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United States Para-Equestrian Association



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United States Para-Equestrian Dressage Team Brings Home the Gold at 2011 Melbourne CPEDI3* in Australia

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia - December 16, 2011 - When the United States Para-Equestrian Team flew Down Under for the 2011 Melbourne CPEDI3* (held at Werribee Park National Equestrian Center), they were prepared to give it their all. This competition was not just about top scores but it was an opportunity to earn team spots for the 2012 Paralympics held in London, England. With outstanding performances each day, the United States Para-Equestrian Dressage Team captured their third Team Gold within a four-month period. The impressive Gold Para-Equestrian Dressage Team consisted of Donna Ponessa for Grade Ia (New Windsor, NY), Rebecca Hart for Grade II (Unionville, PA), Erin Alberda for Grade III (Woodinville, WA), Mary Jordan for Grade IV (Wells, ME), and Chef d'equipe Missy Ranshousen. From December 9-11, 2011 teams from

Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the United States challenged themselves under F.E.I. international judges Mr. Kjell Myhre (NOR), Dr. Ulf Wilken (SWE), Ms. Jan Geary (AUS), Ms. Sue Cunningham (AUS), and Ms. Wendy Barker (AUS).



The Gold United States Para-Equestrian Team

(Pictured Left to Right: USEF Director Pam Lane, Chef d'equipe Missy Ranshousen, Rebecca Hart, Erin Alberda, Mary Jordan, and in front is Donna Ponessa)

Traveling across the world was an opportunity that would not have been possible without the coordinating efforts of the United States Para-Equestrian Association President Hope Hand, USEF Director of the Para-Equestrian and Vaulting disciplines Pam Lane and her team at USEF, and the riders and their families. When traveling abroad it is financially and logistically difficult to bring each rider's horse. Therefore, Donna Ponessa, Rebecca Hart, Erin Alberda borrowed horses from Charlotte Pedersen of Cottage Hill Dressage and Mary Jordan borrowed her horse from Elaine Castineli. Mary noted, "I literally got off the plane after a 26 hour journey to Melbourne and joined up with my teammates and our coach Missy Ranshousen. Together we traversed the Australian countryside searching for suitable horses to compete upon. They were long 12 hour days of driving and riding everything from Australian stock ponies to high-end Warmbloods to 2* event horses. I even schooled horses in front of wild wallabies! The day before we entered the venue I finally found "Northern Charmer" a wonderful mare and we clicked immediately. I am deeply grateful to her owners Elaine and Adrian Castellini for sharing their wonderful horse with me, as well as to all the amazing horse owners and people we met who assisted our team. It

truly was a group/team effort to pull it all together. The fact that it was so successful for everyone involved -American or Aussie- was the icing on the cake!"

She continued, "Charm was an amazing mare to compete and she truly gave it her all. It amazes me with just two rides under our belt prior to the start she went into the ring and got down to business, placing 2nd to the Australian Grade 4 Champion in close competition. She has a ton of heart and the freestyle was particularly fun because we really went for it despite not ever having a chance to ride her to my music. We finished perfectly on the beat and it was a real thrill. I would like to thank Hope Hand for her tireless efforts both stateside and once we were in Australia to help secure quality horse prospects for us to compete upon. Her valuable leads helped to provide us with quality horses which coach Missy Ranshousen could then evaluate for suitability between the team riders. It truly was a team effort that led to the gold."

For Donna Ponessa riding her mount Don Armani was the highlights of her riding to date. "I got goose bumps when I learned that Ralphy as he is affectionately known is the grandson of Donnerhall, one of my favorite stallions. When I saw the caliber I would be competing against, my trainer and I knew that we would need an international quality horse to post the scores we wanted. While watching Don Armani warm up with his trainer, Charlotte Pedersen of Cottage Hill Dressage, my heart skipped a beat. After my first lap around the practice arena I knew that I could really win on this horse. I was elated that his owner, Setsuko Miike, had the confidence to allow me to borrow him for the competition."

In less than a year Donna Ponessa has catapulted to the top of the Para-Equestrian Dressage world. Her dedication paid off in Mexico when she earned the top score each day for Grade Ia. However, even with her outstanding accomplishment she yearned for more. "I went to Australia with the goal of not only winning but achieving a 70% while being mentally tough enough that it did not matter which horse I rode nor what the conditions were," smiled Donna. Her determination earned her a 70.588% aboard Don Armani in the first day of Team Test competition and the top score each day of Grade Ia competition.

Also achieving superior scores in the Grade III freestyle was Erin Alberda aboard Southern Cross Tamaris who earned 71.500%. Erin is accustomed to intense international competition; In 2006, she was part of the Gold winning team at the Pacific Rim International CPEDI. This win helped clinch five team slots for the 2008 Paralympics in Hong Kong. So when she was asked to fly to Australia in six days to compete at the Melbourne CPEDI3* Erin packed her bags.

When arriving in Australia both Grade II rider Rebecca Hart and Grade III rider Erin Alberda were invited to ride Southern Cross Tamaris. Erin commented, " Tammy is a true gem, and I feel so lucky to have had the opportunity to partner with her and share her with Becca. For Tammy, having two riders with incredibly different body types was a testament

to her temperament and adaptability. I simply cannot thank her owner Adele Plumridge and trainer Charlotte Pedersen enough for their help and support!"

Rebecca Hart was also thankful for borrowing Southern Cross Tamaris. Over the three days of Team Test, Individual Test, and Freestyle Test Rebecca continued to put forth the top scores of Grade II competition. USPEA President Hope Hand stated, "Each one of our riders traveled great lengths to compete in Melbourne. Mary, Rebecca, Erin, and Donna gave seamless tests which confirmed that the United States Para-Equestrian Dressage Team is ready for London."

After a short break, the United States Para-Equestrians will be back on their home turf headed to Wellington, Florida for the Gold Coast Dressage Association CPEDI3* January 19 - 22, 2012 and the Wellington Classic Sunshine Challenge CPEDI3* January 26 - 29, 2012. For the United States Para-Equestrians this will be a chance to showcase not only their riding abilities but the quality of horses nationally that are helping each rider achieve their best scores. Donna replied, "The U.S. has some really talented riders which is evidence by the scores posted in Mexico and Australia. There are a number of really talented up-and-coming riders including several promising juniors. The influx of this talent is going to validate the United States as a team to be reckoned with."

As the CPEDI3* in Wellington, Florida approaches Para-Equestrian riders will be looking for owners of top level dressage horses to donate horses for the use of Para-Equestrian athletes. "Our Para-Equestrian riders that will represent the U.S. in London have the classical dressage training that make them one of the most competitive Para-Dressage teams in the F.E.I.," noted Hope Hand. "However, we are always looking for generous owners who have a horse that they wish to move to the F.E.I. level or a horse that they are not using at this time. For an owner this is an opportunity to earn international medals at F.E.I. competitions with exquisite dressage riders."

As the 2012 London Paralympics approaches the United States Para-Equestrian riders are continuing to dedicate themselves and their horses to achieving excellent results nationally. With support of sponsors, donations of horses, financial support for travel, and the dedication of the riders the United States will have a promising future. Donna commented, "Hillary Clinton wrote a book entitled, "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child". After embarking on this journey, I believe that it also takes one to get a Para-Equestrian to the Paralympics!"

For more information about the 2011 Melbourne CPEDI3* or the Saddle World Dressage Festival or please visit www.vic.equestrian.org.au.



Mary Jordan and Sebastian



Donna Ponessa and Otto



Erin Alberda and Pavalina



Rebecca Hart and Lord Ludger

Photo Credit: All photos taken at the 2011 NEDA Fall Festival of Dressage CPEDI3* and the 2011 USEF Para-Equestrian Dressage National Championship held in Saugerties, NY at the HITS On The Hudson show grounds. Photo©2011 Lindsay Y McCall for the United States Para-Equestrian Association (USPEA).

About United States Para-Equestrian Association:

The USPEA is a network of riders, judges, national federation board members, and equestrian enthusiasts. The association gives athletes the ability to get involved and expand their knowledge and experience in the Para-Equestrian sport. The USPEA encourages para-athletes to participate in all disciplines under the para-equestrian umbrella.

The USPEA is a recognized affiliate of the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) which serves as the National Governing Body for the equestrian sport. This relationship between the USPEA and USEF is to encourage para-equestrian competitors, leisure riders, coaches, fans and enthusiasts to network and get involved with the entire equestrian sport.

Ultimately the goal of the USPEA is to foster growth in the para-equestrian discipline. From growth in the number of participants to growth as a team, and growth in the experience and knowledge of all involved. From local horse shows to international Olympic Games, the USPEA will provide para-equestrians the knowledge of what they need to succeed. The USPEA connects with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI), the United States Dressage Federation (USDF), and USEF which provides Para-Equestrians the top equestrian resources.

In June 2010, the USPEA earned its 501 (c)(3) status which has encouraged supporters to help supply funding to the Para-Equestrian Team as a recognized affiliate of the United States Equestrian Federation(USEF).

For more information about the USPEA please visit www.USPEA.org or contact USPEA President: Hope Hand by e-mail: Wheeler966@aol.com or by phone: (610)356-6481.

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