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Postcard: CP \$1 Million Grand Prix at HITS

The CP \$1 million grand prix, presented by Wells Fargo, had such a tough course that only one person was able to conquer it, on a day when \$1,750,000 in purses went to hunter and jumper riders during a cavalcade of championships at HITS in Saugerties, N.Y

By [Nancy Jaffer](#) | 9/6/2015

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September 6, 2015 -- Chatting with course designer Steve Stephens today before the CP \$1 Million Grand Prix at HITS in upstate New York, he told me he'd like to have four or five fault-free trips in the first round to insure a bigger jump-off than usual in the class, which generally has just two or three coming back against the clock.

He was particularly proud of his triple combination of three verticals (with the middle element involving a liverpool) saying that had never been done. I thought it might be a real show-stopper, but in the end, faults were scattered throughout the course where jumps



Beezie Madden had the only clear round in the CP \$1 Million Grand Prix at HITS to win the class with Simon | Photo copyright 2015 by Lawrence J. Nagy

ranged up to 1.6 meters in height. A vertical/oxer double, 5A and B, caused its share of problems early on the course, where it was set four strides from a vertical along one side of the ring.



McLain Ward, a two-time winner of the HITS million, was third with Rothchild | Photo copyright 2015 by Lawrence J. Nagy

"There was a gotcha here and a gotcha there," said defending champion Todd Minikus, who wound up fourth on Quality Girl with the second-fastest of the class's six 4-fault rounds, as he dropped a rail at an oxer that was the 10th of 14 numbered obstacles. The fastest four-faulter was two-time HITS \$1 million winner McLain Ward, third on Rothchild with a rail at the third element of the triple, eliciting heartfelt groans from the crowd lining the sides of the arena as the pole headed groundward.

While 40 of the 41 riders in the class tried and failed to jump without penalties, their ambition to win went the way of Steve's wish for an exciting tiebreaker.

Interestingly, this was the first time the class was an FEI (international equestrian federation) 5-star, and as

such it drew more top riders than previously, when it was a national class and the jumping order was populated mostly with those who had qualified by jumping at HITS shows.

Steve changed the time allowed of 87 seconds to 90 seconds after it was obvious the clocking was too tight once the class got under way. When the sixth horse to go, Big Red (isn't it nice to have a name that's easy to spell and pronounce for a change?) went fault-free over the jumps with just two time penalties, everyone figured a totally clear round would be next. But it wasn't.

Perhaps the most frustrating attempt belonged to German rider Andre Thieme, the 2011 winner with Aragon Rouet. Today he was aboard Ramona de Flobeque, a gray mare as impressive as her name. She was clear until she got to 9A, the first part of the triple, where she came to a smooth halt. It looked to me as if Andre had been trying to find the perfect distance and just missed. He didn't drop any rails, but 4 faults for the stop and two time penalties but him 14th and out of the ribbons.

Spectators had to wait until the 33d horse in the order, Abigail Wexner's Simon, flew over the jumps with Beezie Madden to leave nothing but zeros on the scoreboard. Simon's leap over fence number 10 was amazing. I swear he sprouted wings to get that one done in style.

With eight more to go, we all guessed the next clear wouldn't be far behind, not with the likes of McLain and Todd coming up in the batting order. But in the end, Beezie was able to collect her blue ribbon (and \$330,000 first prize) without jumping again.

Beezie has been everywhere and done everything, but she was impressed by Steve's layout.

"When we walked it, I said, `This is about as hard as it gets, other than maybe the Olympics or World Championships, at the end of those," she observed.

In hindsight, Steve wasn't too disappointed that the jump-off didn't work out.

"Sometimes (when) you look at this kind of class for this type of money, it might be more interesting to watch it and see just the one clear round vs. a two-horse jump-off. A two-horse jump-off is usually not too interesting for me. I think the single clear round in a \$1 million class, if it's going to happen, this is the place for it to happen."

Asked how he felt about it, Tom Struzzieri, the founder and master of all things HITS, conceded, "As a spectator, I prefer to see a jump-off." Then he smiled and added, in true Tom style, "It also gives me a little less overtime (to pay) today for the guys."



It was a big moment of triumph for Beezie Madden, who earned \$330,000 on Simon with the only clear round in the CP \$1 Million Grand Prix presented by Wells Fargo at HITS | Photo copyright 2015 by Nancy Jaffer



Big Red was second, earning \$200,000 with Denmark's Nikolaj Hein Ruus in the irons for Mexican owner Gerardo Pasquel.

Wait--Nikolaj who? Not a household name, for sure.

Amazingly, it was his first 5-star, and his first "really big show." He's a beautiful rider. His father, Niels, specializes in dressage but used to jump, so Nikolaj comes from an equestrian family. It was, however, a family without a lot of money.

Nikolaj Hein Ruus, a Dane riding a Mexican horse in the biggest grand prix of his career, finished second on Big Red with no jumping faults and two time penalties. | Photo copyright 2015 by Nancy Jaffer

"My dad told me you have to work hard, and when other people give up, you smile and say 'Give me more.' I've been working all my life to be here today. It's a dream come true," he told me proudly.

The horse is inexperienced, he said. The owner uses Big Red for amateur classes (he'll be in a 1.40 meter class next weekend), but Nikolaj was able to spend the summer riding him. He works with California trainer Richard Spooner, who was on hand to help him today.

Had he been able to do his round over again, Nikolaj said he wouldn't have changed anything; he needed to take his time a little bit since his mount lacks mileage.

Big Red is not so easy to handle. The horse jumped around at the prize giving ceremony, and Nikolaj ruefully said he didn't wear gloves, because he thought he might have to shake hands with someone, so his fingers got roughed up with Big Red's antics.

To learn more about Nikolaj, watch this video.



The \$500,000 Diamond Mills Hunter Prix Final started the day, with Tori Colvin in the lead on Betsee Parker's Inclusive. Her biggest competition was last year's winner, Dress Balou, owned by irrepressible trainer Don Stewart and ridden by Aaron Vale, who many of you know better as a jumper rider.

Dress Balou had a spectacular trip in his last round today (there were two this morning) but Inclusive rattled a pole, and that was it.

When she heard the pole bounce, "I knew it was over," said Tori, who felt Inclusive was getting tired. The hunters had to do four rounds all together this weekend, and she agreed with me when I wondered whether that was a bit much.

In the end, Balou had a score of 537, just two points more than Inclusive.

Don bought Balou with the prize money from last year's victory. Asked what he'd do with this year's prize money, he chuckled and said that with three children and a wife (I know her, she has great jewelry) he could always use the cash.

We talked a little more about the horse. Click on the right-pointing arrow below to listen to Don's thoughts.



The \$250,000 Vetera Vaccines Junior Amateur-Owner Jumper Prix boiled down to a three-horse jump-off today from a field of 25 who made the finals. Hayley Waters, 19, won with the only clean round, and was still shaking with excitement a few minutes after dismounting from Qurint.

The horse came from Ludo Phillippaerts of Belgium; you know the name because his sons often come to the U.S. fall circuit.

Listen to what Hayley had to say by clicking on the right-pointing arrow below.



Hayley was emphatic about how grateful she is to her parents, Chuck and Dana Waters, and her trainer, Daniel Damen. It's nice to find a young person who knows how to say thank you.

Do you love the photo of Hayley with the giant \$75,000 check? I was joking that I hoped she wouldn't try to put that through the pneumatic tube at the drive-up window of the bank. When she said the money would go toward the expense of showing at HITS, I thought that might be a bit of an exaggeration. But when I spoke to her mother, she told me they had brought 12 horses from their Ocala barn, and I could see how that would add up.

The run of late summer/autumn shows started with last weekend's Hampton Classic (I hope you saw my postcards from there!) and continue with Spruce Meadows in Canada next weekend, when there will be a big Nations' Cup and a \$1 million plus class. I'm staying in the U.S. for the American Gold Cup at Old Salem Farm in New York, which will have plenty of cachet on its own as it hosts a Longines World Cup qualifier for the new Longines North American League..



Hayley Waters got a big check for winning the junior/amateur-owner jumper prix | Photo copyright 2015 by Nancy Jaffer

So be sure to come back next weekend to look at my postcard. In the meantime, go to facebook.com/practicalhorseman for more photos today and tomorrow.