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HITS Saugerties \$1 Million Grand Prix Awarded CSI Five-Star Rating

By: Jasmine Wallace



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The Fédération Equestre Internationale awarded a CSI 5* ranking to the Saugerties \$1 Million Grand Prix, presented by Wells Fargo (N.Y.). This is the first year that the show's annual \$1 million grand prix will be run under FEI rules.

"I think it's the direction that high performance riders want the sport to go," explained Tom Struzzi, HITS President and CEO. "The FEI five-star gives riders the most points for the [FEI Longines] World Ranking list, and right now the world list is on everyone's mind because it really is the gauge for how next year's Olympic team in Brazil is going to be selected. To combine a five-star multiple with \$1 million [in prize money] makes for the highest pointed class in the U.S."

That distinction is what the show management hopes will make it an attractive competition not only for U.S. riders but also for international competitors. While five-star events overseas are typically mandated to invite riders at the organizing committee's expense, shows in North America are not required to do so. "It will be a little tougher to convince European riders to come," said Struzzi. "Obviously, the big carrot to entice them is the fact that it's a chance to jump for a \$1 million purse."

For the past five years that the \$1 Million Grand Prix has been offered at Saugerties, the qualifications for the class were determined by the competition management and required that riders compete at a specified number of HITS shows, either in the winter, summer, or a combination of the two.

"Now with it being under the auspices of the FEI that changes, because the FEI has quite clear guidelines for how you qualify to show in an FEI five-star event," said Struzzi.

In total, 50 riders will be invited to compete in the 1.60-meter class with 70 percent (35 riders) invited based on their standing on the Longines FEI World Ranking list and the other 30 percent (15 riders) invited by the HITS management. As to the invited riders, Struzzi said, "Hopefully we can use a little bit of our past experience with a frequent customer list, and at the same time understanding that the specifications for the four classes that will be ranked five-star at that horse show are going to require some pretty serious show-jumping."

The \$1 million class will take place on Sept. 6 and will close out the eight-week HITS Saugerties show series with a packed competitive schedule during the HITS-on-the-Hudson VIII show. The four classes that comprise the five-star are the Saugerties \$1 Million Grand Prix, a \$100,000 Hudson Valley Jumper Classic 1.50-meter class held on Saturday that also offers world ranking points, and two \$34,000 1.45-meter classics during the week.

The show will also offer national classes that include the Diamond Mills \$500,000 Hunter Prix Final, the Vetera® XP Vaccines \$250,000 Junior/Amateur-Owner Jumper Prix and the Platinum Performance \$250,000 Hunter Prix Final.

"It's a pretty special week," concluded Struzzi. "It really is the richest weekend in the sport."

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