

## Dee Jee Brings His A Game To Win \$70,000 Purina Animal Nutrition Grand Prix With Nassar

By: Lindsey Long  
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Nayel Nassar is no stranger to winning at the HITS Coachella Desert Circuit, but he's usually riding his veteran mount Lordan when he's leading the grand prix victory lap. But during Week 3 of Coachella, in the \$70,000 Purina Animal Nutrition Grand Prix, a younger horse—Dee Jee—stepped up for blue with Nassar.

"Dee Jee really brought his A game today," said Nassar. "He's come a really long way, so I'm thrilled he could get some of the limelight this week."



Nayel Nassar on Dee Jee. Photo by ESI Photography

Nassar has had Dee Jee, a 10-year-old bay Dutch Warmblood (Viento Uno W—Cheeta Ikaria Z) for four years, but he took his time with the gelding. "He was super inexperienced, so he was kind of a project for me to bring along," said Nassar.

Dee Jee spent much of early 2017 alternating between smaller grand prix classes and the 1.35-meter division, gaining experience and confidence. Then in Europe, Nassar had good results with him in the 1.40- and 1.45-meter classes.

"Just in the last year or so he's really grown up a lot," said Nassar. "He did some good things in Europe last summer, and I figured [HITS Coachella] would be a good place to get him going for this year. This is the second biggest class this horse has ever seen, so I'm really pleased with him."

Only four of the 34 entries in the \$70,000 Purina Animal Nutrition Grand Prix jumped clean over Round 1 of the 1.50-meter course designed by Bernardo Costa Cabral of Portugal.

"I was surprised with the number of clear rounds," said Nassar. "I think [the course designer] did a wonderful job with the course. But there were a few really delicate verticals that came down easily."

The short course consisted of eight jumping efforts including one double combination, and first to ride was Karl Cook aboard Signe Ostby's Caillou 24. The pair completed a smooth, beautiful clear round and finished with a time of 42.94 seconds.

Canadian rider Samara Heinrichs was next on course with Marilyn Dawson-Dixon's Peninsula Vertigo. The pair had three down, finishing in fourth place.

Harley Brown took to the ring next, piloting Katherine Brewer's Mylord Cornet to a four-fault round.

"The luck of the draw helped; I went at the very end, so I got to strategize a little bit," said Nassar. "My plan going into the jump-off was to just try to be efficient. I saw Karl go, and he did all the [stride] leave-outs, so I tried to do all the same leave-outs he did and then rush home."

Quickness paid off, and Nassar crossed the timers 3 seconds faster than Cook to take the win with a time of 39.84 seconds.

While the pair made it look easy on Sunday afternoon, Nassar called Dee Jee his most difficult ride. "He's complicated," he said. "He's difficult to balance; he's either too high up or too low down. He's also really sensitive, so it's all about pushing the right buttons with him and making sure that he's in the right place mentally, because he's always extremely fresh. But he's really brave, and he always wants to do the job, and he's really keen to do it. So he has all those things working for him."

See full results of the \$70,000 Purina Animal Nutrition Grand Prix.

**Category:** U.S. Show Jumping

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