



November 13, 2008

Holzer Dominates Dressage at The Royal in the Inaugural FEI World Cup Qualifier

Toronto, ON – It was ladies night tonight for the inaugural FEI World Cup Qualifier in dressage at The Royal Horse Show, part of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto. Canadian Olympian Ashley Holzer and her horse Pop Art, who finished 13th individually at this summer’s Olympics wowed the crowd with an incredibly technical Freestyle to music, which they made look easy.

Yesterday’s Grand Prix results determined the order of appearance for tonight, with Holzer competing last. Although the pair had a somewhat uncomfortable, tense Grand Prix the day before, tonight “Poppy” was back in business and demonstrated his incredible athleticism with a finesse justly rewarded by the judges. Each Freestyle is custom choreographed to music to suit each horse, often matching the tempo and beat to the movements being performed at that moment.

Pop Art’s obvious forte is his trot work, especially the piaffe and passage, two difficult movements requiring the horse to trot on the spot (piaffe) or move forward in almost slow motion, similar to the slow walk of a military procession (passage). A highlight of the test came right at the end, where the pair flew across the ring in an extended canter, before transitioning immediately into piaffe, and then into passage including demi-pirouettes to the right and left. By that point they had done three piaffes, a section of passage nearly a minute long, and back-to-back pirouettes. Holzer acknowledged how lucky she was to have a horse with the capability and desire to put his best out there.

“Yesterday I had a lot of difficulty with him, which is really not like him,” said Holzer following her win tonight. “It turned out that he had a buildup of the footing in his shoes, which was preventing him from really using himself. Tonight we picked out his feet before entering the ring and thankfully he was back to normal. Although my husband did say to me ‘Whisper in his ear that after tonight, he gets the rest of the year off!’ so...” she laughed. “It’s such a great way to end the season, and to have a partner that wants to work with me – that is so happy doing what he is doing – it’s such a joy. At the end of the day I’m lucky to have a horse like him; they don’t come around all that often.”

Previously dressage at The Royal was the season finale of the Canadian League of competition, determining which Canadian riders earned the right to represent their

country at the World Cup Finals. Over the past year, the governing body for equestrian sport, the FEI, amalgamated Mexico, the United States and Canada into a single North American League, and announced only two spots to the Finals are available to the entire League. This puts the pressure on the Canadians, who not only have fewer competitions to choose from than their American counterparts, but traditionally have been just behind the top Americans in the points department. Having a World Cup Qualifier in Toronto now gives them another opportunity to earn those valuable points, and hopefully a ticket to the upcoming Finals to be held in Las Vegas, in April of 2009. President of the dressage Ground Jury this week and prominent judge Anne Gribbons agrees with those who would like to see a truly international Qualifier, including competitors from Mexico and the United States, which may have happened this year had there not been a conflicting competition in San Diego last weekend making it nearly impossible to ship US horses to Toronto comfortably. Nonetheless, she was tremendously impressed with the performance of Holzer and Pop Art, rewarding them with scores of eights and nines on their piaffe sequences.

“Ashley’s piaffes could be tens with just a little more lift and articulation,” said Gribbons. “But the horse sat well and was right on the spot, he really didn’t move at all, and the jury saw that and rewarded him accordingly.”

Second place went to Holzer’s Olympic teammate Jacqueline Brooks, and her horse Gran Gesto, whom Gribbons felt was perhaps a little tired following a long, strenuous season. She also praised the efforts of up-and-comer Simone Williams and her horse Wunder Ein, who came very close to Brooks in the scores.

The all-woman cast of competitors this evening served notice to Toronto that dressage is back at The Royal, and has only up to go from here.

The Royal Horse Show is far from over, with two nights of international show jumping, carriage racing, exhibitions and the family favourite “SuperDog Relay” yet to come. Young American superstar Hillary Dobbs won her second speed class of the week this afternoon with Marengo, and Olympic Champion Eric Lamaze, who won last night’s \$100,000 CN FEI World Cup Qualifier with his shockingly talented horse Hickstead, won this evening’s \$25,000 Accumulator with his second horse Narcotique de Muze II.

The Royal Horse Show will have awarded over \$795,000 when it wraps up Sunday, making it one of the most prestigious indoor competitions in the world. For complete schedule, results and live webcasting of the event, please visit www.royalfair.org.

FEI World Cup Qualifier in Dressage, Grand Prix Freestyle

Rider / Hometown / Horse / Score

1. Ashley Holzer / New York, NY / Pop Art / 74.700%
2. Jacqueline Brooks / Mount Albert, ON / Gran Gesto / 67.950%
3. Simone Williams / Navan, ON / Wunder Ein / 65.800%

Complete scores by judge and position attached.

Attached Photo:

Canadian Olympians Ashley Holzer and Pop Art took top honours in the inaugural FEI World Cup Qualifier in Dressage at Toronto's Royal Horse Show. Photo credit © Michelle C. Dunn

