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Tough Texans Take Region 9 Championships by Storm



Houston, Texas - (date)

Texans are tough. As Hurricane Harvey's floodwaters receded, the Houston Dressage Society (HDS) knew the show must go on and handily hosted the 2017 Great American Insurance Group/USDF Regional 9

Championships at the Great Southwest Equestrian Center in Katy, Texas, just weeks after the storm left a path of destruction.

Competitors passed around stories of survival just as Hurricane Nate

threatened off-shore but, no matter what the circumstance, pluck, perseverance, grit and determination were the theme of the Region 9 Championships and the accompanying Southwest Dressage Classic (SWDC) and HDS Autumn Classic Oct. 5-8.

Madison Waller, a ninth-generation organic rice farmer from hard-hit Beaumont, Texas, said that Harvey destroyed about 4,000 acres of her family's crops, but they took it like Texans and the 14-year-old came to the show. She captured the blue ribbon in the SWDC Training Level Test 3 Junior/Young Rider division with a 70.795 percent on her own Diablo DC, a 9-year-old Lusitano gelding.



Madison Waller and Diablo DC not only claimed a blue ribbon, they performed during the Saturday night Spooktacular dinner during the 2017 Great American Insurance Group/USDF Regional 9 Championships.

Photo by Susan K. Stickle.

Waller's impressive competition results belie her age but she's shown since she was 3-years-old. She tackled the Pinto World Championship show in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as well as hunter, Western showmanship, competitive

bareback, pole bending and driving classes. After trying a variety of disciplines, Waller took up dressage two years ago. She bought Diablo, who is also a 2016 Breyer model horse, with money she made from training and selling a pony. She and Diablo were also featured riders at the Saturday night demonstration during the Spooktacular Dressage Dinner.

"Diablo knows all the movements: pirouettes, passage, piaffe," she said. "And I'm still learning. When they had the demonstration, everybody had a little bit of something to do and I thought, 'What can I do to make it look like I know what I am doing?' I tried some canter pirouettes and tempis by myself at home and they came out beautifully after I had only done them two or three times at the barn. The trot work was beautiful too, including extended trot and passage, and we had a great time. It was so much fun! I love that."

She also loves the HDS shows and connecting with the people she knows there and, even though Hurricane Harvey threw a wrench in her plans, there wasn't a question in her mind that she would be in Katy to compete in the Championships.

Dallas-area dressage trainer Gail Abele, from Lewisville Texas, also sang the praises of the HDS-run show as she and one of her mounts rose from near the bottom of their Training and First Level classes at the 2015 Region 9 Championships to taking home Fourth-Level blue ribbons in 2017.

"HDS is a mature, well-run organization," she said. "Every year the shows and sponsored events are managed better and the changes they make just keep improving it. HDS shows always run like clockwork. I never even think twice about asking if the arena is running on time."

She competed Sandrino, her own 5-year-old Westphalian gelding in Training and First Level classes this year and Teodoros Milagro, a 9-year-old Andalusian/Thoroughbred cross gelding owned by Diana Cilia at Fourth Level.



Dallas-area trainer Gail Abele and Teodoros Milagro earned top honors for the 2017 SWDC Fourth Level Freestyle and the Championship in the GAIG/USDF Fourth Level Freestyle. Photo by Susan J. Stickle.

She and her young Sandrino claimed a blue ribbon with a 73.295 percent in SWDC Training Level Test 3 and the championship with a 73.863 percent in the GAIG/USDF Training Level Test 3 class.

But Teodoros was the star of her rides, as he rose from a 59.886 percent in

Training Level Test 3 at the 2015 Region 9 Championships to notching a blue-ribbon win in the 2017 SWDC Fourth Level Freestyle with a 68.00 percent and the Championship in the GAIG/USDF Fourth Level Freestyle with a 69.083 percent.

"Teodoros, we call him 'Prince' at the barn, was very low in the Training Level Championship placements and we are so very, very proud of his performance at Fourth Level this year," she said. "We also think so highly of Karen Robinson and Applause Dressage, her freestyle business. The freestyles she puts together for him are just always crowd-pleasers and so much fun to ride."

Abele trains out of Southern Comfort Farm in Aubrey, Texas, where she has been for more than four years.

Another Texan who competed with grit and determination is Katie Jackson. A Class V para-equestrian rider, Jackson's right leg was amputated above the knee because of cancer a little more than two years ago. She's a dentist in Austin and previously competed as an Adult Amateur but, because she accepts some sponsorships for her para-equestrian riding and she is actively seeking more sponsorships, she reports to the Open division.

"I don't train horses or humans but I play by the rules," she said, adding that it's intimidating that she could be competing against top Texas riders like John Mason and her coach, Dallas-area trainer Kai Handt.



Trainer Kai Handt gives last-minute instructions to Katie Jackson aboard Winterstolz. Photo by Susan J. Stickle.

Although she has her sights set on competing in the Para-Equestrian division at the 2018 World Equestrian Games to be held in Tryon, North Carolina, in September, she chose to ride in the able-bodied show, partly because she wanted to compete in a shadbelly, an accoutrement not used in the para-division.

"It was definitely on my bucket list I've had since I was a little girl to ride in the Prix St. Georges and wear the pretty shadbelly," she confessed.

Although in para-equestrian events she rides her own Royal Dancer, a 12-year-old Wesphalian gelding she bought from Handt and his daughter Julia, she borrowed Winterstolz, a 12-year-old Oldenburg gelding owned by Debbie Hubbard out of Lake St. Louis, Missouri, for the show. She's been riding Winterstolz, also known as "Stompie," since March.

She and the gelding were consistent in Fourth Level Test 1 with two scores of 64.73 percent and their scores steadily climbed in the competition in the Prix St. Georges with a 59.737 percent on Oct. 6 to a 65.132 percent on Oct. 8. The pair finished as the Reserve High Point Open Fourth Level Champions in the Open show classes.

"He and I are just getting to know each other and he is forward-thinking and sensitive in a good way in that he's listening all of the time. We are still ironing out the changes," she said and laughed that the judges don't award extra points for doing two-tempis instead of fours. "That's unfortunate!"



Katie Jackson and Winterstolz. Photo by Susan J. Stickle.

Jackson and Royal Dancer will be heading to Wellington, Florida, in January for two CEPDI3* shows where she will debut her para-equestrian freestyle. She is currently ranked No. 3 in the world by the FEI in para-dressage.

"In a perfect world, my goal would be to represent Team USA at WEG with the ultimate goal in 2020 to be heading to Tokyo," she said. "I love

competing."

"All the Houston Dressage Society shows are always so well-run and fun," she said. "The Region 9 Championship is probably one of my favorite shows of the year. You have lots of rings going on and you get to see everyone from all parts of our region competing. It's such a fun atmosphere. And, it's a memory I will always have of getting to canter down centerline with my shadbelly on and get those scores."

To see all the results from the 2017 Great American Insurance Group/ United States Dressage Federation Region 9 Dressage Championships and Southwest Dressage Championships and HDS Autumn Classic, click [here](#).

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