

# Pony Power at the National Dressage Pony Cup

July 8-10, 2016, Kentucky Horse Park

*Southwest competitors and their talented small mounts find a place to shine as part of the National Dressage Pony Cup*

By Jennifer M. Keeler



Kalie Beckers on Madoc Mari

More than 100 competitors recently converged upon the Kentucky Horse Park for the 2016 National Dressage Pony Cup (NDPC) Championship Show, held in conjunction with the Kentucky Dressage Association (KDA) Summer Classic and Breed Show I & II on July 8-10 in Lexington. But as any of the riders who came from 23 different states, or ponies representing 16 different breeds and registries would tell you, they weren't all there just to look cute: they were pursuing \$15,000 in prize money and championship honors as well as special high-point, musical freestyle, and breed awards for Intro Level all the way to Grand Prix in Open, Adult Amateur, and Junior/Young Rider divisions. Ponies will also compete in an all-new NDPC Young Pony Futurity for four-, five-, and six-year-olds as well as pony-only Dressage Sport Horse Breeding classes in this national showcase of pony power.

This year an enthusiastic contingent from Texas and Louisiana attended the NDPC Championship Show, including Kalie Beckers who has been to the picturesque Kentucky Horse Park multiple times to attend the FEI North American Junior and Young Rider Championships (NAJYRC). But this was the first time she decided to make the journey from Independence, La. to attend the Pony Cup, and the now-familiar long drive to Lexington proved worthwhile as she easily topped a large field of Juniors and Young Riders to coast to victory in the Training Level Championship. Along the way, she earned the highest individual test score of any pony at this year's show: an impressive 76.136% at Training Level Test 3. All of this was accomplished aboard the eight-year-old Welsh Cob mare Madoc Mari – a ride she unexpectedly inherited from family members. "This is my mother's pony, but my sister stopped riding Mari and so she needed a job and my original thought wasn't necessarily to do dressage, but to jump her," Beckers explained. "Our tests at the Pony Cup were very steady and harmonious the whole time, and the sloppy conditions on the first day didn't faze her at all. It's certainly much less stressful than the NAJYRC and a lot more fun!"

Beckers became familiar with all that the National Dressage Pony Cup has to offer through a network of local competitions which offer pony-only classes as part of the NDPC Partner Show program. “When the dressage shows in our region became NDPC Partner Shows, we found out about the opportunity to come to the championship show in Kentucky and decided to go for it,” Beckers explained. So far in 2016, almost 150 USEF/USDF-licensed dressage competitions nationwide have applied to become designated as official NDPC Partner Shows, offering pony-restricted classes and awards as well as an opportunity for small equines to be measured for a USEF Pony Measurement Card. Competitors are eligible for special championship titles at each show, and all scores in pony-restricted classes at official Partner Shows are automatically entered in the lucrative NDPC Year-End Awards Program.

This added incentive for exhibitors is exactly why the Houston Dressage Society (HDS) chose to add the NDPC classes to the roster for their series of shows held at the Great Southwest Equestrian Center. “With the encouragement of a local sponsor, we first became part of the NDPC Partner Show program in 2015,” explained HDS President Leslie Rohrer. “At the time we weren't sure how successful it would be, but since we have a fair number of dressage ponies in our area, we wanted to give it a try and it ended up being very well-received. So this year Houston Dressage went ahead and added a full pony division to add extra effort to the concept and support the National Dressage Pony Cup program,” Rohrer continued. “At our first recognized show in January, we measured six ponies for their measurement cards – the most we've ever done at one show! Shortly after, a new sponsor who breeds and competes a lot of ponies signed up to support the club. Participation in the Pony division continues to grow and we are also getting questions from riders about going to the Championship Show in Kentucky. In my opinion, the Pony Cup has brought new energy to HDS and already provided significant success in a very short time.”



Kelly Martinez and Fierro L'Oasis

As a direct result of these NDPC Partner Show opportunities in Texas, Kelly Martinez of San Antonio also decided to make the trek to Kentucky, and her efforts were rewarded with a Reserve Championship in the Fourth Level Adult Amateur division with her Welsh cross gelding Fierro L'Oasis. “My trainer Pati Pierucci suggested that I compete in the pony division and luckily the Houston Dressage Society and Reiterhof Shows participate as official NDPC Partner Shows,” said Martinez. “Initially, participating in the NDPC Annual Show was not on my 2016 competition schedule; however, my pony was consistently earning the Pony Champion title at the Participating shows we entered.”

Still, the decision to take the next step was not one that Martinez took lightly. “The thought of making the 17-hour drive by myself caused more stress than the thought of competing,” she laughed. “But my

pony is also 18 years old, so I decided that this would be the year we gave it our all, plus the idea of competing on a more level playing field with other ponies rather than horses was ultimately what encouraged me to attend. The Kentucky Horse Park is beautiful, and all of the Texas ponies were stabled next to each other which was really nice to be with familiar faces. I loved being able to see all of the different pony breeds, and the energy of all the riders and owners was positive and encouraging, even when you were competing against each other.”

“I think it’s just amazing to see everyone from juniors to older adults and seasoned professionals, all having fun and enjoying competing their ponies as part of the Pony Cup programs,” said NDPC founder Jenny Carol. “In addition, with the help of the livestreaming our Championship Show for the first time this year on the USEF Network, these ponies are showing the world how talented they are at all levels of dressage, from introducing new riders to the sport at the Intro level to earning solid marks from top FEI judges at Grand Prix. The atmosphere and camaraderie around the Pony Cup is incredible.” After her first Pony Cup experience, Martinez agreed. “It was evident how much everyone loves their ponies and that we were all just so happy to be there sharing the moment with our four-legged besties,” she said. “Fierro has been essential in helping advance my confidence and riding skills, and he always amazes me at how big his heart is and what a great work ethic he has. Great gifts come in small packages!”

To find out more information about the National Dressage Pony Cup programs, visit the NDPC website at [www.dressageponycup.com](http://www.dressageponycup.com) and [visit their Facebook page](#). Show results can be found at [www.showsecretary.com](http://www.showsecretary.com).