

ROLEX 2008

by Ruth M. Rose

Photos by Pam Harder

Rolex for me is a 'Pilgrimage' to Eventing. I have been going since I was introduced to the sport, and wait all year long for "My most favorite day of the year." (Saturday of Cross Country, and Yes, to the Christmas music tune). This year has been a particularly rocky one for Eventing, and so I was hoping for a 'no injury to horse and rider' event. It was not to be. The afternoon of Cross Country was devastating. My heartfelt sadness goes out to the family of Frodo Baggins and The Quiet Man, both of whom gave their lives to, and for, the sport of Eventing. My thoughts and hopes go toward the speedy recovery of Laine Ashker, who at this writing was free of brain injuries but on a ventilator for extensive chest and jaw injuries.

On to the 'Good Stuff' that made my heart sing and goose bumps appear. My personal highlights:

Oh, the shopping... The Trade Fair was spectacular - and there were support sales benefiting Darren Chiacchia at nearly every booth. Didn't look like a recession at Rolex from the long lines at check-out counters and the bag-laden shoppers!

Okay, HOW can Teddy do it? The AMAZING pony, Theodore O'Connor, finished 6th overall, jumping Cross Country double clear to the roars of an excited crowd. He could easily go under several of the jumps rather than over, but just "boings up" (Sally O'Connor's exact phrase) into this beautiful arch, wastes no energy, and blasts through the course with Karen O'Connors' brilliant riding skills. Their show jumping round was amazing. He just barely missed the spot on the last double, taking the two rails that we saw fall all day with even the slightest touch. They are truly a team.

Laine Ashker's XC ride on her friend's horse, Mazetto, was indisputably a highlight. Eleanor Brennan's mother, Christine, asked her to ride "Eric" for the family after they lost Eleanor to an eventing accident in Florida, so the crowd was absolutely screaming for 'Lainey' and Eric when they crossed the finish line double clear.

Phillip Dutton's double clear Stadium round - You could tell that everyone in



TOP to BOTTOM:
Stadium Karen and
"Teddy" --compare his
size to that fence height!



Laine Ashker and
"Mazetto" - Double Clear
Cross-Country



Phillip Dutton and
"Connaught" showing
their 'style'

the entire stadium was holding their breath when he got to the last jumps - and the EXPLOSION of the crowd when he went double clear (only one of two riders to do so) rocked the stadium and I am pretty sure registered on the Richter Scale in Kentucky! And to see his absolute joy in galloping the Victory Round belied the fact that he said, "Everyone else was more worried about my not winning a Four Star than I was."

The ceremonies for retiring Winsome Adante, and the 30 year Anniversary ceremony for the Horse Trials were so emotional that many were wiping their

eyes during both presentations. Bruce Davidson still looks as handsome as he did in his photo 30 years ago. Ralph Hill looked great, too!

But NO ONE had the look of success or pride as much as our own Becky Holder and Courageous Comet. Her smiles throughout

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the weekend, her friendly and approachable attitude towards the spectators, and Courageous Comet's obvious joy in his job were beyond measure. Nigel Casserly of course, in his usual fashion, had to rib her while handing over the second place check by mentioning, "This could have been a lot bigger," but let me tell you, I've never seen anyone hold their composure like Becky did, while standing in the end gate ready to go in, showing her self-control while the crowd

was exploding; stomping the stands and roaring for Phillips' double clear round.

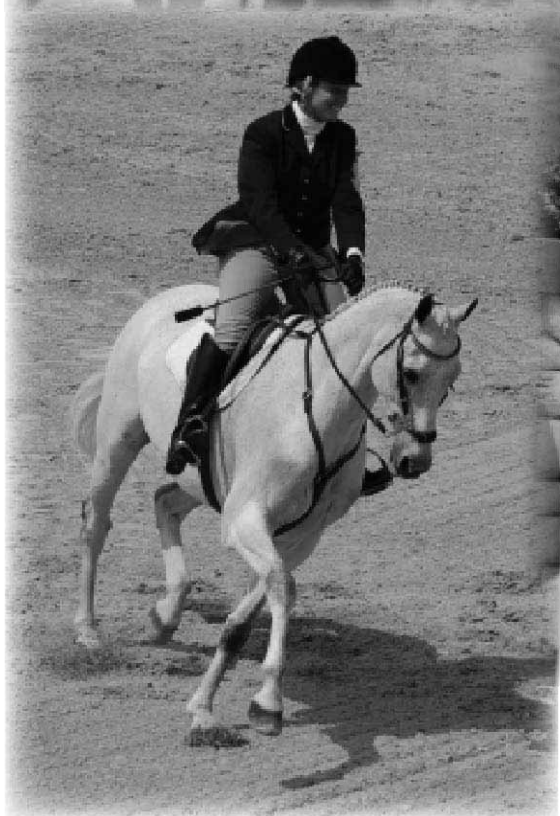
She moved with assurance into that atmosphere and rode her horse so softly round and relaxed that Sally O'Connor said, "This team is what you want to see when you're watching Eventing. Look at this softness and solidarity under almost unthinkable pressure." Since most other rides of the day had taken at least 12 jumping penalties, we were all thrilled to

see Becky take only two rails and finish with such style and success. Our whole section (lots of Area IV riders) shouted for Becky and Comet and I've never seen a happier face on either horse or rider. My genuine gratitude to Becky and Comet for sharing their talent with all of us!

And may next year's Rolex be a year of complete success: No injury to horse or rider.



Becky Holder & "Courageous Comet"



All ROLEX photographs by Pam Harder. She and her daughter, Liz, were also in attendance.