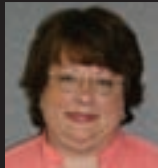




RIDING POINT



By Barb Kastens, Editor

A Classic Show

The Midwest is having a real winter for the first time in years, making it a pleasure for me to board a Boeing 757 bound for the AETA Trade Fair in Orlando, Fla. It wasn't exactly your typical business flight. Parents dressed in shorts and sandals and children anticipating a Mickey sighting made up about 95 percent of the passengers. A 70-degree temperature hike greeted us upon landing.

The show offered a good variety of English manufacturers, with a splattering of Western. (Read a review of this and other winter markets in *Industry In Focus* beginning on page 8 of this issue.) I was fortunate to be offered free tickets to the 2008 Winter Equestrian Festival by Bill Landesman of La Selleria Italia, which I gratefully took advantage of. The company is a sponsor of the event in Wellington, Fla.

The Palm Beach International Equestrian Center, a world-class events venue that is owned and operated by Equestrian Sports Productions, LLC, plays host to the Festival. It runs 12 weeks, from Jan. 16 through Apr. 6 and offers a variety of hunter, jumper and dressage competitions. Weeks that feature jumper events culminate in a Sunday Grand Prix, which has the top placers competing for thousands of dollars in prize money. Visit the web site at www.equestriansports.com to learn more.

The large central arena where the Grand Prix events take place is surrounded by smaller arenas, along with vendors of refreshments and high-end, trendy apparel and gifts. It struck me as odd that no retailers with trailers full of tack or English riding apparel were on site, making it tough for riders needing to replace clothing or equipment at a moment's notice. The Tackeria, a well-known local retailer of these products that is not much more than a stone's throw from the show grounds, is their closest option.

Riders from around the globe come to compete in the events. On the day I attended, the Grand Prix had 64 riders competing for \$50,000 in prize money. Only three horses successfully cleared the track. One was Olympic medalist Beezie Madden, who took home \$20,000.

Back at home where there is still winter, the picture of the participants and their horses enjoying this equestrian sport in the warm Florida sun plays over in my mind's eye. The many breeds of horses were groomed meticulously by their riders, who wore the clothing easily and took pleasure in being a part of this exclusive group of equine athletes. Though they compete, the common denominator of the horse creates a tie that binds them together. And so it is for the industry as a whole. ☐

Barb Kastens

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