



NORTH AMERICAN RIDERS GROUP



THE TOP 25 of 2014



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Together, we can improve our sport.



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THE FIFTH ANNUAL NARG REPORT: THE TOP 25 OF 2014

As the fifth annual NARG Top 25 comes to fruition, we realize how quickly five years can pass. A talented horse can go from competing in the seven and eight-year-olds to the international classes in that span, whereas a rider can evolve from the junior division to the national to international grand prix classes. That isn't always the course; however, in our eyes, it is the ultimate goal.



NARG sees those goals and continues to raise the bar by determinedly pursuing the demanding task of evaluating, scoring, discussing and developing our perspective on the Top 25 Horse Shows in North America.

Along with our personal goals and pursuits to play a role in the success of our teams in the sport of show jumping, we also want the sport to flourish on this continent. These goals go hand in hand and we don't intend to stop improving our sport for the sake of the horses, riders and owners. That is who you are and that is who we are as well.

We anticipated, and continue to expect, that the level of quality as well as the numbers of top internationally ranked riders would subsequently increase as our top horse shows met the marks of a world class event. In fact, per Chef d'Equipe Robert Ridland, in 2014 U.S. Teams earned 11 top three finishes out of 12 Nations Cups; with a depth of 29 riders and 33 horses. Canada won the competitive Nations Cup at Spruce Masters, among other top finishes. And Mexico's Xalapa event earned the Most Improved Award this year, plus NARG welcomes Otomí to the NARG Top 25. This illustrates that quality is within reach for each country in North America.

WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO

In the six years since we started this organization, NARG has matured in many ways. We've fought and won many battles, achieved goals that range from horse welfare to riders rights, better understand the business and governing aspects of our sport, sit on numerous committees and boards in the sport, and continuously commit to upholding standards that result in top show jumping. We have more clarity on the complexities of producing an internationally recognized event, and appreciate all of the organizing committees, show managers and sponsors who make tremendous efforts to produce events in North America.

As we stated in year one, by annually ranking the Top 25 Horse Shows NARG creates not only a standard for elite shows, but also a record of how they achieved this level. We certainly don't take full credit for the vast improvements in the events represented in the NARG Top 25, but after reporting on the status of shows for five years we feel confident in knowing our motto of 'together we can improve our sport' is working.

ADJUSTMENTS IN 2015

Although we've made slight modifications over the last five years, including narrowing our focus to show jumping, adding bonus points to shows that offer FEI-sanctioned events as well as to shows that offer a grand prix with \$500,000 or more in prize money, we've listened to feedback as well as reanalyzed our methods to further improve the process of ranking the top shows.

We also noticed that as shows improve, the current 1-5 point scale doesn't leave enough room for one event to rise above another. In 2015, we will implement more adjustments, including going to a 1-10 point scale, adding another score for 'level of competition' related to what top-ranked riders competed at the event, and separating the top show from each series. So effectively we will be scoring 25 top individual events on an expanded scale, and then adding a Series Category for multi-week events.

NOW ON TO THE NARG TOP 25 of 2014

We are duly impressed by one significant factor here – the number of shows receiving a score of 80% or higher essentially doubled this year. Twenty-one out of the top twenty-five were 80%, with four ties for 25th at a score of 79%. A considerable improvement in just one year, in 2013 eleven shows had an 80% or higher. Also notable is that the score required to make the top 25 increased from 74% to 79%.

In 2014 a group of select shows uphold their position on this elite list, even if they have slipped a touch due to others making their way in; while five new shows made the list, one returned, and as a result, others barely missed. We discuss that group in our Honorable Mentions page.

Next year's evaluation adjustments will change these comparison scenarios; however, it is clear that the NARG Top 25 list has come a long way in five years. Congratulations.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Score of 80% or higher	4	6	11	11	21
Score of 70% -79%	11	18	14	14	6 (incl. ties)
Score required to make Top 25	61	69	74	74	79
NARG Top 25 Average Score	72	76	80	81	84

2014 SCORING

SCORING: ONE RING FORMAT

CATEGORY	MAX. POINTS	WEIGHT	MAX. TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
FOOTING	30	4.0	120	24%
STABLING	20	4.0	80	16%
COURSES/JUMPS	10	4.0	40	8%
TECHNICAL ASPECTS	25	2.0	50	10%
FINANCIAL	30	2.0	60	12%
CEREMONY	30	2.0	60	12%
MARKETING/PRESS RELATIONS	25	1.6	40	8%
MISCELLANEOUS	25	2.0	50	10%
TOTAL POINTS			500	100%

SCORING: MULTI RING FORMAT

CATEGORY	MAX. POINTS	WEIGHT	MAX. TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
FOOTING	45	2.7	120	24%
STABLING	20	4.0	80	16%
COURSES/JUMPS	10	4.0	40	8%
TECHNICAL ASPECTS	25	2.0	50	10%
FINANCIAL	30	2.0	60	12%
CEREMONY	30	2.0	60	12%
MARKETING/PRESS RELATIONS	25	1.6	40	8%
MISCELLANEOUS	25	2.0	50	10%
TOTAL POINTS			500	100%

CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

FOOTING

Quality of footing in all arenas, ability to be used in all conditions, maintenance

STABLING

Location and proximity to main arena, quality and size of stalls, security

JUMPS & COURSES

Quality of jumps, courses, and course design

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Accuracy of scoreboards, timeliness, quality of officials, announcer, loudspeakers

FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Prize money offered, overall cost of showing

CEREMONY

Quality of sponsorship, prize giving, and VIP facilities

MARKETING

Advertising, press coverage, website, attendance

MISCELLANEOUS

Venue, customer service, food, hotel accommodations

BONUS POINTS

FEI classes (10 pts), \$500,000+ Grand Prix (10 pts)

2014 SHOW RANKINGS

EVENT	SCORE %	TOTAL	FOOTING	STABLING	COURSES	TECHNICAL	FINANCIAL	CEREMONY	MARKETING	MISC.	BONUS
SPRUCE/MASTERS	96%	478	40	18	9	24	23	30	25	24	20
THUNDERBIRD	94%	468	41	19	9	25	21	30	23	23	10
GOLD CUP	91%	457	41	17	10	24	22	28	24	21	10
LA MASTERS	90%	450	25	17	10	22	22	30	25	22	10
ROYAL	90%	449	24	19	8	24	22	29	23	24	10
XALAPA	89%	446	42	17	10	24	26	25	14	21	10
NATIONAL	88%	440	23	20	8	23	22	28	20	24	10
HAMPTON CLSC	87%	437	35	17	9	21	23	29	24	22	10
DEVON	86%	428	45	15	9	23	18	25	20	23	0
OTOMI	85%	427	38	17	10	21	19	25	20	22	10
ROYAL WEST	84%	421	30	16	9	19	21	25	13	20	10
PENNSYLVANIA	84%	418	23	19	10	23	21	20	19	21	10
WEF	83%	416	34	15	8	19	20	28	24	20	20
WASHINGTON	83%	414	20	16	9	23	18	29	24	23	10
DEL MAR INTL	81%	406	36	18	8	23	17	23	19	19	10
HITS THERMAL	81%	405	30	15	9	21	21	25	19	22	20
OMAHA	81%	404	26	16	8	21	18	23	20	19	10
SILVER OAK	80%	402	33	17	9	22	16	25	23	23	0
OLD SALEM	80%	401	37	15	9	25	14	27	18	22	0
HITS SAUGERTIES	80%	400	30	13	10	18	22	29	22	22	10
SACRAMENTO	80%	398	37	15	9	22	18	23	19	18	10
NAJYRC	79%	396	45	16	9	23	13	20	9	19	10
LAS VEGAS	79%	395	37	16	8	19	22	20	17	20	10
KY SPRING	79%	394	42	15	10	21	16	22	13	21	0
UPPERVILLE	79%	394	40	16	10	19	16	24	15	20	0
LIVE OAK	79%	394	24	13	10	23	19	24	15	20	10
ROCKY MTN	79%	394	36	17	7	23	19	21	14	21	10

SPECIALTY EQUESTRIAN EVENTS SECTION

EVENT	SCORE %	TOTAL	FOOTING	STABLING	COURSES	TECHNICAL	FINANCIAL	CEREMONY	MARKETING	MISC.	BONUS
NEW ALBANY	89%	445	25	17	10	25	24	30	17	21	10
TRUMP INV	88%	438	30	13	10	20	21	29	20	22	10
AMERICAN INV	83%	416	18	17	10	25	25	27	19	21	10
CENTRAL PARK	80%	402	26	11	8	18	25	25	21	21	10

1.

SPRUCE MEADOWS





STILL SITTING PRETTY

After four years as number one, Spruce Meadows still sets the standard for the best tournaments in North America. As many of us know, the Southern family started with this mission over forty years ago, when they transformed a giant feed lot into an internationally acclaimed show facility in the early seventies. By 1976 they hosted the inaugural Masters Tournament, which was one of only 100 FEI-sanctioned events in the world. Within five years, Spruce Meadows was welcoming over 50,000 people through their gates. Due to their commitment to quality and great sport, spring forward to 2014 and the property's popularity has grown exponentially, with attendance approximately 500,000 annually. No other event on the NARG Top 25 can make those claims, which simply sets Spruce apart from the start.

For multiple weeks in a row the grounds are gorgeous, the prize money is excellent, the footing is fabulous, the ceremony is spectacular – no matter how many times we evaluate Spruce Meadows the experience is consistently awesome. For competitors from all over the world, winning a class at Spruce is not only well earned but rewarding in every aspect.

IMPROVEMENTS

Each year Spruce strives to improve, which speaks volumes about how they became and remain number one, not just with NARG but also with competitors and spectators around the world. In 2014 they improved the viewing area for the All Canada Ring, renovated the Spruce Meadows Tack Shop and increased prize money by 7.5% as well as expanded awards for junior riders. The courses are always beautiful; our evaluators were impressed that some of the WEG jumps were at The Masters, when the Games had finished only a few weeks before.

Most of our critiques this year are actually a result of Spruce's popularity. The record number of horses at the summer series caused a few problems. The traffic in the schooling areas made it difficult for the maintenance crew to do their job well. With the increased entries, the International Ring started in the morning, and the back rings went well into the evening on most days, so scheduling was a challenge. The Chinook ring was a touch hard and the Meadows on the Green was pretty worn by Pan American week. The lunging area would benefit from expansion and improved footing. That said, we have confidence that the organizers will make modifications next year to adjust for the larger turnout.

MASTERING IN THE SNOW

With the inaugural \$1,500,000 CP International at The Masters, Spruce Meadows again raised the prize money bar in North America and beyond. When an early snowstorm threatened to ruin the week, the Spruce team mastered the snow with flying colors. Thanks to their dedicated staff and some devoted volunteers consisting of riders, grooms, Queens Troops members, and more, the snow was removed twice from the International Arena and the warm up area, mostly with shovels and golf carts. Only the first day was canceled, the remaining days in the International Arena were fantastic sport. Everyone pulling together to help with the snow illustrates the appreciation we all have for Spruce Meadows.

Although the fees to participate are high, it is well worth the expenditure. NARG is proud to honor Spruce Meadows as the #1 place to compete in North America.



tbird.

MAGNIFICENTLY MANAGED

Once again, Thunderbird came in at the number two spot closely behind Spruce Meadows. The welcoming ‘feel’ of the venue continues to appeal to riders and spectators alike, while the staff is always attentive and accommodating. Stabling was expanded this year, but even so, every space was taken, and top quality was maintained. It’s simply a nice place to show.

The grass field at Thunderbird is one of the best in the business; as good as it gets for natural grass. Evenly moist, the solid ground doesn’t slip or give way. Despite a heavy rainfall, only one class had to be shifted off the grass field. Maintained year-round, footing is certainly a priority for the Thunderbird team. The secondary arenas have improved this year, with the addition of another ‘Thunderbird Signature Silica Arena,’ providing solid footing and exceptional drainage, even in rainy conditions.

Somewhat less than perfect, the sand schooling area was a bit hard after repeated use. Drainage was iffy, with parts becoming spongy and deep in wet conditions. The maintenance crews were well aware of the situation and did their best to keep conditions viable by watering, dragging, and cordoning off as necessary. We understand that plans for a new schooling arena are under way for next season.

USER-FRIENDLY FACILITY

The facility is laid out so that all stalls are within a short walk to the Main Arena. The access paths have boulevards with lanes for horses on one side, and lanes for vehicles, bicycles, golf carts and foot traffic on the other.

Management does an outstanding job of keeping to the schedule, resisting the chance to push the schedule up if a class finishes early, which works well for planning out the day and the week. While the scoreboard is state of the art, it is difficult to see from the warm up area, prompting NARG evaluators to suggest the addition of a second screen or a counter to keep riders aware of the current horse on course.

From the FEI Top 10 League Rider Bonus Program and great gifts for FEI riders plus VIP access, kudos for the amenities and innovative programs at Thunderbird. Fees for the event remain in line with U.S. standards but are still much higher than those in Europe, a widespread problem recognized and receiving consideration by NARG. This year the Thunderbird August circuit reached an FEI 3★ rating for the first time, helping this marvelous venue inch upward in overall prize money and hopefully attract more world-ranked riders.

Sadly, in the summer of 2014 Thunderbird lost its two founders, George and Dianne Tidball. However the family continues to carry on with their goals and vision for the future, as they implement the Tidball’s fifty-year plan to keep the park a leader in the industry. Hats off to all those responsible for making Thunderbird a true show park.

3.



GOLDEN DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN

After jumping up nine places in 2013, The American Gold Cup at Old Salem Farm held onto third place for a second year. Their state-of-the-art turf grand prix field vastly improved in 2013 and continuously well maintained, is simply lovely. With superb presentation, courses, amenities and VIP, the event has that intimate and classy European feeling.

The management takes great pride in bringing back what once was and it shows. The American Gold Cup is a top North American event. Not a series or a circuit, it is the top singular event on the NARG Top 25 of 2014.

If rain comes pouring down, the grass field does not hold up. Aware of this issue, there is an arena ready to be utilized as a back up. The sand footing in this as well as the secondary and schooling arenas handles wet weather without a problem.

PERKS & PRIZES

Perks for grand prix riders included access to the VIP and free entry fee for those who qualified for the grand prix. The Alan Wade course was top-notch, making use of the natural changing grade in the Main Arena, adding an additional but fair challenge.

Attendance once again filled the stands. Finding space for all vehicles in the tiny picturesque town of Old Salem requires close collaboration and considerable creativity from town officials, the local police force, and the show managers, and they pull it off with aplomb.

Looking to 2015, NARG recommends more prize money in the 1.45m classes and presentations in the sand ring. At \$200,000, the grand prix prize money is certainly good; however, this event is well positioned to bring in a title sponsor that could potentially bring it to the \$500,000 level that NARG requires for bonus points, raising the Gold Cup to another echelon.

A JOB WELL DONE

The American Gold Cup at Old Salem Farm has once again achieved a standard befitting this long-running and important event. Knowing what that involves, NARG commends the teams behind the event and the facility.

4.



THE CHIC EUROPEAN MODEL

In 2014 EEM World brought their European show jumping concept to the United States and earned the number four spot in the NARG Top 25, and as a result pushed other shows down the list. As the third leg to Masters Grand Slam, which includes sister events in Paris and Hong Kong, NARG knew this event was coming across the ocean. Originally it was heading for the New York area but ultimately landed in Los Angeles.

When a facility is fashionably dressed with an equestrian flair including larger-than-life horse sculptures, superb shopping and exquisite parties mixed with international indoor show jumping the result is impressive. Notably different than the typical American horse show, the European chic of the LA Masters was a breath of fresh air. Generating a buzz locally and internationally, this event scored very well in the courses, marketing and ceremony categories.

With a purse of \$475,000, the Longines LA Masters Grand Prix just missed getting 10 bonus points and moving up a spot on the list for offering a grand prix at \$500,000 or more.

ISSUES TO ADDRESS

For an inaugural event it was very well executed; however, several aspects need to be addressed for the 2015 event. NARG is certain the Organizing Committee and show management are aware of these issues.

The footing in the main ring was excellent with the exception of a few classes with heavy entries. With ring crew more on top of the footing between horses this issue would improve. Although we accept that indoor schooling areas are often compromised in size, this one was simply too small and the footing did not hold up under the heavy use.

With amateur classes scheduled in the morning and professional classes at night, the break between classes made for a long day. A tighter schedule that started later would greatly benefit the professionals as well as the show staff.

Although we understand that there was a Riders Lounge, the location was inconvenient and the food was not good. The only other choices were a couple of concession stands with a limited and very expensive menu, or to leave the venue to eat. NARG recommends a sponsored, conveniently-located Riders Lounge with catered food.

The entry process was a confusing and time-consuming hybrid between the US and European systems; hopefully, this can improve. What competitors paid to play varied based on world ranking. Some competitors paid for membership, others didn't. Europeans received a stipend for transport; however, Americans based in Europe did not. Although typical for a European show, these were hot topics amongst competitors.

YET STILL...

With all of these points made, the chic, beautifully appointed Longines Los Angeles Masters left a lasting impression. NARG appreciates the effort and expense required to create and execute this superb production. Simply transitioning the Los Angeles Convention Center into a mecca for show jumping was a feat. We support EEM's tremendous efforts in bringing the LA Masters to North America and look forward to year two.



A ROYAL EXPERIENCE

The Royal Horse Show at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair maintained a firm hold on its place among the ten best shows in North America, slipping one spot but actually scoring a notch higher on the NARG Top 25 of 2014.

Now in its 92nd year, the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, the largest of its kind in the world, brings hundreds of thousands of people to Toronto. The atmosphere is electric, the crowds enthusiastic, and amenities abound. The new Food and Lifestyle venue where international chefs competed enhanced the culinary experience.

In the midst of these surroundings, the Royal Horse Show, the highlight of the fair, can count on a large, animated, international crowd and event producers with years of entertainment experience.

As a CSI-W 4★, The Royal offers six world-ranking classes with good prize money including The Big Ben Challenge and The Hickstead FEI World Cup Qualifier. International riders receive hotel rooms, discounted dining and free shuttle service at the Fairmont Royal York.

DETAILS LARGE AND SMALL

The Main Arena, resurfaced two years ago with state-of-the-art fiber-based footing, is an excellent surface for jumping, though it still has some problems holding in the turns during speed classes. Maintenance was very good, but something specific needs to happen to help those corners hold up for speed. Footing in the Hitching Ring schooling area is nice, but the Horse Palace schooling area has only a mediocre sand surface and could use more drag breaks. Space for lunging is tight, which is often an issue in an indoor venue.

Stabling scores high and issues with right of way for horses have improved. The courses and the jumps were well done, however evaluators noted that the World Cup Qualifier was a touch too straightforward with too many clean.

The performances started on time, with less than ten minutes' variance, which is appreciated. Although scheduling the highlight class at the end of the night is understandable, it is tough on the International riders and staff, so potentially having the first class on a night or two would be great.

The stands were close to full on grand prix night. The webcast was only free for the first hour, with a fee after that. Some television coverage would be a plus.

CHEERS TO TRADITION

Notably the Royal is a Toronto tradition. Tweeted one competitor, “They put the show in show business.” It remains, in our opinion, one of the best indoor shows on the North American fall circuit.

6.



HALLELUJAH XALAPA

Recognized as a top show in the NARG Top 25 each year, Xalapa truly stepped it up in 2014. Moving up fourteen spots, with a score of 89%, this beautiful event hosted by the Chedraui family improved in several categories this year.

First, after 15 plus years of hosting top horse shows in Mexico, the team behind this facility was awarded the first CSIO in Mexico in over 30 years. An immediate jump up, they offered eight World Ranking classes and a Nations Cup where in previous years there was no FEI. Along with the classes were several other perks for CSIO riders including hotel, stalls, feed and bedding as well as VIP at no charge. Plus with guards at the main gate and FEI, the security was excellent.

The stabling is permanent and close to the arena. The prize money is high and the office fees low. The facility, Coapexpan Club Hipico, is within a 20-minute drive of high-end hotels and resorts.

GLORIOUS GRASS AND SUPER SAND

Notably, International riders and one NARG evaluator all commented, “Xalapa has one of the best grass fields in the world.” After a torrential downpour one spring evening, the field was perfect the next morning. The maintenance was impeccable, raking after every class, patching as needed. With three weeks of heavy use, and a good amount of rain, the field was still in excellent condition. As promised, they put nice sand footing in the schooling areas, which also held up well in the rain.

Top-notch international courses, course design, ceremony and presentation, the aura is European with the colorful feel of Mexico.

WAITING

Although improved slightly this year, the marketing aspect is one of the only weak points. With the efforts going towards producing a fabulous event, NARG strongly recommends a big bump in the marketing efforts, especially in the states.

Truly Xalapa is a top International event just waiting to happen. It has all the ingredients as far as infrastructure and enthusiasm. All that remains is the ability to draw top International competitors and horses. To achieve this NARG recommends raising the prize money a notch, looking into waivers for health requirements for horses traveling in and out of Mexico to other countries around the world, and to potentially provide transportation for the horses.

It is well worth the trip south to Mexico once you arrive at the picturesque venue. Xalapa seems to have the Field of Dreams philosophy- “Build it and they will come.”

Also the host for the 2014 Central American and Caribbean Games, NARG congratulates the Chedraui family and their staff for their support of excellent sport south of the border.



EXCELLENCE BY ANY NAME

The National Horse Show, America's oldest indoor event, has retaken its original name, and Canadian Pacific has come on board as the title sponsor for 2015. The Alltech Arena at the Kentucky Horse Park is certainly one of the best indoor arenas devoted to horse sport, and now in its fourth year at this pristine location, The National Horse Show once again ranks high on the NARG Top 25. Although the prize money is fantastic, we do recommend a reallocation to maximize world-ranking points for international riders.

The quality of footing in the arena and the stabling with large stalls close to the action are both outstanding. Many of the unique and high-quality jumps come from the 2010 World Equestrian Games. The new location for the Rider Lounge is excellent – easily accessible from the in-gate yet in a place where you could see the action with great food. Located on the other side of the arena, The Taylor Harris Club, and Gracie's are both well run and well-attended.

LET'S CONSIDER...

The schooling area is too small for a venue as large as Kentucky. In an attempt to address the problem, the organizers provided a secondary tented area, however it is too far from the Main Arena, so it got very little use. We suggest that it be moved closer to the warm-up ring for optimum benefit.

Course design was a bit off-target this year, producing far too many clean first rounds and resulting in crowded jump-offs, but evaluators believe it was a fluke and will be top notch as always going forward.

The National Horse Show has it all – with two unfortunate exceptions: atmosphere and spectators. Attendance was down this year, and with it so was the level of enthusiasm on the grounds. While the sound system is state-of-the-art, the overall vibe needs an injection of excitement mixed with interesting rider facts.

The pending partnership with Longines, combined with the title sponsorship of Canadian Pacific may present a unique opportunity to tackle these issues, however the investment in generating an audience and creating a tradition needs to be seriously considered. Another interesting aspect of the coming season is that the Breeders Cup will be running the same weekend as the National. With huge potential to pique the interest of thousands of thoroughbred racing fans, some innovative marketing ideas should be underway.

SPREAD THE WORD

Lexington, the Horse Capitol of the World, and the Kentucky Horse Park, home of the Rolex Three-Day Event that brings in thousands of fans each year, should be fertile ground for community outreach. The National Horse show is one of North America's outstanding indoor competitions. Spread the word!

8.



AN ENDURING CACHET

For the second year in a row, the Hampton Classic comes in at number eight on the NARG Top 25. A unique event, it oozes prestige and glamour by virtue of its reputation, location, and impeccable social credentials. Spectators fill the stands and star power is assured. Offering a week filled with glittering social events and a long list of loyal corporate sponsors, the Hampton Classic has an established cachet and an air of importance.

Management made significant efforts to address the issues identified in 2013. With wonderful weather this year, the improved footing on the grass fields wasn't tested by mother nature, but held up well with use, which had been an issue in years past. The beauty of this event was apparent not just from the outside looking in but from the inside perspective as well.

ON THE INSIDE

The FEI accommodations vastly improved. The move to a large wide-span tent provided far more space, with a stall size increase from average in 2013 to FEI-compliant in 2014. While this required a move a little farther from the arena, our evaluators deemed it well worth the trade-off.

The natural jumps were relocated to increase the amount of surface area in the ring, giving the course designer more flexibility – a change that meant a lot to the riders. Scheduling ran smoothly with fewer horses and shorter days, also appreciated by all involved.

Regarding the Young Jumper Championships, NARG applauds this opportunity and would like to see this event continue to evolve. However the fee to participate is high, ideally a sponsor could defray the costs. One scheduling note – it would be best for the young jumper classes to be held all on the field or all in the sand arena.

Many top shows offer a nice spread in the Riders Lounge, and the Hampton Classic could make that effort.

With the accommodation challenge in the Hamptons, riders suggest a camper location on the grounds.

AN AMERICAN ICON

An ideal end to summer, the Hampton Classic remains a first-class event held in a superb location. Retaining super-star status for sponsors, spectators, and exhibitors alike, NARG commends the Hampton Classic on a job well done.



DEVON DELIVERS

With point totals similar to 2013, Devon scored well and remains in the top ten of our list, an impressive accomplishment by any standard. Steeped in rich heritage dating back to 1896, the Devon Horse Show and Country Fair continues its tradition as the oldest and largest outdoor multi-breed competition in the United States. More than just a competition, it is an outing, with treats for young and old alike, including festival rides, boutiques, and of course some of the country's best horses and riders. Set in the grandeur of Philadelphia's prestigious Main Line, it is an annual event not to be missed, a fixture on the calendars of families near and far, year-after-year.

Always playing to a packed house, the \$100,000 Grand Prix takes place under the lights, and competitors get a boost from the palpable vibe of excitement emanating from the crowd. There is no avoiding the lack of parking, but the challenge is expected and in some ways part of the charm.

Efforts made three years ago with the footing are holding up beautifully. Devon has received a perfect score for the third year, attesting to the diligence of the maintenance crews. Though evaluators mentioned a few awkward tracks, the Dixon Oval dressed up well and overall the courses were excellent.

ATTRACTING THE COMPETITORS

While a much-appreciated new rider lounge with continental breakfast was introduced this year, the riders would like to see a VIP area. NARG suggests converting the metal bleacher near the in-gate into a two-tiered covered platform with tables and food service. This would have the advantage of a view of the schooling area and the arena, and close proximity to the in-gate. An endemic sponsor would love the opportunity for exposure through supporting this outreach to the competitors.

NARG appreciates that the small stalls in the back were rebuilt; a definite step in the right direction, however some of the permanent stables are still in need of updating.

Notably Devon is the only show in the top ten on our list that didn't receive bonus points for FEI classes or a \$500k+ grand prix. The close time-proximity to Spruce seems to diminish the number of international riders, who must make a difficult choice. Another outreach in this area would be worth considering – changing the schedule, chartering a plane to Calgary via a sponsor, increasing prize money are a few options.

Having earned a loyal following, the tradition of Devon remains steadfast. Many junior, amateur and professional riders aspire to compete in the prestigious Dixon Oval and experience the Devon magic.



OUT OF THIS WORLD OTOMÍ

New to the NARG Top 25 this year, the equestrian events at Otomí deserve recognition. From accommodations to atmosphere, Otomí delivers an excellent experience.

With a goal of hosting a top international grand prix event, Daniel Rihan and Eduardo Leon kicked off the concept in 2012 at the exclusive Otomí residential equestrian complex close to the picturesque town of San Miguel Allende. With shows offering world-ranking classes on gorgeous grass fields amidst incredible ceremony and celebration, this show caught the eye of our evaluators.

The Otomí complex offers luxurious homes surrounded by outdoor amenities including an equestrian center, a lake with a clubhouse, pool, tennis courts and footpaths throughout. Several hours north of Mexico City and south of Monterrey, San Miguel Allende was voted #1 in the 2014 Condé Nast Traveler Readers Choice Awards.

GREAT GRASS, CLASSES, COURSES AND CEREMONY

Offering events in spring and fall, the manicured grass fields held up well through some rainy weather. From FEI to Pan Am qualifying to young horse classes, top name course designers designated the tracks. The jumps were unique and well presented, and there is a large well-used Jumbotron. The setting was beautiful, with a bar and restaurant. Prizes include new cars, sculptures and trophies, with amazing ceremonies. One evaluator commented, "Over the top, every show should see these beautiful presentations."

The stabling is permanent and close to the arena. Also with a foreign allure, Otomí is within a short drive of several high-end hotels and restaurants. They put considerable effort into security and the impression is that Otomí and San Miguel Allende are as safe as any American city.

POTENTIAL GALORE

The lowest score for an otherwise superb event was in the prize money category. If the prize money tripled, and they had a higher FEI rating, there would be even more reason to spend some quality time at Otomí.

For an excellent experience and if the schedule meets your needs, this show is worth considering. Combine this event with Xalapa and you have a unique spring tour to enjoy south of the border.



EXCITING AND NEW

Yet another Canadian venture jumps its way into the NARG Top 25, the Royal West Show Jumping Tournament, a brand new ten-day multi-breed event hosted at the recently opened state-of-the-art Agrium Western Event Centre Stampede Park. The brainchild of Canadian rider and RMSJ facility owner John Anderson, the inaugural event brought show jumping and much more back to the heart of Calgary for the first time in thirty years.

As owner of Rocky Mountain Show Jumping, Anderson is an experienced outdoor event producer. He modeled Royal West, a one ring indoor extravaganza, after the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto (#6 event on this year's list). Announced in April and inaugurated in October, the newly minted show offered classes for hunters, jumpers, hackneys, heavy horses and more. Each evening offered entertainment with an equestrian flair, the prize money totaled \$400,000+ with a grand prix offering \$100,000 and six FEI world-ranking classes over a ten-day period.

THE DETAILS

The Euro footing was top notch and held up beautifully with little need for maintenance. The warm-up area also had nice footing but could have used more frequent grooming. Brand new jumps filled the arena, and although there may have been a few too many in the jump-offs, the courses were well done. The big screen scoreboard was hard to see, a great amenity if moved to a better spot.

The venue had heated barns with plenty of wash stalls and a short walk to the main ring, however if the weather acts up the path between the barns and show arena isn't covered. There is no space for hacking or lunging, as is often seen with indoor venues. The parking is expensive; it would be great if competitors received a discount or pass. On the plus side, riders received gift bags and access to the VIP Sky Suite. The top eight rode for ribbons in all classes, a nice touch for riders. Hotels are close-by, however food at the venue was not good and over-priced. The crowds were weak, but now that year one is in the books, the management group looks to increase marketing quite a bit this year.

COME ON BOARD

The NARG evaluators applaud this inaugural CSI 3★ effort. The Agrium Western Event Centre Stampede Park is shiny clean and right in the heart of Calgary. Exciting and new, come on board, Royal West is expecting you.

12.



PLEASING THE PARTICIPANTS

The Pennsylvania National Horse Show remains consistent in points scored, despite having fallen five places in the rankings. The truth for this reputable event is that they remain top notch in several categories and still need improvement in others.

Throughout its 69-year history, the show known as 'Harrisburg' has been held in the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex & Expo Center, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. With plenty of space for stabling, riding, parking, and vendors; and lots of permanent bathrooms, this indoor venue is a favorite among exhibitors. The single arena setting offers first-class, well-maintained footing.

The Stabling is comfortable, security is tight and professional, and the courses as well as the jumps are consistently well designed. The exhibitors' lounge serves several meals a day. Once again, there were three FEI classes on the schedule – another draw for world-class riders. The schedule ran on time, much appreciated by all involved. Located in Pennsylvania's capital city, the Farm Show Complex is just minutes away from a wide variety of hotels.

NOT AS PLEASING

The footing in the schooling area is not up to par. Deep during the junior week, it did improve during the open week. We realize the investment in top footing is high, but it should be addressed.

At \$85,000, the prize money for the Grand Prix de Penn National is at the low end of the scale for a World Cup Qualifier. Overall, the entire prize structure is behind the curve. National companies abound in the area, and if just one were to step up as a major sponsor for the grand prix, it would open the door to better prize money, and a promotional blitz to provide a much-needed injection of excitement.

After 69 years, this venerable indoor show has everything it takes to produce great top-tier sport. But like many shows in this elite company, it needs to re-work its atmosphere to generate excitement. The venue offers excellent exposure to any would-be sponsor.

REALIZE FULL POTENTIAL

If 'Harrisburg' management could tackle these issues – improving schooling area footing, increasing prize money, garnering great sponsors and re-kindling excitement among spectators, this show could be one of the best in North America.

The stated goal of the Pennsylvania National Horse Show Association is to continue to be one of the premier national sporting events in the United States, by improving, engaging and educating the audience, while remaining dedicated to the horsemen. If the organizers take this goal seriously, then their goals align with ours, and this traditional event can realize its full potential.



WELL WISHES FOR WELLINGTON

There is no doubt that Wellington is a focal point for equestrians, especially in the winter months. Numerous farms from around the world own private facilities and spend thousands of dollars in the area. There is no match for the level of international competition and overall excellent weather anywhere in the world. The city has grown to accommodate the influx of people, and with dressage and polo added to the mix, the air is electric with everything equestrian.

By drawing some of the best riders in the world year after year, The Wellington Equestrian Festival does provide significant value for the top end of the sport. With very good prize money, WEF offers a wide variety of classes including a Nations Cup, World Cup qualifiers, numerous World Ranking classes, and a Jumper Derby. WEF has developed creative ways to help the community, such as The Great Charity Challenge, and to draw crowds for the evening classes, which adds to the flair. Aside from the highlight classes, there are a host of divisions for every level, shopping, dining and social events galore.

This circuit should be ranked within the top three in North America. But it isn't.

Since this is the upper echelon of the sport, one would expect the cost to compete to be higher as well as the potential to win prize money exponentially better, which isn't quite balanced at WEF. It's exorbitantly expensive. But more importantly, the environment should be outstanding. From the competitors' point of view, and NARG is not alone in our perspective, Wellington Equestrian Partners struggles with this important detail – maintaining an excellent place to participate. For many of the riders, trainers and owners there is a begrudging acceptance of the pitfalls, which ultimately leads to a black cloud covering what could and should be a silver lining.

NICE ON THE OUTSIDE, NOT SO NICE ON THE INSIDE

However, WEF continues to disappoint in some of the most basic areas. Even with all the panache, the experience for horses and riders is often stressful. Fees increase each year yet the maintenance of the venue is inadequate. In 2014 the web site was poor, as it has been for years, and there was no ShowNet, a needed service that exhibitors are willing to pay extra to use. But the pressing concern is that the venue is overcrowded, offering woefully insufficient areas to ride and lunge. The constant schooling ring traffic is not a good environment for horses or riders and creates serious safety issues.

With significant downpours last season, there was horrible flooding in the back stabling area, which is unacceptable. The worst part was the tents were set up in a swale (valley) that management had to know would flood if it rained. The conditions in the FEI stabling area, where some of the world's best horses are housed, were subpar and did not meet FEI minimum standards.

WE ARE HERE

We hear that management is considering splitting the international division, for example running concurrent 5★ and 2★ shows, like some of the bigger European shows do successfully. This benefits the top horses, limits the mass numbers in the classes and provides better top-level competition for the spectators. If this is truly underway, NARG would welcome the opportunity to provide input. We are all invested in the future of this facility, this circuit and this sport, and look forward to Wellington Equestrian Partners aligning their vision with ours.



WELL DONE WASHINGTON

The Washington International Horse Show continues to be a national treasure, attended by celebrities, business, military, and diplomatic leaders, as well as horse lovers of all ages. Held in the nation's capital, the beautifully managed event has an unmistakable big-city atmosphere, an excellent VIP and feels important. The urban neighborhood around the Verizon Center is magically transformed into an equestrian venue for one week every year. Streets are closed to make room for stabling, while pedestrians and vehicles make way for the horses.

NARG congratulates the WIHS team for jumping up nine spots in the rankings to number fourteen. The VIP Acela Club was expanded this year to both ends of the arena, and all International Riders were given access, a nice perk. The grooms' kitchen is also appreciated, and the social events were well done. Service, consistently excellent, went above and beyond this year. Any feedback given to management was addressed quickly.

Ceremonies and entertainment were beautifully done, with sponsors noticeably in attendance. The professional video production and replays make WIHS a standout in terms of spectator engagement and atmosphere. For those who couldn't attend, a webcast was available throughout the week, with plenty of press coverage both locally and nationally. The WIHS team's active use of social media is non-stop, with live tweets and live feeds. NARG commends WIHS on all technical aspects.

PLEASE & THANK YOU

The biggest remaining issue of this great event is the footing. Despite the diligence of the maintenance crew, horses slipped in major classes, including the grand prix jump-off. It is unacceptable for an event of this caliber to put horses and riders in this kind of added danger. We understand that WIHS is negotiating with Longines on sponsorship for the new North American World Cup series, and we hope that this will help to crack the footing challenge, and increase prize money as well.

However, the Anthony D'Ambrosio-designed courses were outstanding, keeping fans on the edge of their seats. Also the FEI stabling and security issue was solved successfully in 2014. The relentless efforts of organizer David Distler to streamline the CEM Quarantine process are noted and very much appreciated. Providing top-quality stabling is difficult at best, given the restrictions of being in downtown Washington, but NARG recognizes the limitations and loves the location.

When the footing problem is resolved, and the Longines piece comes together, this event could rank in the top ten or better. Major credit goes to the organizers and the management; Washington International is one of our best venues.

15.



IDEAL DEL MAR

Utilizing essentially the same formula as previous years, this California-based management runs two-weeks of shows in the fall at the Del Mar Fairgrounds facility. Filled with special classes for all levels of exhibitors, including Child/Adult Championships, the culmination of a 1.40m Grand Prix Series and an FEI World Cup Qualifier, they draw a large group of exhibitors. There was a reasonable crowd at the grand prix, with extra curricular activities including a Halloween costume contest for young and old.

In an idyllic location, the venue has all the ingredients to produce a superb event. Several years ago the state-owned fairgrounds invested in a new stadium, a state-of-the-art Jumbotron, and a scoreboard plus excellent footing. The surrounding area offers everything from the beach to boutiques, healthy California fare to fine dining. And the weather is almost always ideal.

MORE...

The footing in the other arenas and schooling area are not at the level of the stadium. The show rings have sand, which is fine if there is good weather; and the schooling areas are on the racetrack, which has fiber sand that has always been unpredictable, and is getting old. The maintenance is usually very good in the show rings, this year it slacked just a bit in the schooling areas.

Although a nice facility, with permanent cinderblock barns, the overall feel outside of the new stadium is a bit old and tired. An overhaul including a power wash would help spruce it up a bit.

The USEF Network covered the World Cup Qualifier, a nice addition, but the color commentary was unprofessional and awkward. Other press was minimal.

NARG continues to recommend the European model – make the event incredible for the amateur (child or adult) with great prizes and fanfare, and focus the big prize money and international flair on the high performance classes. This worked well at the LA Masters just north of this location. It does require a significant investment in marketing and creating an event that feels important. Not the typical US horse show model.

NEXT YEAR

A nice two-week series that has the potential for more, Del Mar International is slated to raise the bar. With the expanded participation from the FEI and Longines in the 2015/2016 World Cup qualifying season, if this show is awarded that distinction NARG feels it will easily rise to the occasion.

16.



WINTER WONDER IN THE DESERT

Although the ranking is slightly lower than last year, the HITS Desert Circuit in Thermal actually scored slightly higher. The improvements continue and evaluators commented accordingly. With warm weather and a well laid out facility, the seven week event attracts competitors from throughout the nation, and culminates with a million dollar grand prix.

After a series of successful years in Indio, CA the HITS Desert Circuit made a bold move to a new Horse Park in 2007. Potentially a touch too early, the first season had a series of issues. Seven seasons later the place has grown into its own winter wonderland. There is plenty of room to ride and park. The footing in the show arenas and the schooling rings has vastly improved over the years. The permanent barns are lovely and reasonably priced for the circuit. Both the VIP and the concessions are well run with an excellent selection of items.

By offering FEI classes and a grand prix with over \$500,000 in prize money, this circuit is still one of the few that earns 20 bonus points. Attracting competitors from all over the North America, the show offers classes for every level and, similar to WEF, many of the barns flee winter climates to spend several months in the desert sun.

NARG also credits HITS management for their continuing effort to work with a committee of trainers who discuss their recommendations several times a year.

OUR OBSERVATION

We realize it is a challenge to have all the footing work well at a large facility, but we also believe that if a management offers eleven show rings, it is their responsibility to make them work well for their clients. HITS is close. The warm-up area for the main arena can still get hard, which we imagine has been discussed by the aforementioned group. Jumper Ring 4 is not up to par; however when asked management did move classes out of that ring.

If there are night classes, the lighting needs to improve for safety reasons. There is a reasonable amount of prize money spread throughout the circuit, but aside from the million-dollar purse in the last grand prix, there aren't any other large purses. Possibly the FEI week could bump up and offer more ranking points and more prize money.

ANTICIPATION

HITS Management deserves a round of applause for developing this facility into a solid show environment. NARG anticipates this will continue to evolve and remain on, if not climb up, the Top 25 list in future years.

17.



THE INTERNATIONAL
OMAHA INDOOR HORSE JUMPING COMPETITION

THE RISE OF OMAHA

With an auspicious beginning, The International in Omaha, Nebraska jumped onto the NARG Top 25 list in 2012, its first year. With some unfortunate mishaps in year two, a lower score dropped the still very new event off the list. It is clear the mission and motivation of the group behind The International is unwavering, as they have risen once again and earned recognition as one of North America's top horse shows.

When the intent is excellence, even the mighty can falter but that only creates a stronger resolution to shine once again. This happens consistently with top international riders, yet they persevere. The same can be said for the group putting this event and Omaha on the map. The two-day European show jumping format is refreshing and a welcome reprieve from multi-day, multi-ring shows.

Some of the most impressive aspects included what makes an event feel important – a great indoor setting with an attractive course, video featuring the riders playing on the Jumbotron and superb ceremonies. The exhibitors as well as the full house of spectators appreciated the amped up ambiance. In our sport it is challenging to fill a stadium that holds thousands of people, yet the International Omaha continues to successfully fill the seats.

LISTENING

Although NARG doesn't take credit for the improvements in year three, our evaluators were impressed with the specific aspects addressed in a number of categories. We expect that top footing and its maintenance was paramount, and with almost perfect scores in this category it showed. We noticed there were mats in the stalls.

One limitation to this event was the date, mid-April, which meant some of the nation's best riders would be at the World Cup Finals. Possibly these dates were picked intentionally, as this very location at a similar time of year, March 27 – April 2nd to be exact, will host the 2017 Longines FEI World Cup Jumping and Dressage Finals.

We suspect more improvements as well as more attendance in the coming years in anticipation of the upcoming finals. This will likely include enhanced concessions and VIP.

REPEAT FEAT

NARG is pleased to see Omaha rise to the top once again. Our huntcaps are off to all the people who want to make a difference in our sport by taking on an endeavor as challenging as producing a Top 25 event.



Silver Oak Jumper Tournament

SILVER OAK SCORES

After making a name for itself in 2013, the Silver Oak Jumper Tournament moved to a new venue, Fieldstone, this year. A bold but well-planned move, the facility owner committed to some serious investments in infrastructure, and the Silver Oak management brought its commitment to top sport to the table, as they continued in pursuit of their goal to be a “Riders’ Horse Show.”

Remaining true to that mission, management made numerous efforts to deliver an outstanding experience. The grass field and the sand arenas held up beautifully even with heavy rain. Grand prix day was not only well-attended but televised. The large crowds that filled the seats, drawn in part by lively bands and entertainment to make the day a real outing, produced an unmistakable vibe of excitement, and a Riders’ Tent well stocked with good food provided a comfortable oasis for competitors.

Awards were elaborately celebrated, with special touches such as the presentation to last year’s champion of an exquisite oil painting of his horse.

Competitors also appreciated that the days ran smoothly, and noted that everyone from the officials to the office were professional and friendly.

A FEW THINGS

Although the show arenas held up well in the rain, the schooling areas could use some improvement. The one for the main arena flooded in the downpour. Possibly stepping up the maintenance, especially in bad weather would help.

Security was very good, with night watch personnel and a 24-hour police guard at the gate. With average size stalls and narrow aisles, the stabling could be bigger and in better condition.

Silver Oak is one of the few events that earns a spot on the Top 25, yet receives no bonus points for offering FEI classes or a purse at \$500,000+.

APPLAUSE

After a successful first year at Fieldstone, this unique and intimate ‘jumpers-only’ show has great potential. The Silver Oak group knows how to produce a top event, and NARG applauds the success of their efforts.



OLD SALEM SATISFIES

Aesthetically one of the best facilities in America, with a grass field that is second to none, Westchester County's Old Salem Farm continues to impress. The management that steps in to host the spring shows in May makes it a pleasure to compete, offering a nice choice for East coast riders between the winter circuits and summer campaigns.

Old Salem's Spring Shows is one of a handful of events that scored higher in 2014 but moved down the list. Not a reflection on the show itself, but on the overall North American horse show landscape improving each year. To achieve and hold a position in the Top 25 is a triumph.

This year the shows included significant improvements to the schedule, classes started on time, and the days ended at a pleasant hour. The upgraded sound system included Peter Doubleday announcing, an appreciated addition.

The grand prix welcomed a sizeable crowd of spectators. The word is out that spending an afternoon in the country watching top-notch show jumping is a nice way to spend the afternoon.

METICULOUS MANAGEMENT

Our evaluators noted that the sand arenas and the schooling areas seem to have deteriorated a bit this year. While the footing stood up to rain, it was hard in dry weather. All would benefit from more frequent grooming, tough to do with a robust schedule, but necessary nonetheless.

Another event that makes the NARG Top 25 list without earning bonus points, Old Salem Spring Shows would benefit from more sponsorship. That boost would create the means to increase prize money and the possibility for the addition of world-ranking classes. This is an ongoing challenge for several show managers.

SPRING CHOICE

Old Salem Farm is beautiful any time of year, but especially in the spring. Management's attention to even the smallest detail makes it a pleasure to be an exhibitor. A job well done; all the ingredients for excellence are in place.



HATS OFF TO HITS SAUGERTIES

NARG continues to commend Tom Struzzieri and the HITS team for their leadership in providing three of the richest prize money competitions in North America. We are very pleased to hear that the Fédération Equestre Internationale has approved the 2015 Saugerties \$1 Million Grand Prix as a CSI5★ event. That combination of prize money and stars should make this the highest-ranked class in the United States in the coming year.

Weather was definitely on the side of the spectators and exhibitors – clear, breezy, and beautiful. Sponsorship and prize money was excellent, with sponsors visibly in attendance. Ceremonies for the top classes were special, but could be stepped up a bit for other classes. Press coverage was good industry-wide, but will no doubt broaden and improve next year with the FEI designation.

Danny Foster's course, along with new jumps and decorations, was appropriately big and challenging as it should be for a million-dollar class. A new announcer upped the excitement vibe a notch, and once again, the competitors appreciated free entry to the incredible VIP.

A LITTLE WORN

While things did appear cleaner and more organized this year, the Million still suffers a bit by coming at the end of a long and busy season.

The concerns expressed by our evaluators last year seem to have been addressed to a degree. Footing in the secondary arenas improved slightly, though there's room for more progress, and the schooling areas still get too packed down and hard.

The office staff is tired, and the stabling areas look a bit run down, though the stalls are of good quality. It would be great to see an effort made to separate horses from the golf carts on the paths.

FEI FERVOR

Crowds for the Million flock to this little sleepy-chic town, for a bit of show jumping excitement and a post-competition concert, a concept that is working well for HITS. But a jam-packed schedule and a need for increased cleanliness of the facility keep the rest of the week from feeling top notch.

Our hats are off to Tom Struzzieri and his team for creating these Million Dollar events. We're certain that the CSI5★ classification will up the ante, spurring management to prepare a fresh, clean, and energized venue as they welcome more world-class riders. NARG sees the future of show jumping in North America continuing to improve with events such as the 2015 Saugerties \$1 Million Grand Prix as a CSI5★.

21.



W

WEST PALMS
EVENT MANAGEMENT

SAVORY SACRAMENTO

This two-week event in California's capital city scores slightly higher this year, even though it moved down two spots on the list. What they do well is commendable – management takes an average facility and transforms it into a nice covered show venue, with night classes, nice presentations and an audience. The overall feeling is important, the course designer is top notch, the footing is good and there is plenty of space to ride.

It's not a simple task to draw a crowd to a show jumping event in a suburban area, and after hosting exciting evenings for a handful of years, and continuing promotion to build a buzz, the Sacramento International has established itself as a destination for both spectators and competitors.

The schedule ran smoothly this year, much more on time than in previous years, and the footing improved in the secondary arenas and schooling areas.

NOT AS SWEET

Our evaluators noted that one of the main issues is there was no loudspeaker in the FEI barn, so it was difficult to know what was happening at the ring. Since the distance from barn to arena is a touch far, it would be safer with improved lighting for night classes. The path changes on Saturday night to allow for overflow parking, which can be confusing so the new path needs to be well-marked.

The webcast is appreciated, it isn't officially produced with commentary but it does have a feed that shows classes throughout the day. There isn't much other press, aside from short press announcements that don't tell the 'story' of the class, and our evaluators found the web site confusing, it was hard to find information they wanted. The VIP is nice, but the concessions could improve.

FUTURE IS BRIGHT

The fundamentals are all in place for an excellent event. Since this management has been chosen to host two of seven west coast 2015/2016 North American World Cup League shows (the second one in Del Mar), NARG looks forward to increased prize money, more FEI classes and superior evaluations in the coming year. Sacramento can and will shine more brightly.



THE VISION FOR YOUNG RIDERS

Without doubt, the NAJYRC is the premier multi-discipline competition in North America for Junior and Young Riders. As such, it should be a special, well-publicized, and widely promoted event. In recent years, too many top young riders are choosing to skip this championship, a clear sign that the producers of this event as well as management are not embracing the big picture.

Truly, these fresh, bright young faces are the future of our sport, and it is essential that we build a pipeline for them to realize their dreams of competing at the international level, and of representing their countries in Olympic competition. With the appointment of DiAnn Langer as the U.S. Show Jumping Young Rider Chef d'Equipe/Technical Advisor, the wheels are starting to turn in the right direction. Creating a long-term vision with a view toward the future of equestrian sport will help guide the direction of this competition.

NARG has recommended that the USEF create a structure of events leading up to the championship by offering this division in each Zone. Though young riders must qualify for the championship, the level of difficulty in the qualifying shows varies according to geography and availability, and often a rider will be caught off-guard by the difficulty of the courses set to FEI standards. A consistent framework of preliminary competitions would raise the importance and create the excitement and prestige that comes with a championship that is a true culminating event.

CONSIDER THIS

The event still receives low marks for total prize money (there is none), advertising and community outreach, a dated website, little use of social media, and poor attendance. The excitement factor is desperately in need of improvement, not to mention the lack of audience.

Still the basic aspects of the show are well managed, and it continues to hold a place in the Top 25. The Kentucky Horse Park is beautiful and expansive, with plenty of room to ride, plus restaurants and museums on site. The Rolex arena is outstanding and the Walnut Ring worked fine for the speed section. The courses are beautiful and technically challenging, as they should be at a National Championship. Those who did compete achieved solid goals and the medal winners deserve applause.

The NAJYRC should be an aspiration of all young show jumpers, dressage riders, eventers, endurance riders and reiners, and the stands should be filled with wannabe juniors who hope to be competing in this prestigious Championship someday.

23.



GLITZ AND GRAND PRIX

Las Vegas has an incomparable aura all of its own. Blenheim EquiSports brings the grand prix to the glitz, dresses it up a touch, hosts evening classes, including FEI, in an ideal indoor setting for a horse show. No other event offers hotel rooms, dining, spa, bowling, movies, gambling and an equestrian facility all under one roof. This unique setting gives the event a leg up.

The footing in both arenas areas received a perfect grade. The sand gave without slipping, and was well maintained. The construction NARG noted last year resulted in the new Priefert Arena and warm-up area, a huge improvement from the previous covered ring that shared the schooling area with the main ring.

Also new this year, Blenheim brought in the USEF Network. Both rings received full coverage, plus daily photos and a handful of live interviews. The autograph signing after the grand prix was well attended.

A FEW FIXES

Evaluators noted that although the permanent stalls inside the building are nice, exhibitors had to pay for their own stall mats and the FEI stabling was quite far from the show arena. However the FEI security improved over last year and was to FEI standards.

The schooling areas were a bit deep after fences, requiring more maintenance than in the main arenas. The jumps seemed a little plain, the arena overall has a western feel and could use some equestrian panache.

Evaluators noted that although the Las Vegas National offered all that was required by the FEI, plus a parade of nations and pre-show entertainment on grand prix night, the show lacked that important feeling of show jumping excitement and the attendance was only fair.

Blenheim provided free rooms for all FEI riders, an appreciated perk. However the VIP was weak and the food inside the venue is poor. The arena would benefit from a VIP similar to the National Horse Show, where not only could the sponsors, competitors and invited guests more readily enjoy the experience, but the elegance would help the lack of ambiance.

MAKE IT VEGAS

Overall a nice show for riders and horses with excellent footing, ample room to ride, and a good variety of classes, what the Las Vegas National lacks is that wow factor.

With its incomparable unique Vegas setting, Blenheim's management experience and increased wow for both the competitor and the fans, this event has the potential to be top notch in every aspect.

SPRING IN LEXINGTON



The Kentucky Horse Park is, as we've stated, one of the best venues in North America. Footing in the main arena is excellent, even after it rains, there is unlimited space to ride on well-kept grounds, along with good permanent stabling and nice courses. As the only state park devoted to the horse, with museums and year-round visitors, as well as a vibrant horse community of thoroughbred and recently several show jumping facilities, Lexington is a natural destination for competitors and tourists alike.

After trouble in past years, the footing in the main arena and schooling area is great. The secondary rings can get hard and were sometimes overwatered. Stabling is good, but with the increase in horses, manure removal needs to increase.

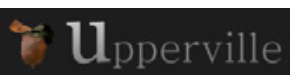
TRY FOCUSING ON THE TOP

We feel that management's decision to forgo international level classes, while understandable in terms of cost, should be reversed. In our view, some focus on top-level sport would not only increase the participation of world-class professionals, but also continue to drive the overall attendance at the Kentucky spring and summer shows. Streamlining the schedule would improve the experience for all constituencies, including riders, trainers, and spectators, ultimately a win-win. Currently there are too many classes, the days drag on and the grand prix gets pushed to dusk, when the light is not at all ideal for show jumping. Then the next day starts early, which is exhausting for all involved.

This event also suffers from a lack of wow. This facility hosts the ever-popular Rolex 3-day event, which brings thousands of people to the park; it seems more effort should be made in that direction.

It is our understanding that management is seeking to hold a 3★ week with three World Ranking classes, as well as two National Classes, on week two. We applaud and support that effort. There is no doubt that this outstanding venue, given the experience of its management, can host an amazing show jumping event and secure its place in the Top 25.

WELCOME UPPERVILLE



NARG welcomes the first organized horse show in the United States, the Upperville Colt and Horse Show, to the NARG Top 25 of 2014. Hosted on the same grounds since 1853, the show is set in the scenic rolling hills of Virginia's Piedmont country, straddling the historic Route 50 Corridor. The Board of Directors has masterfully combined the patina of its long history with an eye to the comfort of its exhibitors and the pleasure of its loyal spectators.

Upperville received a perfect mark from our evaluators for the quality of the Euro footing in the Main Arena. Stabling improved, with newer tents, and competitors appreciated the walking paths that were limited to horses only. The courses and the jumps, which are molded into the incomparable scenery, were undeniably beautiful. The Charles Owen riders lounge between the two jumper rings was fully enclosed and air-conditioned with great food. The beautiful VIP at the end of the ring offered an excellent catered buffet all week, as well as a comfortable seating area with a big screen television for viewing the action in the rings.

The long tradition of this show ensures a large and enthusiastic crowd every year. There was a free webcast, but no television coverage. NARG would like to see the five-star Salamander Hotel in nearby Middleburg offer a significant discount to exhibitors. World-ranking classes would be a plus.

Our hats are off to all those involved with Upperville. They are putting the sport first, and pushing hard for more sponsorship. Indications are that the prize money will be stepped up in 2015. Further improvements in footing are in the works, with plans to install Euro footing in the secondary arena. We salute their commitment.



CHASING PERFECTION

For twenty years, Live Oak Plantation, a 4,500-acre Thoroughbred farm owned by The Weber family, has hosted a world-class Driving competition, one of only two in the United States sanctioned by the FEI. In 2012, Show Jumping was added to the roster, drawing thirty-five riders from sixteen countries in its first year.

Now in its third year, Live Oak International is adhering to their motto, “Chase Perfection, Catch Excellence”. Evaluators appreciated the extra efforts made by the management, describing the experience as “wonderful, looking forward to next year.”

Amenities were generous, with free VIP for riders, a shipping allowance through Brookledge, and a Lugano Diamonds Competitors Party on Saturday. Footing was good, despite rain the day before, and great effort was made to maintain it between rounds. The pole tent stabling was fine, however the walk to the arena, while beautiful and peaceful, was a bit long. One suggested improvement would be a European counter in the warm-up area, as announcements were difficult to hear. Marketing could use a bump, but for a young event in our sport its popularity and reputation are organically rising.

STRONG VISION

The Weber family and their team have a vision for Live Oak International as ‘America’s Aachen’. They transitioned from one-day of show jumping to multiple days this year; the next step is to add a 3-day event to the schedule. With their strong focus on hospitality, along with their exceptional facilities and expansive property, more world-ranking classes, and prize money on the increase, plus thousands of enthusiastic fans that return each year, their sights are clearly set on continuing that chase for excellence.



A TEAM OF HORSEMEN

The Rocky Mountain Classics I & II were the first FEI Grand Prix events ever held at Anderson Ranch in Calgary, Alberta. The Rocky Mountain Show Jumping management team consists of horsemen still actively competing in the sport and passionately interested in its progress and evolution. Founded by John Anderson, once a member of Canada’s Olympic Show Jumping team, RMSJ is headquartered at Anderson Ranch, just minutes from world-renowned Spruce Meadows.

The facility now features three all weather footing show rings, three grass competition rings and indoor stabling for over 300 horses. The footing in the grass fields and in the secondary rings is top quality, holding up well to wet weather as well as heavy traffic. The Euro footing in the large warm-up areas is also excellent, though a bit more susceptible to steady rain. There is plenty of room to ride, with the added pleasure of having the Canadian Rockies as a backdrop.

The new large, bright, clean stabling area also has ample space for hand walking and grazing. The schedule ran on time, and the scoreboard and speakers were state-of-the-art, however the jumps as well as the announcer could use a little more pizzazz.

There was a nice VIP area, and food concessions excellent, with quality food at good prices. Ideally sponsorship and prize money can be stepped up, that’s always an ongoing effort. The new website is well done and user-friendly, and the big classes were available for view online. There was no television coverage, and publicity could be better, but attendance was still quite good.

MOVING ON UP

Achieving a nice balance between feeling important and maintaining a low-key environment, the shows have a friendly Canadian feel. The management team has an eye on the future of the sport and a vision for the success and growth of their brand. They seem to welcome suggestions and are ready and willing to act on them, a recipe for success that bodes well for a move up in the rankings.

1.

SPECIALTY



#1: THE NEW ALBANY CLASSIC & FAMILY DAY

Once again, The New Albany Classic comes in on top in NARG's Specialty Events Category. Held on the Wexner's magnificent 550-acre estate, the truly special day draws huge crowds, more than 15,000 this year, who come to enjoy a day of entertainment.

Offering carnival rides, a zip line, archery instruction, pig races, dog agility demonstrations, a Tween concert, and mixing in a top-level grand prix competition, the Wexners have found a brilliant way to draw in new fans, produce a nice event and raise money for charity.

The top thirty riders from the computer list that receive an invite to this FEI-sanctioned \$125,000 world-ranking event pay no entry fees, stabling expenses, or hotel costs, and are treated to a lovely VIP. In addition to the prize money, the winner receives a two-year lease on a Mercedes.

The organizers ask only that the competitors make a donation to the charity supported by the event. Because it is held on the Wexner estate and they underwrite the entire cost, all of the proceeds benefit The Center for Family Safety and Health.

Every aspect of the competition is outstanding. The grass field was pristine. The course was both challenging and beautiful, and all technical aspects were first-class. New and much appreciated wash stalls were added to the stabling area this year.

Along with the local and equestrian press, we'd love to see some television coverage of the grand prix that could expand the excitement to an audience beyond those in attendance.

Other than expanding appreciation for a superb and unique show jumping event, it's hard to imagine improving on The New Albany Classic. An anticipated event for competitors as well as thousands of attendees, all are grateful to the Wexners for their tremendous efforts. We look forward to the 2015 show.

2.

SPECIALTY



#2: TRUMP INVITATIONAL

In its second year, the Trump Invitational at Mar-a-Lago has jumped right up into a close second position as one of America's premier specialty equestrian events. The Mar-a-Lago Club setting is exquisite. Designated a U.S. National Landmark in 1969, the property was purchased and restored by Donald Trump in 1985, and is one of the most spectacular mansions in the world. Situated on Florida's beautiful Intracoastal Waterway, the estate forms a sumptuous backdrop for the grand prix, which draws a crowd of Palm Beach's A-list and raises significant amounts of money for charity.

Showcasing 36 of the world's top riders (by invitation only) in an FEI world-ranking competition, the \$125,000 Trump Invitational Grand Prix kicks off the twelve-week Winter Equestrian Festival.

Addressing our concerns about last year's footing, Donald Trump spared no expense in replacing the turf in the grand prix arena and in the schooling area as well. Clearly having learned from the previous year's debacle, he commented, "a world-class event requires world-class footing." And world-class it was. Plagued with torrential rain, the footing was unfazed, remaining in good condition throughout and requiring no maintenance.

Unfortunately, the stabling area didn't fare quite so well, flooding under the pressure of the intense rain. Weather also caused a delay in the schedule, and the time for re-starting was a bit unclear.

The elegant VIP area was filled, and riders, owners, and trainers were welcome. In addition to the VIP experience at the ring, competitors enjoyed cocktails and a red carpet welcome at the pool. Press coverage was abundant, though there were some technical difficulties with the Webcast.

Given that most problems this year were related to the unusually intense rain, the vastly improved event was indeed a success. Hoping for sunshine in future years, NARG is pleased to see this elegant event rise and shine.

3.

SPECIALTY



#3: THE AMERICAN INVITATIONAL

At forty-two years of age, the American Invitational remains one of North America's oldest show jumping traditions. Similar to other Specialty Events, the top thirty riders on the USEF Ranking List are invited to this FEI grand prix that offers a \$200,000 purse.

In 2014, after many years at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, management made the move to Sun Life Stadium in Miami, a larger venue that is much closer to the action in Wellington. A new schooling area with all-weather footing and stabling next to the in-gate were much appreciated improvements.

As always, the courses and the jumps were first-class, as were all the technical aspects of the competition, which included two Jumbotrons in the stadium and televisions in the new and superb VIP. Another nice addition was the hospitality tent that offered free food while videos of past Invitationals played on the screen.

However, as often happens with a change of venue, important aspects need to be worked out. Although the event was lovely, the footing was disastrous; the grass seemed to have no roots or base, and the horses' hooves dug deep into the ground, causing some competitors to scratch. NARG knows that management is well aware of the problem, and trusts that it will be a distant memory in 2015, as the American Invitational becomes part of a three-day show jumping extravaganza that includes the first ever North American Global Champions Tour event.

Not having much chance for advance publicity last year, attendance was down. It is always a challenge to fill the seats of a stadium. Expecting that the marketing will pick up quite a bit for this year, certainly the combined days of superior show jumping should attract a nice crowd.

NARG salutes the tradition of the American Invitational and supports all the efforts to make it great.

4.

SPECIALTY



#4: CENTRAL PARK HORSE SHOW

What could be better than a \$210,000 world-ranking FEI grand prix wrapped in the magic of Manhattan? With a spectacular setting, live television coverage, elite sponsorship, an elegant VIP, and an atmosphere second to none, the Central Park Horse Show brought show jumping back to New York City with style.

NARG congratulates Mark Bellissimo and his team for bringing this event to fruition. Organizing a horse show in the nation's largest city is tricky to say the least. True that some of the logistical challenges will need to be sorted out next year, however some aspects are simply part of the city lifestyle. For example, space was at a premium. The ring was small for a competition at this level, as were the schooling and stabling areas.

The footing was good and the Steve Stephens jumps were uniquely designed specifically for this event. But the course proved too difficult and the time was too tight for the venue. Run in a Winning Round format, the class was won with a four fault score, which made it confusing to those watching on the NBC Sports Network.

The staging area to go into the city was at Gladstone, and only the horses showing each day were allowed into the city. This process was disorganized and confusing, and could improve with better communication.

Despite its challenges, the concept is fantastic, and although challenging, the potential for sponsors and spectators is phenomenal. The lack of space is part of the adventure, so riders that choose to compete know this going in. NARG would like to see improvements in course design, organization and communication. For the first year the Central Park Horse Show was certainly commendable.



HONORABLE MENTIONS



Since beginning this venture, we have recognized a horse show tapestry that is quite expansive and satisfies many levels of the sport. Initially, some of the top national shows made the Top 25, even though they didn't offer FEI classes or top money grand prix classes. We applaud these events and their management, as they have and will continue to produce popular, well-run horse shows.

Many of these management teams uphold standards we value in top shows, including excellent footing and nice stabling, which make up 40% of the score. For several reasons including developing a string of young horses and training clients, a good number of top level competitors choose to compete at these shows throughout the year.

The honorable mentions either consciously choose to serve their audience, which may not be top-level show jumpers; or they are working towards making the list; or they had a mishap this year and will be back another year.

Tryon is terrific. A brand new venue with a ton of potential, Tryon's outstanding footing and stabling received perfect scores. Not yet offering top level sport, they did host nice grand prix classes, the schedule was light so the days were nice, and they have a lot of local support.

The National Sunshine Series shined. When it comes to customer service, the new owners of what used to be the LA Preview and LA National went all out to create a great experience for the exhibitor. And it was appreciated as well as rewarded in the scores. Other areas need a bump up, some that the hired management could address, which will help improve scores in the future.

Lake Placid is lovely. From a warm welcome to superb ceremony to a beautiful grass field to delicious concessions, management makes every competitor feel important. But the new footing in the secondary arenas wasn't quite ready, especially with the heavy rain. The schooling areas still need work. We love Lake Placid, recognize the efforts they continue to make and look forward to next season.

Horse Shows by the Bay is a super summer stop. HSBB is another friendly horse show environment near a great town with loads of stuff to do. They limited the entries, so days were shorter. Much appreciated. Overall a nice national series of shows that have continued to improve, our evaluators enjoy the HSBB experience.

Blenheim EquiSports is top notch. This southern California show management knows how to and has produced an Olympic level event. Their show seasons in San Juan Capistrano and Del Mar offer something for every competitor, including grand prix classes. Both facilities have grass fields and international level course designers. An excellent example of national level shows which fits their constituency to a 't'.

Del Mar National has a loyal following. This traditional southern California show still attracts a loyal audience after many years. The facility is the same as Del Mar International, an exceptional main arena with nice footing and a jumbotron, but otherwise it needs some sprucing up. With a downgrade on secondary arena footing, stabling and course design, and no bonus points, this event slipped out of the Top 25.

Bromont is building up... Once an Olympic site, Bromont is beautiful and capable of great things. The shows and the area have a European feel. The FEI classes draw some top barns from the East Coast and Canada. But the place needs a facelift, especially before they host a multi-discipline international event in 2018. We assume a solid refurbishing plan is in place for the upcoming World Equestrian Games.

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To unite professional riders, trainers and owners to use their collective strength to make show jumping in North America the best in the world.

Established five years ago, the North American Riders Group continues to address and weigh in on national and international issues affecting our sport. There is always room for improvement and we strive to recognize and achieve this within NARG, our governing bodies as well as in our sport.



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