

Brendl Leads USEF National Single Horse Championship; Weber Jumps to Lead in Pursuit of Eighth USEF National Four-in-Hand Driving Title

By Joanie Morris

Ocala, FL – The Live Oak International sponsored by US Trust kicked off with the FEI dressage on Thursday, and two USEF National Driving Championships bookended the six FEI divisions at the premiere event. Held at Charlotte Weber's Live Oak Plantation, it is one of the featured events on the US calendar and showcased 40 of the best drivers in the United States.

The USEF National Single Horse Championship got the morning started and Leslie Brendl bested 11 competitors in the division. She drove Fritz Grupe's 9-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding, Uminco – who Grupe himself drove to USEF National Championship accolades in 2009.

Brendl (Newcastle, CA) drove a lovely test with Uminco despite having only driven the horse for five days before the competition started.

"I came out here and drove him for three days," said Brendl. "Then I started driving him again on Tuesday."

Uminco has a reputation for being excitable in the arena, but Brendl was impressed with how well he kept his composure.

"It was scary because I heard how he can be," said Brendl. "He can be hot but as soon as we entered he changed, he was all business – he was great."

The short term relationship of Brendl and 'Travis' certainly wasn't evident during their test: Travis has plenty of movement, and their work was very accurate. They even survived through a small equipment malfunction, when during one of the canter transitions, the curb chain came off the bridle.

"I was just happy with the whole test," said Brendl. "He was so obedient and he was just there for me."

There score of 49.92 left them with the lead going into Saturday's marathon as Uminco works to defend his national championship title.

“He’s a great horse,” said Brendl. “He’s sweet and he loves people.”

Brendl’s strategy for the marathon will be sensible, considering their recent introduction.

“In the first obstacle I will be pretty conservative, to feel how well he extends and comes back. I will keep building as I go and push him a little harder,” said Brendl.

The pair will know each other quite a bit better by Sunday.

Scott Monroe came in to the competition thinking, if he could be second after the dressage behind Brendl, he would be in pretty good order.

He achieved that goal.

After spending quite a bit of time with Brendl to improve the phase he always deemed his weakest – the work, and the cross country trips from his Connecticut base to California, paid off.

Driving his own Bethesda After Dark to second place in his first trip to Live Oak International, Monroe was relieved that the time and effort was rewarded. One mistake, a dropped rein in the one-handed circle, was the only blemish on a performance of which Monroe was very proud.

“I’ve been working with Leslie,” said Monroe. “She had him out there and I flew back and forth. She showed him where his errors are and showed me a better horse. All I wanted to do was be a close second, it’s not his forte. He’s made his reputation on other things.”

On a score of 52.92, less than three points off Brendl’s winning score, the 17-year-old Black Morgan gelding excels in the second two phases, and is a veteran of two previous World Championships team. Monroe travelled south for the first time with the hope of making his third team.

“He’s been at this level for 10 years,” said Monroe. “It’s a credit to his personality and his breed. He’s a real fighter.”

The competition is fierce for spots on the US squad for FEI World Single Horse Driving Championships which will be held July 28-Aug 1, 2010 in Patroni, Italy and Monroe knew if he sat out the winter he might be left behind.

“Usually I do two or three events up north,” said Monroe. “But with the competition being tougher I had no option if I wanted to make the team.”

Weber Leads USEF National Four-in-Hand Driving Championship: Aiming for Eighth Title

There has been a lot focus on the Four-in-Hands in 2010, as they will represent driving at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games this fall in Lexington, KY. Many of those vying for a spot on the US Team were going head-to-head at Live Oak both to catch the eye of the selectors but also for National Championship bragging rights.

Chester Weber, who has won seven consecutive National titles, made it very clear that winning the eighth was his mission when he scored 36.86.

“They’re good old horses,” said Weber. “That’s the same group that I drove at Reisenbeck when I broke the World Record. They’re just good. I don’t think the two leaders have been beaten since May of 2006.”

Those leaders: Grumus and Rolex, know how to win.

Weber has the confidence that if he doesn’t make a mistake in the dressage ring his horses are fantastically reliable.

“Three of them are 13 and one is nine, so they are experienced good old horses,” said Weber of his team, Boy and Para backed up the leaders at the wheel.” Weber was the individual Silver medalist at the 2008 World Championships and is a force both in the US and in Europe.

His dressage test just looked effortless and his four horses appeared to match every stride. His circles and shoulder-in were accurate and obedient, setting a very high standard.

Weber is looking forward to a marathon course that walks as tough as anything the American group has seen so far in 2010.

“The marathon looks more technical than the last two shows, which is good for experienced drivers like Jimmy and I,” said Weber. “It’s been getting built up (over the season) which is quite good.”

Jimmy Fairclough was going to ensure that Weber didn’t get too far ahead. Teammates from the 2008 World Championships, they go head-to-head regularly. Fairclough’s score of 55.42 rewarded an effort that was quite good, especially considering he has only driven the leaders for six or seven days.

“They were great today,” said Fairclough. “There is a little learning curve. They are experienced, they’re not tricky. We are just getting used to each other.”

Fairclough drove Jane Clark’s team which includes Keady Cadwell’s pair in the lead – they have been leased for the season.

“They went really well,” said Fairclough. “There were a few mistakes, I need to work the loose ends out.”

Fairclough isn’t sure what his plan is for the marathon, because the course is more technical, he will take Friday, as a practice day, to make up his mind. Uniek and Splash are the two new leaders and Fairclough’s beloved two mares, Caletta and Celina 6 were the wheelers.

“We have the day off tomorrow to do send some testing,” said Fairclough. “I’ve had one day at home with them in the hazards. When it’s a little more technical it’s nice to have one in the front you know.”

Other results included:

FEI Single Pony

- | | | |
|----|-----------------|-------|
| 1. | Rochelle Temple | 45.95 |
| 2. | Phyllis Grupe | 50.94 |

FEI Pair Pony

- | | | |
|----|-------------------|-------|
| 1. | Jennifer Matheson | 47.36 |
| 2. | Katie Whaley | 66.69 |

FEI Pony Teams

- | | | |
|----|-------------|-------|
| 1. | Lisa Stroud | 55.04 |
|----|-------------|-------|

FEI Pair Horse

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-------|
| 1. | Misdee Wrigley Miller | 47.62 |
|----|-----------------------|-------|

ENDS

For more information, complete results please visit: http://www.usef.org/_IFrames/breedsDisciplines/discipline/competitions/liveoak.aspx.

For photos, please visit: http://www.clubequestrian.com/coverage/live_oak_2010.aspx.