

DRIVING Five Questions for Chester Weber

Combined Driving competitor Chester Weber became the first American to win an individual medal with a Four-in-Hand driving at a World Championship competition in 2008, adding yet another accomplishment to his record and making his name synonymous with Combined Driving.

Chester won the Individual Silver Medal at the Four-In-Hand World Driving Championship in Beesd, The Netherlands, an event that was attended by more than 90,000 people.

Weber's success has certainly catapulted the sport of Combined Driving into the spotlight. Combined driving is literally a triathlon for horses, where, in Chester's case, his team of four horses competes in three phases: dressage, marathon and cones. The fast and furious action of the cross country marathon thrills spectators, which certainly proved true in The Netherlands when the enormous crowd turned out to watch the show.

At only 33 years of age, Chester has also won the United States National Four-in-Hand Championship the last six years in a row. *Sidelines* caught up with Weber at his farm in Ocala, Florida, to talk about his driving career and the accomplishment of winning the silver medal, a fact that he says validates all of his devotion and hard work over the past 20 years.

Sidelines: You had an incredible year in 2008, what was your most satisfying victory?

CW: Without a doubt, winning the individual medal at the world championships was the most satisfying victory because it is something that Americans have been trying to achieve since the '70s.

Sidelines: Who has influenced you and your driving career throughout the years?

CW: Jim Westbrook, a true horseman, was my first real driving teacher and we drove Clydesdales together. Jimmy Fairclough introduced me to the sport of combined driving with a single then a pair from [the time I was] 13 to 20. Michael Freund has been a father of our sport, and has the patience of a saint. Together, he and I have achieved all of our success. Other influences include Eva Pfaff, a German sports psychologist who I met and worked with this year. She works as a conduit in conversations with Michael in not only how to drive but how to have the right mind set for me to win. And also Koos deRonde who helped me understand what it takes to put together a competitive marathon. Of course it wouldn't be right if I didn't mention my family,



Chester Weber winning the 50th Anniversary of the German Fahrderby (Driving Derby) held in Riesenbeck, Germany. (2008) (Photo by Courtesy of My Elisabeth Weber)

who have put up with countless disappointments and remained supportive. And my wife — it goes without saying that she is the best.

Sidelines: Are you active in any other equestrian pursuits, or non-equestrian hobbies, along with your driving?

CW: My wife and I run a jumper dealing business called AvailableJumpers.com where we buy and sell European horses in the States. I have a partnership where we pin-hook yearling Thoroughbreds and sell them at the two-year-old in training sales. I am also actively involved in the management of my family's Thoroughbred breeding and racing operation. My hobbies include snow skiing, water skiing, cooking and tennis.

Sidelines: What are your goals for 2009 and beyond?

CW: I would like to win double gold in Kentucky at the World Equestrian Games. It will be difficult, but it is in the cards. I would also like to help my family win more classic races and develop my business

Sidelines: And a favorite two-part "Actor's Studio" question: What turns you on and what turns you off?

CW: Turn-ons: Open minded people who dare to set goals and follow their passions, whatever that is. Driving a team that is working like a well-oiled machine. It's a sport where the best man wins.

Turn-offs: Dishonesty and a general lack of respect for others and horse professionals who are not horsemen or horsewomen. People who make excuses about their results and never had a plan to win because I believe "winners train; losers complain."