting was considered a training exercise and a spectator sport. While the potential for injury looks great, the most commonly incurred injury is a broken hand. Eleven-foot long poplar lances are used to strike a target, typically a small shield ("enranche") strapped to the jousting rider's left shoulder. Extra points are earned if the lance breaks on impact. From the number of splinters flying through the air, it seemed like a lot of extra points were earned during the exhibition! At the end Justine, with the assistance of the cheering crowd, selected the winner by bestowing upon him a single red rose.

Erika Jansson next gave a stunning exhibition of Ladies' sidesaddle while riding Rimer, a dashing Friesian gelding owned by Tracy Underwood of Santa Rosa Equestrian Center. Resplendent in wine-colored sidesaddle attire, Erika urged on the cheering crowd as she demonstrated a variety of riding maneuvers including cantering and passage, all while perched sidesaddle wearing a flowing dress. Riding aside, which was developed in European countries in the Middle Ages, allowed women to ride while wearing fine clothing in modest style. Erika's demonstration showed how much grace, athleticism and, yes, balance can be achieved while riding sidesaddle.

A musical interlude followed as Cantiamo Sonoma, a seventeen-member vocal ensemble, rose to the equestrian theme by performing a very elegant version of Camptown Races. This was followed by the National Anthem, and the Presentation of the Flag



Combined Driving with Frank and Marlies Leutz



by the Painted Ladies Rodeo Performers of Sacramento. The precision drill team, mounted on Paint horses (hence the name of the group, I hope), put on an exhilarating and fast-paced performance while carrying American flags. One horse apparently had his fill of noisy grandstands, evening lighting, and waving flags and, to use

some wine country parlance, popped his cork and did some impromptu and unrehearsed rodeo-style airs above the ground! Showing considerable grit, the rider remained in the saddle and the drill was completed successfully. The speed, splashy Paints, and the red-white-and blue bling worn by riders and their mounts alike, made this group a crowd-pleaser.

From Templeton, Ca, German native Frank Luetz and his wife Marlies next demonstrated the sport of Combined Driving with a four-in-hand of German riding ponies. This event, which became an official equestrian sport in the 1970's, takes place over three days, with the speed and complexity increasing each day! Adding to the excitement was the inclusion of "Dexter," a four year old grey, who had only been in carriage for four months and this was his first public appearance. His older teammates helped guide him along as they navigated the course—although Dexter had a few "moments," making the outcome of the demonstration seem uncertain at times! The agility and deft navigating skills left the crowd cheering as the team and coach negotiated a course of cones and barrels, making clean turns at high speed in tight spaces. Mr. Luetz's informative and entertaining dialogue during the performance added to the audience's enjoyment and knowledge. All the ponies in the team endeared themselves to the crowd, with Dexter earning a special place in many hearts for his bravery during his first performance.

Following the excitement of the Carriage Driving was the stately and disciplined Grand Quadrille, consisting of four stallions performing Classical Dressage movements. Quadrille is defined as team riding, such as the Spanish Riding School and the Cadre Noir. While the Painted Ladies thrilled the crowd with speed and splash, the Grand Quadrille impressed with precision and grace. Led by Allison Mathy of Lyric Dressage, the stunning Lusitano and Andalusian horses and their riders were smartly turned out for their lovely performance.

Modern Dressage followed Classical with the next rider, Jaclyn Pepper. Jaclyn is a member of the USDF Region 7 team that recently won gold at the 2013 North American Junior/Young Rider Championships in Kentucky. Mounted on Taboo, her thirteen year old KWPN horse (Dutch Warmblood), she performed a FEI Young Rider Freestyle demonstration. The crowd cheered as Taboo displayed his athleticism, performing difficult moves such as lead changes every two strides and a pirouette.

Wrapping things up was the "Despicable Me" segment. Chelsey Sibley and her Warmblood mount brought innocent charm to their Grand Prix Freestyle performance. With the horse sporting a pink and white unicorn horn, pink streamers in its tail, and sparkles on every part of its anatomy right down to its hooves, and Chelsey adorned in pigtails and with a Teddy bear in her pocket, they were



Justine selects the jousting winner

able to pull off advanced maneuvers including lead changes at every stride.

And that ended the show except for the Grand Finale, where all the evening's participants were invited back into the ring to parade one more time, often interacting with the crowd, bringing the 2013 Dressage in the Wine Country to a spectacular close.

Congratulations to the hardworking committee heads for making the 2013 Dressage in the Wine Country another rousing success! Check out their website at <http://www.dressageinthewinecountry.org>.

Joan Rasmussen grew up in Sonoma County and currently lives in Sebastopol. She got her first pony, Tiny, when she was ten, and now enjoys trail riding with her Quarter Horse buddy, Cowboy. Joan supports her horse hobby by providing bookkeeping services (In Balance Bookkeeping Service). She occasionally blogs about her horse experiences at cowdex.blogspot.com. To reach Joan, email her at joanras795@gmail.com.



The Painted Ladies Rodeo Performers