



NORTH AMERICAN RIDERS GROUP

# THE TOP 25 of 2013





# Together, we can improve our sport.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2-3
Show Scoring	4
Show Rankings	5
Show Write Ups	6-31
Specialty Equestrian Events	32-35
Honorable Mentions	36
Photo Credits	37
Our Sponsors	37

# THE FOURTH ANNUAL NARG REPORT: THE TOP 25 OF 2013

Over the past five years, NARG has evolved. We've developed a renewed perspective in regards to how horse shows are run as well as how our sport is governed. We believe that we've bridged an important gap between "us" and "them". We will continue to follow that path.

As we roll into year four of the NARG Top 25, a list of key aspects is emerging from our efforts. As a group dedicated to high performance show jumping, we see the path for North America through those eyes, and have ceased to try and see it any other way.

To be clear about our vision for the Top 25, we don't negate the top-notch American horse shows that offer classes for all levels in the hunter, jumper and equitation arenas. We commend those events that have created an assortment of options for riders of all ages and aspirations. Those events are worthy to thousands of exhibitors. And our efforts over these past five years have improved a number of these shows. NARG hopes that trend continues as a result of the NARG Top 25. With the hundreds of horse shows on the calendar, there are certainly a number of nice events from that American genre that don't make the list.

But those shows are not our focus. If our goal is to improve the sport of show jumping, this process is an essential step. To produce top international teams and individuals in North America we must offer destination events that prepare, challenge and reward the best horse and rider combinations. The best shows attract the best riders, in turn offering the toughest competition and equestrian sport worth watching. We believe a successful high end of the sport will grow the entire sport, from grassroots to the Olympic Games. And NARG envisions this for an elite group of horse shows in North America, expanding in the years to come.

## DEFINING A GRAND PRIX

This year we adjusted our evaluations to reflect primarily the show jumper aspects of the events. NARG seeks to reward shows that offer grand prix classes with jumps, courses, atmosphere and prize money comparable to a top European show. These are a different level of building blocks, ones that prepare the competitors for international championships.

That leads to the query of national versus international. If the event chooses not to pay the fees the FEI requires for hosting a world-ranking class, which does add an expense to the bottom line, does the show management tend to uphold the international expectations from jump height to course design to quality of competition to venue, not only for the highlight grand prix but beyond? We would like to believe so, but are not completely convinced. Although not our preferred option, hosting a non-FEI event is acceptable; nonetheless, upholding top quality show standards in all categories is mandatory.

## EVALUATING STANDARDS

NARG believes strongly in upholding standards, which is why we created our own evaluation for horse shows. New standards are now in effect for USEF-recognized events, which is a great step if shows uphold them and are held accountable if they do not.

For a couple of years, the FEI evaluated the shows that were hosting World Cup qualifiers, resulting in some changes to the schedule. Also score-based, those evaluations had their own set of standards and practices that the FEI deemed important in order to be associated with the FEI World Cup brand.

Whether or not organizing committees and management agree to accept the results, these efforts have shed and should continue to shine significant light on horse show standards.



## WHY FEI

Because the FEI is the international authority on the sport of show jumping – they rank the world’s top riders and sponsor some of the world’s top championships – NARG would like to encourage more shows to participate in hosting FEI classes and divisions in North America. We realize there is a cost in offering FEI classes and continue to seek a solution that works for both our goals for the sport and the managers who produce the events. That stated, NARG asks: Can there be 25 top FEI-sanctioned events in North America? Ones that offer significant opportunity for world ranking points, uphold top standards and offer great prize money? We believe the answer is yes.

## WHY TOP 25

One of NARG’s goals is that each of the Top 25 events, as well as the Specialty Shows, uphold standards that equal outstanding equestrian sport. If, and when, that happens, we will have achieved multiple objectives, including: vastly improving shows in North America; helping to build a pipeline for aspiring show jumpers to succeed in North America and Europe; creating events worth watching in North America, in turn building a fan base that wants to attend, follow, watch and invest in equestrian sport on multiple levels, from taking lessons to purchasing top level show jumpers.

## NOW ON TO THE NARG TOP 25 of 2013

We saw some interesting trends and results in this year’s rankings once again. For the first time we added bonus points for offering FEI classes (10 points) and prize money at \$500,000 or above (10 points).

An important aspect to top events, the bonus points did affect the rankings to a degree – but the aspects of superb footing, stabling, course design and overall venue are still the most significant factors.

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Score of 80% or higher	4	6	11	11
Score of 70% -79%	11	18	14	14
Score required to make Top 25	61	69	74	74
NARG Top 25 Average Score	72	76	80	81

# 2013 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%
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>			<b>500</b>	<b>100%</b>

## 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%
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>			<b>500</b>	<b>100%</b>

## 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

# 2013 SHOW RANKINGS

EVENT	SCORE %	TOTAL	FOOTING	STABLING	COURSES	TECHNICAL	FINANCIAL	CEREMONY	MARKETING	MISC.	BONUS
SPRUCE/MASTERS	96%	481	41	18	9	24	23	30	25	24	20
THUNDERBIRD	93%	463	40	18	10	25	21	29	23	23	10
GOLD CUP	90%	451	41	17	10	23	22	25	24	22	10
ROYAL	90%	448	24	19	9	23	23	28	24	22	10
ALLTECH NATL	88%	442	22	20	10	22	22	27	21	24	10
DEVON	85%	424	45	14	9	23	18	26	20	22	0
PNHS	83%	414	23	19	10	22	21	19	19	21	10
HAMPTON CLSC	82%	411	32	14	8	20	23	29	24	22	10
DEL MAR NATL	82%	410	39	18	9	24	17	23	18	20	0
WEF	81%	403	30	16	7	19	20	28	24	19	20
HITS THERMAL	80%	399	34	15	8	19	21	24	17	20	20
OLD SALEM	79%	395	43	15	9	21	14	21	17	22	0
SILVER OAK	78%	390	28	17	9	23	17	26	19	24	0
HITS MILLION	78%	389	29	13	9	17	21	29	23	21	10
KY SPRING	78%	389	40	15	10	21	16	22	13	21	0
LAS VEGAS	77%	387	30	15	10	21	20	24	15	21	10
DEL MAR INTL	77%	387	33	17	8	19	21	22	16	19	10
NAJYRC	77%	384	30	16	9	20	13	19	9	18	10
SACRAMENTO	77%	384	33	15	9	20	18	23	19	18	10
XALAPA	76%	379	36	14	10	21	18	24	11	21	0
LAKE PLACID	76%	378	30	15	9	23	17	24	17	23	0
SHOWPARK	75%	376	31	15	9	19	19	24	15	19	10
WASHINGTON	75%	375	20	11	6	21	18	29	23	22	10
HSBB	75%	374	36	15	9	17	13	24	17	23	0
BROMONT	74%	368	24	16	10	17	21	22	21	18	10

## SPECIALTY EQUESTRIAN EVENTS SECTION

EVENT	SCORE %	TOTAL	FOOTING	STABLING	COURSES	TECHNICAL	FINANCIAL	CEREMONY	MARKETING	MISC.	BONUS
NEW ALBANY	88%	442	26	16	10	25	24	30	15	21	10
AMERICAN INV	82%	412	20	16	10	24	25	28	16	19	10
LIVE OAK	78%	390	24	13	10	23	19	24	16	17	10
TRUMP INV	67%	337	6	13	9	20	21	30	18	22	10

1.

# SPRUCE MEADOWS







# TOP NOTCH

Spruce Meadows has always had an aura of excellence. Once again they win the top nod from NARG, but we are not alone. TripAdvisor, the world's largest travel site, awarded Spruce a Certificate of Excellence and the distinction of #1 attraction in Calgary for the second year in a row.

All of the top tournaments in North America should have a mission that begins like this: "[We are] committed to being the leading venue in the world in international horse sports..." and then put their minds, money and efforts towards that end as Spruce has done for almost forty years. Setting their standards high decades ago, the facility was awarded North America's first CSIO in 1977 and 50,000 spectators came to watch that season.

Interestingly their score of 92-93 has remained steadfast, and unbeatable, since the inception of The NARG Top 25. This year it increased due to bonus points NARG assigned to events that offer FEI classes and grand prix events with prize money over \$500,000, which Spruce does each season in style.

## A NOTE ON THE FOOTING

Spruce has a team that works on the footing year-round and it shows. They put new grass in after the Masters in 2012, and it is excellent. Although a couple spots were slippery when wet, for grass footing it can tolerate a significant amount of rain.

NARG recommends moving FEI classes out of the All Canada Ring. We feel strongly that the footing is not acceptable for that level of show jumping. In regards to the schooling areas, the grass for the International Ring was better this year and the footing in the coverall improved. The North American Ring schooling area and the lunging areas need a little work.

## AND THE COMPETITION

Competition at Spruce is always world class. It runs amazingly well. The computer program manages to avoid rider conflicts and classes start on time. We would like to note that it felt like the facility was at full capacity this year. Although excellent in terms of high level competition, there was some congestion at the North American ring with golf carts, bicycles and horses.

The courses were top notch for the most part, with the exception of week one where the time allowed in many classes was too tight. We noted a few judging errors in the back rings this year. All minor mishaps and we know the Spruce team will take note.

## EXCELLENCE EVERYWHERE

Both the week off in the summer and the additional \$500,000 grand prix were welcomed changes. With Canadian Pacific returning as a top sponsor, we congratulate Spruce and look forward to the Masters having a \$1.5 million purse in 2014.

We strongly recommend that anyone interested in experiencing a superior sporting event choose Spruce Meadows. The facilities are splendid; the air of excellence is everywhere. It is an experience worth having whether you compete or come for fun. Note that excellence comes at a price, it is expensive to play here but it is well worth it. Spruce Meadows not only ranks at the top of our list, it is one of the best venues in the world.

After four years, Spruce Meadows continues to hold our banner high – sport first – and we commend them wholeheartedly.





tbird.

## THUNDERBIRD IS TERRIFIC

Another Canadian wonder of the horse show world, Thunderbird is Spruce Meadows with a homey feeling. Every evaluator raves about how the Thunderbird management team is tremendously accommodating and exhibitor friendly, while still maintaining good sport. The facility is wonderful for horses, with plenty of grass, paddocks, trails and many stabling options including a quarantine barn.

It is fitting that they jumped back into second position this year. Along with the above accolades, they earned ten bonus points by offering FEI classes in their schedule, including three CSI\*\*, two with World Cup Qualifiers.

Thunderbird Show Park is located just off the TransCanada highway in Langley, BC, the facility is three hours north of Seattle, WA and less than 30 miles southeast of Vancouver.

### ALL GOOD

Similar to Spruce, Thunderbird doesn't rest on their good scores but they make improvements year after year. A brand new course of jumps decorated the fields and arenas this season. The press coverage was world class including interviews on the morning news and a live stream on FEI TV. The stands were at capacity and the ceremony is well done. Innovative sponsorships make it fun for competitors and sponsors alike; for example, Maui Jim gave sunglasses to the top eight in their grand prix.

Although a touch soft when it rained, the grass field at Thunderbird is not only superb but also impeccably maintained. The synthetic footing in the secondary arena is excellent, but some of the other show rings didn't seem to have the same footing. Similarly with the schooling areas, the primary schooling area was pristine though others could get a touch dry.

The two Riders' Lounges serve free meals daily while always stocked with drinks and snacks. The FEI riders receive VIP passes and those competitors that are sitting in the top ten of their World Cup League earn a \$1,500 appearance fee.

### THE PRIZE

The overall prize money is a notch lower than other events of this caliber. Seems with all the media efforts and the increasing popularity, Thunderbird is prime for a big money sponsor, or sponsors, to match its otherwise tremendous presence.

NARG commends Thunderbird on maintaining a top position for the third year in a row. This year an evaluator attending for the first time stated, "We will return. We want to go year after year."



## OH GLORIOUS GOLD CUP

Once the highlight of the Chagrin Valley Horse Show in Ohio, the American Gold Cup was a tradition on the grand prix calendar. With several location changes over the years, the event didn't regain its glory until landing in New York at Old Salem Farm. Our hats are off to Stadium Jumping and Old Salem for combining tradition with a world class venue. Moving up nine spots this year, The American Gold Cup earns the 2013 NARG Most Improved Top 25 Horse Show Award.

### ALMOST IDEAL

It is notable that the top three scores in the NARG Top 25 each maintain beautiful grass fields for show jumping. Old Salem prepared the field correctly this year, which made a world of difference. It helped that Mother Nature was kind making it a perfect fall day. Old Salem's sand rings are also excellent

The course design and jumps were superb. Prize money increased, which is always appreciated. Top that off with great hospitality, where not only was there no entry fee for the grand prix but all FEI riders were given two armbands to the exquisite two-story Hermes VIP. However we have to mention that the food was not quite as well done as the set up.

With four world ranking classes, the American Gold Cup also earned ten bonus points this year. NARG suggests adding back in the Speed Derby for a touch of variety in the schedule.

The event was live on Shownet, USEF Network and FEI TV plus an NBC Sports broadcast. The facility was packed on grand prix day, which led to some parking issues for spectators which management plans to address. A nice problem to have in year two.

### THANK YOU

In this second year of the American Gold Cup at Old Salem Farm, the improvements and prestige were all in place. An excellent North American product, NARG is proud to see this event regain its success and feels confident that the teams behind the effort will keep the Gold Cup banner waving high.



## ONE ROYAL SENSATION

Making the worthwhile investment in fiber-based footing mixed with solid prize money, six world ranking classes, an awesome crowd and nice exhibitor benefits, The Royal has re-emerged as a fall indoor circuit sensation. Each year the Organizing Committee has listened and subsequently improved the event, resulting in solid moves up the ranking list. The Royal advanced from 17th in 2011 to 10th in 2012, and then this year jumped up to 4th on the NARG Top 25.

Also steeped in tradition, The Royal knows how to entertain a crowd and keeps the place hopping. The scoreboard shows instant replays, there are commentators in the tower and on the ground. There's a buzz in the air, one of a true sporting event, which NARG feels could and should happen at more top level shows. It's fun for competitors and spectators alike, and bodes well for sponsors.

Downtown Toronto embraces The Royal, adding to the air of importance. The stabling is nice and they resolved the safety issues we raised last year. Hotel and shuttle are covered for the FEI riders. Simply a sensational show jumping atmosphere.

## THE MINOR DETAILS

Overall the footing was excellent, but got a little loose in the speed classes. As long as they maintain it well it will continue to be top notch. A few of the classes started late, which is sometimes hard to avoid. There isn't a ton of room, typical for an indoor show. We recommend placing an outdoor tent with footing to add some additional riding area. The jumps are a touch tired; they could use some new material. It would be nice to have lower fees overall, but for a great experience it is worth the price.

## CONGRATS

Once again, Royally done and thank you for taking action on our recommendations. Congratulations on a spectacular sport horse tournament that has earned a score of 90 for a fourth place position on the NARG Top 25.



5.



## ALLTECH IS ALL THAT

Now in year three, the aptly renamed Alltech National Horse Show is without question the best indoor show in the United States. NARG continues to believe that each year this show improves and has all the pieces to maintain and elevate its top ranking. The Alltech Arena is one of the most pristine and well-planned indoor equestrian facilities, truly second to none. And the Organizing Committee knows how to put on a show. Top prize money and world ranking classes, tremendous exhibitor perks, permanent stabling and excellent main ring footing mixed with superb shopping and a social calendar offer what NARG seeks. Add in top course design with a solid turnout of international competitors and a burgeoning audience, and you have all the ingredients for a grand sporting event.

### IMPROVING BUT...

We respect the organizers of this event for taking feedback and continuing to create a better event from every perspective. The VIP area was a sold out success in its second year. The well-located Riders Lounge with catered meals and a live feed from the arena is so appreciated. Access to the stands from the arena and schooling areas makes a world of difference. With planned community events over the weekend catering to adults and families, a DJ in the 'house' for the highlight events plus the building of a loyal fan base, the stadium seats are filling up. Markedly better attended this year. And notably the show was upgraded to a 5★, one of the few in North America. Bravo.

Our biggest issue is with the footing in the FEI schooling area. It is substandard, not even close to the caliber of the footing in the show ring. Although stabling is nice, the temporary stalls added to house non-FEI horses made that area crowded and more difficult to work in. The jumper schedule could still use a touch of work so that the highlight events run at prime time, as well as optimizing the prize money allocation to take advantage of the 5★ ranking.

### LEXINGTON NOTICED

Although still working towards building a reputation as a must-attend event for both locals and show jumping fans nationwide, the efforts this year did not go unnoticed. With Halloween trick-or-treating for the kids and the new Kentucky Gathering that included 'Horses, Heritage & Hops', the innovative ways to make the evening events an experience are underway. If Alltech continues to offer something for everyone, the fan base will evolve. Congratulations.



## DEVON IS DIVINE

Devon can still proudly uphold their motto ‘Where Champions Meet’. It is truly an American tradition that extends beyond sport. The old-world country charm is unmatched, unique and alluring for competitors and loyal attendees.

Nibble on tea sandwiches, delight in Devon fudge (made by volunteers), ride a ferris wheel with the show below, listen to barbershop quartets, wear a fancy hat and shop at the splendid array of stores – all part of the Devon experience. It is for these reasons and more that riders and spectators travel a great distance to attend.

NARG appreciates these details about Devon. We also commend the efforts the management has made with footing – receiving a perfect score this year and last proves they not only invested, to date they are also maintaining the excellence. The course design and jumps are both well done. The exclusivity of having to qualify adds to the importance.

## THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

The tight parking is a part of the Devon experience. Not ideal but expected. It is always fun to have an enthusiastic crowd and Devon delivers this year after year. The stables are old and charming, cute from the outside but aspects do need improvement. Some stalls flooded this year, the lighting is poor, and horses can kick through the wood boards. We understand that barn renovations continue.

Of course we were extremely disappointed that Devon dropped their FEI classes this year. We understand, have studied, and are working on the fact that the FEI fees are a big expense and if a show doesn't have the exhibitors to support the effort it can affect the bottom line.

NARG loves Devon and all it stands for. Our recommendation is to consider flipping the schedule so the grand prix is scheduled earlier and the juniors later. This could help with the riders heading to Spruce as well as kids still in school. It may also help alleviate the travel conflict, although we still feel that arranging a charter to Spruce shows that Devon wants the quality show jumpers to be a part of the experience.

## KEEP IT UP

The Devon Horse Show & Country Fair has all the ingredients to be a superb event. In many aspects it is there, but the ongoing challenge of offering world-ranking classes, top prize money and drawing the best show jumpers remains. NARG would like to assist in finding a solution. Devon deserves to continue to be a delight for all involved.



7.



## HAIL TO HARRISBURG

Although bumping down one ranking spot on the Top 25 list this year, The Pennsylvania National Horse Show (Harrisburg) did not receive a lower score. All that is well with this indoor show remains superb and the parts that require attention still need to be addressed. Having reached out to us in past years, we know that the group behind this traditional event wants it to be an important stop on the show calendar and make improvements accordingly, when possible.

The Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex & Expo Center is a nice venue with plenty of room, a plus for an indoor facility. The footing in the main arena and small schooling area close by is excellent. With three FEI classes in the schedule, they continue to host world-ranking classes, a definite benefit. Courses are top notch. Presentation and scheduling improved this year. The exhibitor hospitality is well done. Each year a solid group of riders compete, so the setting is right for a top sporting event.

## IS IT POSSIBLE?

It may be a budget issue, but the larger schooling area needs new footing. Although it improves as the show goes on, the footing is lumpy, rocky and hard. It is not nearly as good as the main arena.

With 2013 marking its 67th year, Harrisburg is in dire need of an excitement injection. Efforts made to live stream the highlight events on the USEF Network are commendable, and could help to draw that much needed title sponsor.

Where is the 'Alltech' in Harrisburg? The Pennsylvania National is a well-established entity. One hopes that a nearby national company like Auntie Anne's Pretzels, Penn National Insurance or Hershey's could see the benefit in creating an exciting event around this show with a solid group of exhibitors from high performance show jumpers plus hundreds of junior riders for the Prix de States Team Championship and the Pessoa/US National Hunter Seat Final and their families and friends, plus a small fan group that could easily expand.

## KEEP CLIMBING

As we have said, NARG realizes that it is an uphill climb in the sponsorship and prize money category. As we go down the list of the NARG Top 25, many of the well-run shows have the same challenges – lack of big sponsors, which in turn limits prize money, budget for FEI classes and extensive promotion to the public.

All the ingredients for great sport are intact. The layout of the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex & Expo Center is convenient for horses and riders, and easy for spectators to find. Who will recognize and capitalize on this opportunity?



## WRAPPING UP SUMMER WITH A BOW

The Hampton Classic is reputable for many reasons. A great location, a beautiful setting on acres of gorgeous grass fields, superb shopping, a not-to-be-missed social scene and a chance to see some of show jumping's finest. The sponsors are well taken care of and everyone involved enjoys spending the end of summer in the Hamptons. For years competitors have made this one of the important stops on the show schedule.

The group at the helm of The Hampton Classic works hard and skillfully handles the many aspects of turning simple green fields into a gorgeous event. It is one of the few Top 25 events that retain top sponsors, draw a large spectator base and attract a lot of media attention. Truly a 'classic' example of a boutique, one-of-a-kind show wrapped in a glamorous package.

## UNWRAPPING THE ISSUES

We realize that this is a one week show and not a "facility" that runs many weeks. Note that NARG believes that to be an asset to this and a handful of other classic shows on our Top 25 list. However, the standards for horse shows at the top class level have risen and this field is substandard. This not only limits top class competition, but many riders are concerned for the safety of their horses. In short, the footing must be upgraded. We know other shows of this caliber that have made the investment in footing, it's time this elite event does the same.

The FEI stabling area has long been an issue but this past year was worse. The aisles were too narrow due to lack of space. Equipment had to be stored in the aisles. The access in and out of the area was tight and it would be impossible to evacuate in the case of an emergency.

Another issue discussed among the riders is that while the grand prix entry fee is very reasonable (\$650 for a \$250k class), the entry for the qualifier seems exorbitant (\$1,000 for a \$50k class). Of course several competitors ride more than one horse in the qualifier, which means that instead of saving money it is actually creating more expense for the riders.

And as a final note everyone would love to see local restaurants woven into the tapestry of The Hampton Classics catered for—purchase food options, another spectator draw and "event". As well as a sponsored grooms tent, a token for the unsung heroes.

## HOPEFUL

NARG loves The Hampton Classic. We feel confident that the stellar management team that has handled hurricanes can make the above improvements. Certainly the Board of Directors behind this historical event can see how essential these changes are for the future of this fabulous Top 25 show.



9.



## DEL MAR DOES IT WELL

The Western, Dressage and Hunter-Jumper weeks at the Del Mar National are a West Coast tradition for equestrian enthusiasts and have been for almost 70 years. The tradition of the trio of shows combined with a solid marketing budget brings in a good crowd each year. Similar to Devon on the east coast, in 2012 the Del Mar National took on the honor, and responsibility, of hosting an Olympic Observation Trial. Appreciated by the high performance riders, both shows had to uphold higher standards that year and both did so beautifully.

NARG had hoped they would continue offering FEI classes, but, like Devon, the decision makers behind the event chose to return to the same non-FEI schedule, presumably due to the financial commitment. We would be remiss not to mention that both of these traditional shows have all the ingredients to host an international level event.

Del Mar continues to have what the Alltech National will have in a few years— an enthusiastic, local following that returns on an annual basis. The crowd doesn't so much care about amount of prize money or whom they may be cheering for, a large percentage just enjoy watching horses perform. And our sport desperately needs that type of following.

## ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

The recently renovated main arena is structurally attractive, has excellent footing, a jumbotron, plenty of space for both spectators and exhibitors and is quite large for an indoor. However, the schooling area and other show rings are only average. The stabling is permanent with nice big stalls and wide aisles, but lacks wash racks. The VIP is well done. However, there is minimal hospitality for exhibitors.

NARG applauds management for choosing The USEF Network to cover the event live, making it available to a wider audience. Aside from that, the press coverage is marginal.

Importance was lacking this year. Maybe not noticeable to most of the general public, but without the stature of being a top level qualifying event the show didn't attract the same caliber of riders. Although \$100,000 is a nice amount of prize money, with several shows offering \$250k and more, others offering FEI classes, and a handful doing both, it isn't enough to attract riders seeking international level sport.

## WELL WISHING

Del Mar is a tremendous location for a top notch sporting event. The racetrack next door produces a stellar season. As the highest ranking California event, NARG sincerely hopes that the Del Mar National producers and management will consider some international level upgrades in years to come.

10.



## WISHFUL WINTER WONDERLAND

NARG credits the FTI Wellington Equestrian Festival for creating an equestrian winter destination that includes World Cup Qualifiers, two Five Stars and the only Nations Cup in the United States, all of which serve to attract a large group of international competitors. This is the one competition in the U.S. that draws a large meaningful contingent from the other side of the ocean. WEF earned 20 bonus points for being one of the few events on our list offering both multiple FEI classes and grand prix prize money at \$500,000+. This alone changes their score and ranking, which NARG recognizes they deserve.

We appreciate the improvements made in 2013, even if they were completed after the circuit began. Not finished until week four, ESP made a significant investment in and improved the FEI stabling. The wide span tent stalls were all power washed. The International Club is now a more permanent structure. International riders were provided more access. Prize money increased in top classes and the addition of team events for up and coming riders is fantastic. Riders in our sport need these types of stepping-stones. The Palm Beach Intl. Equestrian Center is an expansive property with a list of amenities, and the show schedule offers something for everyone, although this is also a weak point for this circuit.

### THE DOWNSIDE

Without a doubt WEF has all the ingredients of a world-class circuit and could rank higher. It simply isn't possible without addressing a long list of issues. NARG continues to reach out in the spirit of cooperation with Wellington Equestrian Partners and Equestrian Sport Productions, and struggle with feeling like our efforts are largely ignored. While the overall aura is one of importance with an international flair, the competitors are paying the price. Not only is it expensive to participate, there aren't enough stalls and if you don't have a stall, even if you want one, you are charged a grounds fee. Many of the tenants in the permanent stabling fixed issues at their own expense, after paying a significant fee to be there. The back area stabling is still only average, unacceptable for this level and cost of competition. The parking is pitiful and far from plentiful. The quantity of classes, arenas and competitors far outweighs the quality – even a facility of this size can't support the density of participation.

The schedule is innovative, but also grueling. We still encourage a week off, a great time to make minor changes, construct if needed and change out the jumps so there is more variety, plus more importantly to let everything and every being rest. Possibly work out a better schedule for use of sponsor jumps, so they don't have to be used as ring decoration.

### THE UPHILL BATTLE

NARG along with many of our members have a strong commitment to Wellington and to WEF. We are anchored here. We often feel that due to this, our presence is taken for granted. We can and truly aspire to be happy customers. If the decision makers put themselves in our boots, shed the corporate cloak even if just for a week, they would better understand our position. We feel confident that this circuit could be near the top of the list, a circuit we support as we do other top shows who honor their constituents as well as their bottom line.



11.



## THE DESERT IS BLOOMING

With FEI classes as well as a grand prix offering over \$500,000 in prize money, the HITS Desert Circuit is one of three on the Top 25 list that earns 20 bonus points. The well-established winter series offers numerous levels of high performance jumper classes, the final World Cup qualifiers of the season on the West Coast and culminates with the AIG \$1 Million Grand Prix.

From maturing trees to newly structured arenas the property continues to grow up and come into its own. The VIP seating is now completely enclosed and the food is fabulous. Although not FEI-sanctioned, a grand prix with a million dollars in prize money is impressive and certainly the highest amount offered in one week in the Western U.S.

Running simultaneously with the third through tenth week of WEF, Thermal does a few things better than Wellington – the layout of the facility is spacious with plenty of room to ride horses as well as ample parking. Stabling is nice and reasonably priced in both the permanent barns and the tents. The circuit offers seven shows, with a welcomed off-week after week three.

Another commendable effort made by the HITS management that other top shows should seriously consider is to have a committee of trainers that meet by conference call to discuss their recommendations. This effort illustrates that management is listening to its core client.

## OUR OBSERVATIONS

The footing at a facility of this size is a constant challenge. Overall the show arenas are in good shape and maintained well. The footing in the warm-up rings goes from good to fair to not good at all, for example it gets hard in the main jumper warm up, but the new Jumper 1 schooling area was fabulous, yet Jumper 4 had horrendous footing.

The prize money in the FEI classes is minimal. The aisles in the tent stabling are too narrow; tack trunks don't fit and have to go at the end. Crowds did improve this year, but the press isn't really present, even for the big week.

## JOB WELL DONE

With plenty of sponsors and improved ceremony for the big classes, what seems to be lacking is passion. It's good business first, top sport second. What separates Spruce from HITS is the Southern family's enduring passion and love for the sport. However, the HITS formula does work and continues to consider what is good for their customers, which NARG appreciates and commends.



12.



OLD SALEM FARM

## OLD SALEM SHINES

The millions spent in renovations and improvements in recent years has paid off. Old Salem Farm's May horse shows are now a springtime destination for a significant group of East Coast riders returning from winter circuits and gearing up for summer.

Overall presentation improved across the board. Prizes and ceremony stepped up a notch; there were new jumps and more decoration in the show rings, plus the addition of a new lunging ring – all these efforts are appreciated. If not competing, the local horsey set came to watch. The word is out that Old Salem is renewed and spectators are responding.

The footing in the sand rings is still excellent even in adverse conditions and the schooling area adjacent to the field is large enough to accommodate any class including the grand prix. This year the grass field was in great condition but not used much due to rain.

### TOO BIG?

It seems that the show is getting too big for the facility. The schooling areas are too small. Another issue we continue to bring up is the schedule. It needs to be reworked, the show day runs late and with some adjustments this could be avoided. Parking is working for now but if entries continue to increase it will be problematic. NARG thinks management should consider limiting entries to keep the quality intact.

There was an unfortunate buzz coming from the speakers when they weren't in use, minor but annoying. There was no VIP available until Friday, and breakfast options were weak.

With no FEI classes and average prize money, OSF didn't receive the bonus points that could push them into the top ten. However, all the ingredients for a top-notch grand prix with a large purse are in place.

### PRAISE

NARG noticed that the owners and management were responsive to our concerns and stepped up their efforts this year. If they continue to build, maintain and manage Old Salem Farm at this level, it will be one of the best venues in North America. Neatly laid out, the acreage is ideal for hosting superior specialty events.

Another example is the prestigious American Gold Cup, a beautiful event this year, which fits ideally in this space. Thank you, Old Salem Farm.

13.



## *Silver Oak Jumper Tournament*

## TREMENDOUS TOURNAMENT

Hats off to Silver Oak Jumper Tournament Chairman Jeffrey Pappos and his team, including Show Manager Mike Belisle, for producing a fantastic event. With a widespread focus on riders, horses, sponsors and spectators, they truly went overboard in this inaugural year.

For the horses, they made substantial footing investments as well as having a supply of carrots and apples. The wide span stabling area offered plenty of places to graze. The grass field was a pleasure and the facility had more than enough space to exercise and warm up horses. They constructed an elevated riders tent with leather furniture that was catered around the clock with breakfast and lunch, plus drinks at all ring gates. The concessions from local restaurants were tasty and offered healthy, reasonably-priced options. The prize giving ceremonies included beautiful ribbons, sashes, trophies and custom embroidered jackets for Champion and Reserve. Grand Prix day was gorgeous and welcomed thousands of spectators.

We also commend the innovative efforts, including a Q&A session with the Grand Prix riders available to the Amateur and young riders. A live band added to the weekend atmosphere. Another crowd pleaser was the moped raffle, where each Championship winner received a key, but only one started the moped. A financial incentive is always a plus, and Silver Oak offered the \$25,000 Boston Strong Rider Bonus.

### A COUPLE OF THINGS...

We hope that in years to come the Silver Oak Jumper Tournament will offer FEI classes and increased prize money. And that management would consider offering a webcast or even televising the grand prix.

We understand the event is moving facilities next year, so although the Silver Oak Equestrian Center worked well, Pappos commented that the owners of Fieldstone agreed to invest in making the facility top notch, so he will have more in the budget for prize money and perks. Seems the Silver Oak Jumper Tournament is gearing up to be all that NARG seeks in a superior event, and we look forward to year two.

14.



**zoetis**  
\$1 MILLION GRAND PRIX

## FROM AA TO ZOETIS

The HITS on the Hudson summer series of 'AA' shows culminates with a million-dollar weekend in Saugerties in September. In its fourth year, the Zoetis \$1 Million Grand Prix is now the final of three \$1,000,000 grand prix classes offered by HITS annually. The AIG Thermal Million wraps up seven weeks of the Desert Circuit in March and added to the March schedule in Ocala this year is the first Great American Million Grand Prix. We hear there could be a \$250,000 Junior/Amateur class. Money talks and HITS is offering it in significant amounts.

Each year the competition gets better and more international level competitors come to vie for the big prize. The VIP facilities were amazing; the food and the turnout were both excellent. They did a nice job with the ceremonies for the big classes, sponsors were present as well as the press. For the Zoetis Million, they have great crowd – standing room only. The class is televised on RFD-TV.

## THUMBS UP & DOWN

The main arena footing and the weather were just right this year. The footing in the secondary arenas is not nearly as nice. However, the drainage system improved the schooling area footing. Stabling is hot in warm weather and the paths up to the arena can get slick in wet weather.

The jumps for a million dollar class should be fresh, new, exciting and the course well decorated. Ideally, the announcer(s) educates the crowd as well as generates excitement for the class. Overall the facility has been ridden hard by this time of the year. It is ready for a rest when in fact it needs to be ready to shine. Maybe the million dollar class should open the summer instead of close it.

On that note, this event could score higher if it were a stand-alone weekend. Since it is run along with a multi-ring schedule and includes the entire facility, the typical horse show aspects that aren't a part of 'big event' production water down the scores.

## HOME RUN

The concept for the Triple Crown of Show Jumping is a good one. We commend HITS for showing us the money three times in one year. Preferably these events would be stand-alone FEI shows, but that model is likely too European. It is encouraging to see the million dollar model not only continue but expand in North America. First a one million dollar class, then three million dollar classes, next FEI. We can encourage and hope.



15.



## KENTUCKY HORSE SHOWS, LLC.

# THE INCREDIBLE KENTUCKY HORSE PARK

Thanks to the 2010 World Equestrian Games, this venue is still fantastic. With a gorgeous main arena and several nice secondary arenas, plenty of room to ride, superior footing, good stabling and great courses, the Kentucky Spring Horse Shows are an appealing mid-level option for competition after the winter circuits.

Improvements we noticed were in the VIP, exhibitor parties as well as in the acknowledgement and presence of sponsors. Even after a deluge of rain, the footing held up.

The praise, higher score and better ranking in 2012 directly related to the level of importance—hosting an Olympic Trial definitely added to the quality of the show. Similar to Devon, management chose not to host any international level classes, which we know saves money, but the riders and the sport both lose. This was a real disappointment as in the past Kentucky held the only World Ranking Classes in the United States during the month of May.

## LOOSE RUBBER & RUNNING LATE

An important footing issue that we also mentioned in 2012 is the deteriorating rubber mats under the footing in several rings. Black nubs, like little rocks, are breaking off and can be found in the footing. This needs to be addressed.

Quality of starting was out of sync this year. The Grand Prix started two hours late the first week. This was unfortunate for sponsors, spectators and many owners who needed to fly out.

Overall importance was lacking, not much panache. As the host of the Rolex Three-Day Event, The Alltech National Horse Show and other important events, this venue is ideal for a top of the line outdoor international show jumping event.

## CAN YOU?

Kentucky was the place to go in the spring after Florida. For many who spend the spring and summer seasons in Lexington, they now have choices. On the east coast, there are spring series with grand prix classes at Palm Beach International Equestrian Center and Old Salem Farms. The Kentucky Horse Shows are nice enough. But NARG wants more. It seems such a shame that this experienced management can't step up and host at least one outdoor show at this incredible venue that offers top prize money and world ranking points.

16.



## ONLY IN VEGAS

After producing successful CSIOs in California and managing World Cups in Las Vegas, Blenheim EquiSports introduced The Las Vegas National at the South Point Hotel & Casino several years ago. Taking their operation to Vegas one time per year is a big undertaking, but with their collective knowledge and South Point's Equestrian Center, it's a winning hand.

The South Point is likely the only event center where your horses are stabled below your hotel room and where you can: watch the show from your room via the closed circuit feed, order room service at the barn, go to the spa, have a great meal at one of nine restaurants, gamble, go to the movies, bowl and more all without leaving the hotel. Plus the equestrian center has an indoor arena with permanent barns attached, euro-footing, a large scoreboard, Jumbotron, stadium seating and a great sound system. Add a schedule of night classes, including FEI, over well-designed courses with imaginative opening ceremonies and you've got the potential for a good time and great sport.

The efforts that make this show special continue to evolve, including barn night, a JustWorld Horseless Horse Show, VIP lounge, raffles, Las Vegas style entertainment and late-night autograph signing. VIP passes and hotels rooms were provided for FEI riders.

## IDEALLY

Since the facility is expanding to create more space, construction was an issue. Not ideal but acceptable for one year. With only two show arenas and a small schooling area, the expansion is welcome.

The footing needs a little attention; there were some small rocks in both the warm-up and show arenas. The FEI Security could step up a notch; it was a touch too relaxed. Although there was a definite buzz in social media, there was no webcast, which is a loss for sponsors and fans. Filling seats is an ongoing challenge for show management, but each year the crowd improves.

NARG recommends moving the VIP seating to a better location on the side of the arena. That did wonders for the Alltech National Horse Show. And wouldn't it be wonderful to offer similar prize money and an FEI star rating like Alltech on the West Coast?

The Las Vegas National has all the ingredients to be a truly special event, and not just another horse show. NARG hopes Blenheim EquiSports' vision continues along those lines.



17.



## DEL MAR IS DELECTABLE

The investments made in building a brand new state-of-the-art arena at the Del Mar Fairgrounds a few years ago transformed the facility from tired to top notch. Home to a variety of events year-round, for two weeks in October show jumping steps in with a World Cup Qualifier and several other special classes, including the new mid-level grand prix series, sponsored by GGT Footing.

At the same location as #9-ranked Del Mar National, the time of year coincides with East Coast indoor shows, however there is no shortage of competitors. Management is meticulous about dressing up the arena, rolling out the red carpet and making presentations special. The entire back wall is draped with a life-size image of the Villas at Rancho Valencia, title sponsor, resembling a life-size courtyard pool, seen by all exhibitors and spectators as well as used in presentation shots.

Knowing what exhibitors want, show management fills the two-weeks with unique classes for all levels of riders, increasing the feeling of importance.

## WHAT TO DO

Of course every business loves growth but in the case of high-end horse shows, too many competitors effects quality. Del Mar International is not the only event that has an innovative array of classes filling the schedule, but offering larger purses at lower levels waters down the top. NARG continues to recommend the European model – make the event incredible for the amateur with great prizes and fanfare, and focus the big prize money and international flare on the high performance classes.

There are a handful of issues with this event, some fixable, others not as easily addressed. The outdoor racetrack footing is unpredictable, hard in cold weather and mushy when warmer. Although the new stadium is large and lovely, the rest of the facility could use sprucing up. The course is grand, but the jumps have not changed much for years. Possibly a few new impressive jumps are in order. The schedule was unpredictable; sometimes it ran early, other times late. No benefits for riders unless VIP was purchased; in addition, the boxes were sold individually on grand prix night, so some VIP box holders didn't even have their box for that class.

The USEF Network covered the World Cup Qualifier, a nice addition. Other press was minimal. The seats don't fill quite like the Del Mar National; although also worth watching this event doesn't have the same tradition in the community.

## NICE OPTION

Overall these are nice shows. The Del Mar location is ideal. However, NARG would love to see this management offer a high-end event with top prize money at this venue.

18.



## WE WANT NAJYRC

When it comes to the North American Junior and Young Rider Championships (NAJYRC), we could essentially rewrite last year's report. Not much changed, except those who came to experience the supposed glory and those few who gained great miles and medals. The event received a small boost since it is recognized by the FEI, otherwise it may have dropped lower.

As we've said and truly support, the sport of show jumping in North America needs important stepping stones on the path of developing top international competitors. This FEI championship in a challenging Nations Cup format should attract aspiring youth to participate in high-level sport. Though the USEF does produce the NAJYRC, unfortunately this event is not executed well and is in dire need of improvement.

Currently the best attribute of this championship event, and the main reason it earns a top 25 ranking, is the world-class venue, specifically the Rolex Arena. The courses are challenging as well as beautiful – Steve Stephens brought in some unique and special jumps this year. Aside from some unpredictable summer weather, it is a magnificent setting. The media coverage, including the USEF Network and press tent, is well done.

## PUMP IT UP

The primary problem with the NAJYRC is that it isn't viewed as an important final as it had been in previous years. Since Young Riders is a championship for a division that doesn't even exist in North America, possibly the USEF should consider creating building blocks to the event by taking some zone and sponsorship dollars to offer this division throughout North America. The Artisan Farms Young Rider Grand Prix Series at WEF is a solid example. The USEF needs to look at the big picture and encourage young riders to strive for a common goal – NAJYRC. We look forward to DiAnn Langer's expertise as U.S. Show Jumping Young Rider Chef d'Equipe to help bring this important event and its constituents to a new level.

This type of initiative would help the event tremendously. Then the USEF needs to work on the importance factor, the sponsors, the ceremony and the scheduling. With a concerted effort in this direction, plus some innovative marketing, including pumped up social media, NAJYRC could become a must for both the competitor and spectator.

## REBUILD IT

We all agree that NAJYRC should be an important part of a developing young rider's path to the next level, as it has been in the past. We feel that for that to happen, the USEF needs to change the model not just with our suggestions but also those that came up at the USEF Annual Meeting this year. With a focused effort from event producers, the NAJYRC could and should easily be one of North America's top ten events.

19.



## SWEET SACRAMENTO

Moving up five spots this year, this European-style event strives to set itself apart from the other multi-ring types. Now a two-week event, the scores are essentially the same for most aspects. Popular with competitors, the management group does a great job of sprucing up a tired facility by creating an intimate setting around the indoor arena for two weeks.

The schedule highlights included a Welcome Grand Prix week one and a World Cup Qualifier the second week. The course designers were excellent. The VIP is intimate and well done.

Sacramento isn't a destination location but after five years the show is beginning to draw a loyal audience that comes to see show jumping action in the evening, from Ride & Drive to grand prix. The announcer works hard to generate excitement in the crowd.

## PLUS AND MINUS

In their second year of new dates the two weeks of shows in October had stellar turnouts. However this plus is also a minus, especially week one. There were too many horses overall, the schedule didn't run on time, class formats were changed; the grand prix had 80 horses. Potentially management has already considered limiting entries or establishing qualifiers for the highlight classes, or if they haven't they will.

The footing and maintenance is very good in the main ring. The second arena and the schooling areas get hard and could use better footing, and this year the maintenance was not as good as in previous years. The focus is on the main arena, but the secondary arenas need some attention since the show has grown, so has the participation in those rings.

Although there is a tremendous response to a grand prix at 1.40m, NARG would like to see Sacramento offer higher prize money for the top level. Offering the FEI classes is a plus, and we know an expense, but NARG would love to see this management make the second week truly top level. More FEI classes, more prize money. Possible?

Once the Welcome Week's issues are addressed, the overall experience in Sacramento will be super. A solid west coast choice, we look forward to a bump in prize money in future years.





## XALAPA EXCELLENCE

For four years this show in Mexico, also with a European feel, has made it to the NARG Top 25. The Chedraui family produces a fantastic two-week sold-out event on a beautiful grass field. In 2014 the circuit is expanding to three weeks including a CSIO with a \$250,000 grand prix, eight world-ranking classes and a Nations Cup.

With great attention to detail, every aspect of the event is beautiful. From well-decorated courses with top designers to a VIP full of sponsors and patrons, bright and colorful ceremonies and an enthusiastic crowd, the competition is one of the best in Mexico.

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

### STEPPING IT UP

The grass field is in top shape plus they brought in special footing for the secondary show arena, also excellent. However the schooling rings have a harsh sand footing. This is one of the aspects that will be improved in preparation for the 2014 spring circuit.

Xalapa didn't offer any FEI classes in 2013, so no bonus points and security wasn't required. However 2014 will change that.

The marketing aspect is also a weak point. With the efforts going towards producing a fabulous event this year, NARG strongly recommends a big bump in the marketing efforts, especially in the states. The event wasn't televised, nor is there a web site.

This is our only top 25 show without a web presence. Especially with the upcoming CSIO, a simple and sophisticated multi-lingual website, social media and expanded press is strongly recommended. A bi-lingual webcast would not only enhance Xalapa but show jumping as a whole, especially to illustrate the international efforts.

We understand that the Chedraui family and staff are chartering planes, one from California and one from Florida, at a very reasonable price for those who would like to come to Xalapa. Possibly they would consider inviting a group of top riders from the east coast and the west coast to experience Xalapa in the spring.

NARG congratulates this event on continuing their presence in the Top 25 and looks forward to what 2014 has in store for equestrian sport south of the border.

21.



## LAKE PLACID HAS HEART

The I Love New York and Lake Placid Horse Shows have heart. The loyal Lake Placid team truly cares about the competitors. When you arrive the place looks fabulous and the staff makes you feel welcome. Moving up a spot this year, this unique coupling of shows once again improved its score.

A vacation destination located in the Adirondack Mountains, it is hard to resist this incredible area and the hospitality of the management. Lake Placid Horse Show Association Chairman Richard Feldman hands out local restaurant dinner cards to exhibitors, a fabulous and thoughtful perk. They go the extra mile with food choices, including a wood oven pizza concession, a sausage stand and a great grooms kitchen. The award ceremonies together with the Parade of Champions add to the special feeling of the two-weeks.

The grass field was simply fantastic this year. It poured rain one day, classes were cancelled, but the field was ready to go and the course looked gorgeous the following day.

## TO DO LIST

We understand that Lake Placid has added a third week to the 2014 circuit. While we would love to support this decision, we implore those in charge to address two areas. It is essential that the footing in the secondary arenas and schooling areas improve. There's not enough material to support the amount of use, and that will only get worse when there's a third week. If you really want to extend your series, which we do think people would enjoy, you must for the sake of our equine partners consider a serious investment in footing.

On a smaller note the manure disposal is still a disappointment and a third week might just make that issue untenable. By the second week the area between tents is a disgusting mess and very unpleasant to endure.

Offering higher prize money and lower fees would be a plus, but as with other shows of high quality, paying the price is well worth it when the event is top notch.

## PLEASE

This is a fantastic show, a great town and loads of fun. For over forty years we have loved coming to Lake Placid and we would love to continue. Please consider our requests. Let's see these shows shine even brighter on the NARG Top 25.

22.



## EXCELLENT EQUISPORT

Run by the Blenheim EquiSports show management, the Showpark season includes nice grand prix events as well as Young Jumper Championships and a World Cup Qualifier in the fall. An intimate and well-located venue in Del Mar, the weather is almost always ideal.

The Grand Prix field and a secondary jumper field are on grass. The footing in the main grass field is quite nice and includes a bank and hill. The courses and design are excellent with nice awards presentation. Each season Blenheim arranges very nice exhibitor parties at private farms in the area.

The experience of the staff is apparent with how smoothly the shows run. Last year they implemented free entries and discounted stabling for young jumpers, which was much appreciated. Start times are posted online and they keep to the schedule. This is very helpful for trainers, competitors, families and friends as many of Del Mar's amenities are within a short drive including delectable restaurants, shopping, movies and the beach.

### WHAT CAN BE ADDRESSED

The intimacy of the venue is a plus and a minus, the parking gets tight and the temporary stabling spreads out a bit when the show has a large turnout. This is acceptable as not much can be done.

The footing in the secondary arenas and schooling areas is just dirt, however they do a good job of maintaining it. Luckily it doesn't rain much, but when it does the footing is a mess.

With essentially the same schedule and officials year after year, the shows are pretty predictable. This is also a plus and a minus. Competitors would love to see some variety and also an increase in prize money. One of the top events of their season runs the week after the Del Mar National, seems an ideal opportunity to offer a matching amount of prize money (\$100,000) and to market to the loyal audience. The World Cup Qualifier in the fall offers prize money on the lower end of the scale - bringing in a top notch sponsor for this class could elevate it to a new level.

### TOP CHOICE

Spring, summer or fall, Del Mar is desirable. It's a treat to experience a fabulous grass field in ideal weather, with some of southern California's best resorts, dining and entertainment close by. The Blenheim team is top notch, capable of producing a world-class event. We've seen it and would love to again.



23.



## FRONT AND CENTER

The Washington International Horse Show is a tradition we want to keep. The city atmosphere, world-ranking classes, solid prize money, top competition, exciting opening entertainment – all are important parts of a great sporting event.

Still managing to attract an international field of competitors, the evenings are electric, both the competitors and the crowd enjoy the events. The ceremony is outstanding, with sponsors present and gorgeous presentation. From press to web to social media, the media outreach is one of the best efforts of the top shows on our list. Now well established, the VIP is exquisite. The overall feeling at Washington is still one of importance. And for all of this, we commend you.

The show moved down the ranks this year. For all the good points, there are aspects that must be addressed in order for the show to keep from slipping off the NARG Top 25 altogether.

## COMPETITOR BLUES

NARG is saddened by the fact that for several years we've had the same unaddressed comments. Washington has made some improvements, but the truth is the footing is not at the caliber of the event, nor is the stabling. We fully realize the challenges of the location, and are willing to bend to a degree to keep that slick city buzz, however for the sake of our horses' safety we need to see significant changes.

Management can't change the size of the arena and the schooling area, but they can change the quality of the footing. Yes it is an investment, which over the last few years several shows have made. Bringing back the small sand arena is still on our wish list, but the footing is a primary concern.

The stabling issues include aisles that are dangerously narrow and poor FEI security. It's not compliant with FEI rules. We hope management can find a way to let non-FEI horses walk down to the schooling area and to the ring with no access to the FEI stalls.

NARG also feels that a change in the schedule would help – possibly eliminating some of the smaller divisions would reduce the classes on the schedule, provide more space and make the experience, which is an expensive one, more pleasant for the trainers and top athletes.

## WASHINGTON RISING

We applaud everything that makes Washington fabulous. However we beseech you to address the problem areas before this year's event. This international tradition should remain on the show calendar and rise up once again on the NARG Top 25.

24.



## BOUNTIFUL IN THE BAY

Horse Shows By The Bay is another one of the top 25 shows that rank for aesthetic and ancillary reasons – a fantastic facility in a fabulous town with a friendly and welcoming staff.

In past years our evaluators have highly commended the atmosphere and customer service. Show producer Alex Rheineheimer is accessible and easy to communicate with; she wants these shows to be outstanding. The word is out – the turnout was tremendous year. The courses and jumps were fabulous.

Hosted at the expansive and lovely Flintfields Horse Park, the shows are close to the active tourist town of Traverse City with loads of fun activities outside of the competition.

### TOO MANY, TOO LATE

We have applauded Horse Shows By The Bay for a schedule that allows us to compete at a great facility and then have some time to travel into town, however this year, and last year, the days ran late. With some rings ending after 8 p.m., seems it may be time to find a balance between number of classes, number of entries and schedule. Some classes were moved, but then young horses were competing in a different ring than they had warmed up in. NARG believes that Alex is aware of this – not a bad problem to have but nonetheless needs attention.

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.

We would love to see the VIP offer snacks, especially when days run late. The fees are high, which is acceptable when the management, venue and food are terrific. But it's best when there is time to enjoy Traverse City.

The grand prix prize money is low and there are no FEI classes. We recognize that for some events that is the best fit. However, the potential to host a high performance, big purse event is there, possibly one day that can happen.

It isn't too late for Horse Shows By the Bay to avoid becoming a victim of their success. NARG trusts that they will continue to have a vision of how to host a special event and not just become another big horse show. This is a nice summer show option; we hope it remains on the NARG Top 25.

25.



## INTERNATIONAL HOPEFUL

Bromont is bursting with potential. Currently, the prize money over the two weeks is very good and they offer five world-ranking classes. A beautiful setting, the courses are on a large dirt field with big local crowds in the stands and a full VIP. The highlight events are televised. There were several exhibitor parties as well as a rider's lounge.

With the French Canadian influence, the overall feeling is très European. Like Lake Placid, this is a popular ski location in the winter surrounded by mountains and nice resorts. The facility was the site of the 1976 Olympics and even after not being able to supply all the required paperwork, remains committed to their bid for the 2018 World Equestrian Games. NARG would like to see these shows meet higher standards.

## HELP REQUIRED

Issues that we mentioned in 2011 were not addressed in 2012 or 2013. If an investment is not made in the footing, the facility won't be ready to host any top event.

Our footing comments are essentially unchanged. The footing in the field is nice but can get hard and dusty unless watered perfectly. The secondary arenas are slippery, to the point of dangerous, and the schooling areas are dusty and hard. If it rains the dusty footing gets very slick.

This year the management seemed to be a bit disorganized and the stewards uninformed. The FEI classes were not run according to rules, yet FEI rules were imposed on non-FEI classes. Order of go was not followed. The back office was understaffed. The food at the concession is far away; so many trainers and competitors couldn't get there. This level of show should be better with these details.

## SHOW US YOU CAN

Bromont could be an ideal location for top sporting events. The issues are not insurmountable, so once addressed the place could be beautiful inside and out. NARG would love to see, and support, international sport in Quebec. Show us you can do it Bromont.



NEW ALBANY



# SPECIALTY EQUESTRIAN EVENTS

In 2012, the NARG Board determined that events of this unique caliber deserve special recognition. The essence behind each of these Specialty Equestrian Events is to produce a fabulous sporting event. All the events listed below are focused strictly on top-level equestrian sport and entertainment. Whether open to the public or an exclusive event, NARG commends the efforts made to showcase show jumping in North America.

## #1: THE NEW ALBANY CLASSIC AND FAMILY DAY



With an improved score over last year, The New Albany Classic not only ranks #1 in Specialty Equestrian Events, this tremendous single day would rank sixth in the 2013 NARG Top 25.

The epitome of Specialty, this event lives up to its name by offering a classic equestrian show jumping event wrapped into a tremendous family day. Thousands of people from Ohio, Kentucky and more flock to the Wexner's private property on a Sunday in September just to attend the New Albany Classic. Live music, carnival rides, entertainment, art, food and a \$125,000 FEI grand prix with the top 30 riders from the computer list combine into one unique and wonderful event. For many years the Wexners have produced this incredible day, not only offering a great carnival atmosphere for attendees, a nice class for top riders but also generously raising money for charity.

Riders ranked on the computer list look forward to an invite to this special class. Every aspect is top notch. Truly an invitational, there are no entry or stabling fees. The day is relaxed, the competition is tough, prizes include a lease of a Mercedes, and the grass field now has fabulous footing.

The entertainment of the day is not just equestrian style. The event organizers bring in popular tween bands, plus acres of rides, food and fun things to do. This collective crowd of thousands would likely never see this level of show jumping. They are welcome to watch and to make the experience spectator-friendly a non-horse person is in the announcer booth asking questions that are answered over the loud speaker throughout the class.

Once again our only note is that this would be an ideal event to webcast or televise so the quality and excitement could reach a wider audience. That aside, our hats are off the Wexners for making this an outstanding day for our sport, the community and for charity.

## #2: THE AMERICAN INVITATIONAL



Since 1971, The Gene Mische American Invitational presents one night in April at Raymond James Stadium where thirty top riders compete for a \$200,000 purse in the sport of show jumping. Also landing a score higher than in 2012, plus earning bonus points for offering a world-ranking class, this is another single evening that earns high praise from NARG.

We recommend that riders continue to support this tremendous event. A unique setting not matched in the United States, the chance to gallop into an immense outdoor stadium has a dreamlike quality and is one to aspire to. The crowd continues to increase each year, but the thousands that do attend cheer with exuberance. An ideal setting for a sell-out event, we hope to see the stadium filled with fans one day.

We realize it is a challenge to set up a solid and safe practice area for a one-day event, but the schooling ring needs to improve. Ideally the stabling tent could shift so there would be more room for warm-up and potentially no sand pit would accumulate at the exit. Otherwise from the course to the ceremonies, the presentation is impressive. The footing in the stadium was just right. Media exposure included TV and a webcast.

Also an invitational, there are no entry or stabling fees and the hospitality includes food during the day and a prize money party after the class. Another unique and awesome aspect, the prize money is paid to the riders at the party. The American Invitational is a long-standing tradition that we are proud to recognize as a top-notch specialty event.



# LIVE OAK INTERNATIONAL



## #3: LIVE OAK INTERNATIONAL

As stated by Chester Weber and Juliet Reid: “Live Oak International was born out of our family’s passion, strength, and commitment to excellence in equestrian sport. Our family has always had a strong commitment to equestrian sport and continues to strive for the highest standards in sport and sportsmanship.”

Leaving big-circuit headaches behind, it is a pleasure to enter the Weber’s beautiful farm in Ocala with acres of live oak trees. Several thousand spectators have made this a must attend event based on this venue’s history of hosting a spectacular Driving competition and they are equally thrilled to watch quality show jumping.

The 2013 Live Oak International was more beautiful and exciting than the previous year. The grass competition ring was perfect and held up very well, even with the addition of two classes and some bad weather.

The stabling was much improved, nice tents with plenty of room and extra stalls. Adding the CSI 2★ was a bonus, certainly all the pieces are in place for a fabulously unique and exciting sporting event. Thank you!



# TRUMP INVITATIONAL



## #4: TRUMP INVITATIONAL

An absolutely picturesque setting in Palm Beach, Mar-a-Lago is simply pristine. An exquisite country club with an elite clientele, the grounds are gorgeous throughout. The course looked amazing with Lake Worth as the backdrop and a beautifully set VIP full of spectators dining on gourmet faire.

The concept for this class is up to par with what NARG would like to see more of in North America. A stand-alone event that offers top prize money, world-ranking points, raises money for charity and entertains a crowd. However year one had some serious issues that have to be addressed in order for riders to compete in a safe environment. The grass footing was the worst of any event we evaluated in the last four years and was simply unacceptable. In good weather the turf tore significantly and resulted in numerous withdrawals and wrecks in the ring. There was insufficient equipment to even try and maintain the surface. Another issue was the ban on bedding in the stalls.

The good news is that Donald Trump openly acknowledged this and as we know from the 2014 event he learned, invested and fixed the footing. We admire someone who non-defensively recognizes when something isn't right. So because of the unbelievable venue and Mr. Trump's commitment, this is an event NARG wholeheartedly supports. We would like to see it grow into a viable and glamorous stop on the North American Show Jumping tour.



## HONORABLE MENTIONS

Those that have made the list in years past, Blenheim EquiSports shows in San Juan Capistrano, Pin Oak Charity Horse Show and the unique event in Omaha, deserve a tip of the hat.

Blenheim offers nice horse shows with grand prix classes that are well managed. Both the Pin Oak and Omaha horse shows work hard to produce nice events. Some lower scores are out of their hands, others they will undoubtedly work on. Any of these events could certainly return to the NARG Top 25.

Fieldstone didn't make the Top 25 this year, but have really stepped up their game. They improved the facility, hosted a grand prix tied in with Silver Oak and appear to be making strides towards more. Proving Fieldstone's upscale vision, the 2014 Silver Oak Jumper Tournament will be hosted at the facility.

Gulfport and Pensacola didn't quite make the Top 25 but also earn a mention. Under the management of Bob Bell's Classic Company, these circuits are quite popular, and as we've seen in the evaluations, a pleasure to attend.

Other honorable mentions include Upperville, Angelstone, Princeton and the Langer Equestrian Group. Each of these entities produce well-attended events and appear to be making efforts to improve.

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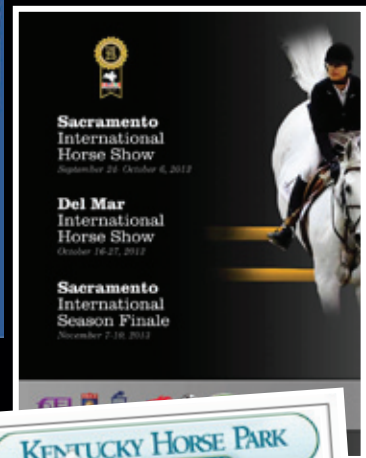
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