



**NORTH AMERICAN RIDERS GROUP**

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*Winter 2020*

# Sport Report

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Together,  
we can improve  
our sport.



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# THE NARG Sport Report

## Winter Season 2020

### A History

NARG (North American Riders Group) gathered steam back in 2010 when we gave a voice to riders, trainers and owners. Collectively we decided to take on the task of evaluating the top 25 horse shows in North America. For the next six years, the NARG Top 25 initiative made a significant impact on the betterment of the sport of show jumping (as well as other disciplines within the niche) on this continent. Even after we discontinued the annual report we noticed the impact of our efforts.

Rewind to 2010 when we started this exploration: there were 548 FEI show jumping events around the world, with 61 in North America (about 11%), and only four of those at the highest CSI5\* level, with three of those four at Spruce Meadows. When we last issued the NARG Top 25 in the winter of 2016, we were pleased to point out that out of 657 FEI-ranked events in our sport globally, there were 89 FEI show jumping events on this continent (almost 14%), with 13 FEI CSI5\* events in North America at six different venues on the calendar. The FEI North American League kicked off in 2016. These two examples illustrated how the sport was improving on our continent. We felt that the first phase of our role was

complete and it was time to see the impact of our work over the next few years.

*PLEASE NOTE: NARG is aware that our sport goes beyond FEI Jumping; that there are young horse programs, jumper development programs as well as high performance hunter and equitation events and programs. Currently our focus is on high level show jumpers. We intend to expand that over time.*

### What We Did to Prepare for the Return

After discussion about our goals, addressing issues important to our sport and welcoming three new Board Members in the winter of 2019, we decided to bring back the NARG Top 25. EqSol, who had produced the report with Executive Director Jen Markee and the NARG Board for six years, went to work on updating and revising the evaluation form. Reaching out to managers, competitors and sponsors to get feedback on the previous form, a number of adjustments were made, including managers answering questions that directly applied to scores. Still using the 1–10 point system and similar yet updated parameters, the scoring chart on page 4 explains the details.

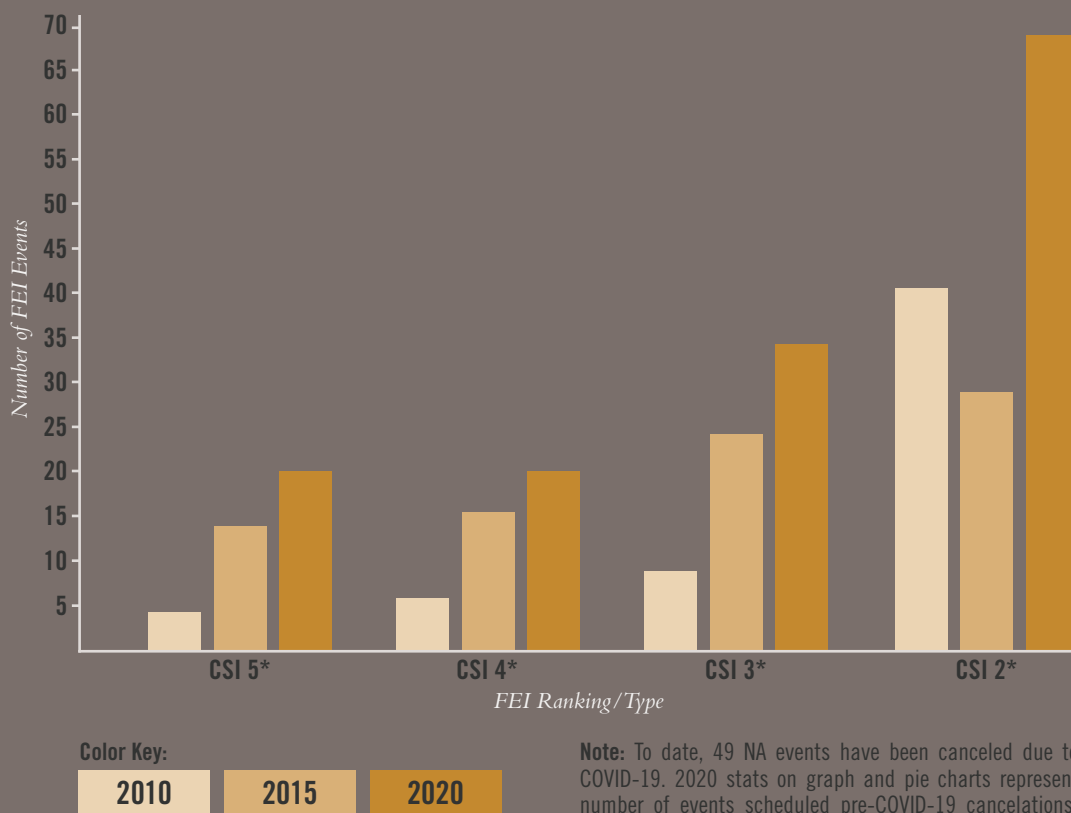
With 139 FEI-ranked events in North America scheduled in 2020, NARG

decided to evaluate only FEI 3\*, 4\* and 5\*- rated weeks this year, which before the COVID-19 pandemic came to 75 events.

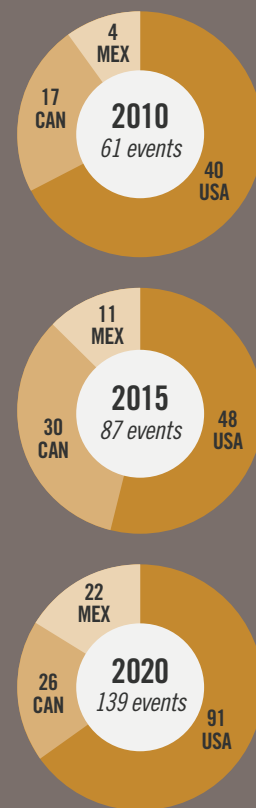
### The NARG Top 25 of 2020 is now the NARG Sport Report

Clearly we will not be able to report on the top 25 events in North America in 2020. Now at eight weeks of canceled competitions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a potential end in sight in June in some areas, when the FEI level of the sport will return to 'normal' is unknown. However, there were 19 active weeks in North America's winter season before shelter in place and social distancing were set in motion. Those events were each evaluated and then organized in this report by the eight venues where competition occurred. Many of us have had more time to think in these last weeks since 'lockdown.' After evaluating the winter season we realize how much more show jumping quality there is in North America. With week after week of FEI 3\*, 4\* and 5\* events in FL, MX and CA, this continent is certainly an international destination for winter. The final scores reflected some span, but as can be seen in the chart were quite close. Had we continued through the full year of 75 events we would have been splitting hairs with scores.

# FEI Events in North America: 2010–2015–2020



## DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTRY



## What We Learned

After 32 evaluations (all weeks were evaluated more than once) and 15 evaluators we learned that in the last five years the winter season playing field has evolved. As illustrated in the graphic above, the increase in events in the last decade is remarkable.

With the addition of Deeridge's three FEI weeks, plus an upgrade to WEF's FEI offerings, from January 21<sup>st</sup> – March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Wellington offered 11 weeks of FEI CSI 3\*-5\* events. That would've been 13 weeks in Wellington if WEF 11 and WEF 12 had not been canceled. Directly followed by the North American kick-off of the GCT CSI5\* events in Mexico City and Miami. But not this year.

Mexico has jumped onto the FEI scene, increasing from four FEI events in 2010 to 11 in 2015 to 22 scheduled in 2020. Clearly this surge of FEI events in Mexico has had a positive impact on the riders and horses who spend their show seasons down south, as seen by the increase in their individual and team victories

worldwide in the last few years.

With regard to scoring we also noted that with the 1–10 scoring system top events score towards the top of the eightieth percentile – in 2015 our #1 Spruce Meadows Masters scored 88% and this winter season's number one venue scored an average of 87%.

We commend all organizers for their efforts and appreciate that each venue responded to our questions, as we want to keep communication open, have positive interactions and ultimately improve our sport, together.

## Where We Are Now

We are in the era of COVID-19 and all of our lives and many of our livelihoods have been and will continue to be radically changed. As this was beginning to be apparent in March, some events were credited for taking precautions. One evaluator said, *"As the week transpired – it became clear that this was the last event. I felt very safe. They were wiping down and disinfecting every 15 minutes and all the workers wore gloves. Seemed each day there were*

*less and less people around, so less potential for harm. The management team handled it as well as could be expected at that point and time."*

These measures and more will be a mandatory part of any event this year and potentially beyond.

## What We Intend to Do

As we learn to navigate the 'new normal' we can once again evaluate, discuss and celebrate our sport. Meanwhile, NARG continues to serve on the IJRC Board and stays active in the sport globally. We all look forward to when this pandemic is behind us, and our health and the health of others will not be in question just by breathing the same potentially contaminated air.

We also all appreciate the positive aspects of slowing down, spending time at home and staying healthy. But our place is in the show ring, so we continue to prepare for a safe return.

As we prepare for seasons to come, NARG presents the top eight venues of the 2020 Winter Season. ■



# NARG EVALUATIONS AND SCORING...

## Revamped for 2020 & Beyond

The goal of the updated NARG event evaluation is to present results with a healthy mix of objective and subjective data from riders, barn managers and show organizers. We look to evaluate the event as a whole – so the form now includes questions answered by organizers as well as feedback from riders and managers, plus research on each event to avoid bias. Notably this is a subjective perspective from the core of those who pay to participate, however there is a balance with research and a perspective from the organizers.

Each evaluation included 41 individual criteria grouped into nine categories. These scores were tallied by category, plus each grouping was assigned a 'weight' pertinent to the importance and effect it had on the event overall. For example, weights for categories Footing, Stabling, Courses/

Jumps, and Venue make up 60% of the total score, while the other four categories make up the remaining 40%. The completed evaluation was then peer reviewed and discussed by the NARG Board. Certainly there will be subjectivity, but our collective mission is still clear – to improve our sport through better competitions, which results in better riders and horses in North America. A full detailed report is also provided to each horse show organizer. And NARG is available to discuss and offer solutions to any issues. Ultimately, the goal is not to criticize or complain, but to work together to improve our sport – rider, owner, manager and organizer.

It is important to recognize the magnitude of the NARG mission from every perspective. NARG respects the tremendous undertaking of producing

a world-class equestrian competition, especially at the international level. The re-emergence of the Top 25 Rankings is a work in progress. The COVID-19 pandemic has canceled much of the spring and summer seasons and many events that historically were top finishers. Spruce Meadows, Thunderbird, GCT Miami, Xalapa, and others, will not be evaluated in 2020.

This NARG Winter Sport Report gives NARG a chance to provide valuable feedback to the Winter Season venues, work with the new evaluation system and define what we can continue to do to elevate our sport on this continent. NARG truly believes this evaluation process has encouraged meaningful improvements at many major horse shows in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

### 2020 SCORING: FEI 3\*, 4\* & 5\* EVENT FORMAT

CATEGORY	MAX. POINTS	WEIGHT	MAX. TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
FOOTING	74	2.7	200	20%
STABLING	32	5.0	160	16%
COURSES/JUMPS	13	9.2	120	12%
COMPETITION	45	2.2	100	10%
FINANCIAL	33	5.5	100	10%
VENUE	55	2.2	120	12%
CEREMONY	25	4.0	100	10%
MARKETING/PR	50	2.0	100	10%
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>	<b>327</b>		<b>1000</b>	<b>100%</b>

### CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

#### FOOTING

Quality of footing in all FEI 3\*–5\* arenas, ability to be used in all weather conditions, maintenance

#### STABLING

Quality and size of stalls, safety, security, cleanliness, amenities and location

#### COURSES & JUMPS

Quality of jumps, courses, course design

#### COMPETITION

Scoreboards, timeliness, quality of officials, competitor quality, announcers, audio/video, loudspeakers, arena size/shape

#### FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Prize money offered, overall cost and value of showing

#### VENUE

Customer service, food, hotels, rider and owner amenities, overall venue appearance, VIP facilities

#### CEREMONY

Quality of sponsorship, production quality, prize giving, sponsor visibility and amenities

#### MARKETING & PR

Advertising, visibility, press coverage, website, attendance

# 2020 VENUE RANKINGS

## WINTER SPORT REPORT | JANUARY – MARCH

LOCATION	SCORE	FOOTING	STABLING	COURSES/JUMP	COMPETITION	FINANCIAL	VENUE	CEREMONY	MKTG/PR	TOTAL
Max Points	100.00%	74.00	32.00	13.00	45.00	33.00	55.00	25.00	50.00	327.00
DEERIDGE (PBM)	87.00%	63.82	22.49	12.36	38.86	25.52	40.36	19.79	38.86	262.06
WEF (DERBY/GLOBAL)	81.07%	63.50	24.58	9.50	34.06	22.67	30.32	20.17	41.00	245.80
WEF (PBIEC)	80.85%	56.72	20.59	9.78	36.68	26.42	31.78	21.13	41.00	244.10
GUADALAJARA (TCS)	80.72%	61.75	24.88	12.13	35.54	19.13	37.33	21.75	26.00	238.51
LEON (COPA BANBAJÍO)	79.92%	63.25	26.63	10.25	34.14	19.25	37.75	20.25	28.00	239.52
LIVE OAK INTL.	79.55%	52.75	22.50	12.25	33.13	18.50	46.00	20.50	35.00	240.63
BALVANERA	76.73%	56.25	22.00	11.50	35.15	19.50	40.00	17.50	28.50	230.40
THERMAL (DS)	74.48%	57.46	19.36	11.25	27.75	16.63	33.68	21.38	38.67	226.18

**NOTE:** When reviewing the rankings by venue it may be noted that some venues have a higher percentage score with a lower total point score. This is due to the weighting of each section. As mentioned in “NARG Evaluations and Scoring” on page 4, weights for categories Footing, Stabling, Courses/Jumps, and Venue make up 60% of the total score, while the other four categories make up the remaining 40%, this shows that the value of a point in the top four categories carries more weight than the value of a point in the remaining four categories.

## TOP SCORING

### TOP 3 BY SECTION

#### FOOTING

1. Deeridge (PBM)
2. WEF (Global)
3. Leon (Copa BanBajío)

#### STABLING

1. Leon (Copa BanBajío)
2. Guadalajara (TCS)
3. WEF (Global)

#### COURSES/JUMPS

1. Deeridge (PBM)
2. Live Oak International
3. Guadalajara (TCS)

#### COMPETITION

1. Deeridge (PBM)
2. WEF (PBIEC)
3. Guadalajara (TCS)

#### FINANCIAL

1. WEF (PBIEC)
2. Deeridge (PBM)
3. WEF (Global)

#### VENUE

1. Live Oak International
2. Deeridge (PBM)
3. Balvanera

#### CEREMONY

1. Guadalajara (TCS)
2. Thermal (DS)
3. WEF (PBIEC)

#### MARKETING/PR

- 1 (Tied). WEF (Global)
- 1 (Tied). WEF (PBIEC)
3. Deeridge (PBM)



# A Beautiful Oasis

## THE PALM BEACH MASTERS AT DEERIDGE

*The Palm Beach Masters at Deeridge was our clear winner, scoring almost six percentage points ahead of the next contender. As noted in the opening, the NARG Winter Sport Report only includes the winter season that began in mid-January and ran for nine weeks, until mid-March when all equestrian events around the world were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

### **It All Started Four Years Ago...**

The determination to ensure that the Longines FEI World Cup™ remain in Wellington was the catalyst that launched the Palm Beach Masters (then the Wellington Masters) in 2016. Hosted by the Jacobs family on their picturesque 300-acre property, this boutique setting now features three exclusive weeks of FEI events.

The first week of competition in late January showcased two FEI-ranked events: the Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ Qualifier CSI4\*-W on the grass field, along with a CSI2\* in the sand ring. Serving as one of sixteen qualifiers for the 2019/2020 season, international competitors earned

both valuable points and prize money. Although the Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ Final scheduled for mid-April was canceled, we all look forward to the reduced 2020/2021 World Cup™ season in which Deeridge was picked as one of only eight prestigious qualifiers.

In 2020, the FEI Nations Cup™ competition, formerly held in Ocala, moved to Deeridge for the second week of the Palm Beach Masters, CSIO5\*, held in mid-February. Not only did eight teams compete in the international event, this second week was also host to CSIO-Y, CSIO-J and CSIO-Ch Nations Cup events, a \$213,300 Longines





Ranking Grand Prix and a CSI2\*. The three-week series culminated in mid-March with the Palm Beach Open, CSI5\* and CSI2\*.

Though the CSI2\* events weren't evaluated this season, it is notable that Deeridge offered one in each of the three weeks, providing this boutique experience for horses and riders not competing at the higher level.

### Kudos and Wishes

Since the inception of NARG evaluations, footing has been one of the most heavily weighted sections. An essential part of the experience, Deeridge's grass arena earned the highest footing score and glowing remarks on the beauty of the setting as well as the quality and maintenance.

The Jacobs and their team listened to feedback from last year saying that there were too many entries, the grounds were too crowded and congested. NARG commends them for limiting the numbers in order to provide a more pleasant experience for competitors. Palm Beach Masters has become a nice oasis, an absolutely pristine setting, for those seeking a bit of a respite from the busy-ness of WEF.



Some of the evaluators would like to see more well-defined pathways for horses, golf carts, and people on foot. They would like to see the VIP gratis to at least competitors who qualify for the grand prix, if not for all 4- and 5-star competitors. They enjoyed the riders area but noted that the large video screen/scoreboard was blocked by a tree. Several asked that more amenities (food and water) be available for grooms. Ultimately, the comments were overwhelmingly positive. Congratulations to the organizers and the Jacobs family for creating superior sporting events with a relaxed, welcoming feel.







# A Breath of Fresh Air

*Coming in second overall is the facility 'across the street' from PBIEC, AGDF (Adequan Global Dressage Festival), known as 'Global'. Produced by ESP (Equestrian Sport Productions), WEF Weeks 4 and 6 were held at this venue.*

*Since a large percentage of the experience at Global is different than at PBIEC, NARG scored it separately for the purposes of this Winter Season report.*

## Green, Space and an Intimate Setting

With its beautiful large grass Derby field and a smaller intimate Stadium Arena, plenty of warm-up space, including the covered arena, WEF Global came in well ahead of PBIEC in its footing score, and only a fraction below the leader, Deeridge. Less rings to maintain than PBIEC, but plenty of space to take care of. When the show jumping moves over to Global it is an intimate setting, as the rest of the WEF traffic remains across the street. Evaluators found the footing in the field to be excellent with the exception of a few spots that get boggy. The Stadium Arena footing is good quality, rain or shine, but not quite as top notch as the International Arena at PBIEC. The maintenance received positive remarks.

## A Few Minor Issues

The large covered arena is appreciated for warm-up in wet weather, but the footing is only fair. While the stabling area is in better condition than PBIEC, there were still issues of cleanliness there and in the bathrooms. The wash rack needs some attention; there were safety issues. One of

our evaluators expressed some concern for the relaxed FEI security at Global. Given the value of the FEI horses gathered into a small stabling area, security is something that should always be top of mind.

Amenities are far fewer, a few more food concessions would enhance the experience, and audiences on grand prix day are smaller, but the open space and intimate atmosphere feel like a breath of fresh air, which the competitors enjoy.

## More Global

With approximately 70% of the scores generated from the Global experience and the remaining 30% from the overall WEF experience, this venue's atmosphere and competition space is valued and appreciated by the competitors, managers and the horses. Riders relish the breathing room that WEF Global affords, away from the always-crowded sister venue; and both footing and stabling seem to benefit from fewer horses and less traffic. Evaluators would like to see WEF make more use of this venue for show jumping.



# A Winter Destination

*Coming third in our group of eight venues that were able to hold events prior to the close for COVID-19 in March are the Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF) FEI events at the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center (PBIEC). Over the 12-week circuit produced by ESP (Equestrian Sport Productions), 10 of the weeks are FEI 3\*, 4\* or 5\*, of which two, WEF 4 and 6, were held at the Adequan Global facility and two, WEF 11 and 12, were canceled. Those events produced at Global were scored as a separate venue.*

## Fabulous For FEI

The addition of multiple FEI weeks makes WEF a fabulous international winter destination. Every evaluator enjoyed competing on the newly installed state-of-the-art footing system by iEquiTek. The surface material features an electronic monitoring system that keeps it consistent no matter the weather conditions. Not only did evaluators applaud the quality, they noted that it remained excellent despite times of

heavy rain. However, the total footing score also reflects the warm-up and schooling areas, which deteriorated in quality as the weeks rolled along. Although staff does a reasonable job with footing maintenance, the sheer number of riders that utilize the space on a weekly basis makes it a difficult task.

Course design is usually excellent, and although the jumps were once exciting and new, most could use a cleaning and some new innovative materials would be welcome. For one night a week, Saturday Night Lights, the buzz of superb show jumping is in the air, and the 'factory' feeling of WEF subsides to top sport. The rest of the week is about maneuvering about the masses and making it work as best as possible. Interestingly, for those who come in and compete for a few of the special weeks the experience is more palatable. For those who run their business on site or at a nearby farm for the entire season, this 'workplace' is less favorable. Evaluators consistently commented on the food onsite as too costly, and not healthy. Potentially each trainer could receive a weekly coupon book or some WEF bucks to alleviate this complaint.

## Addressable Issues

Since thousands of equestrians spend the winter in Wellington, this venue takes on

the majority of that competition traffic. It's often over capacity and that leads to cleanliness and safety issues that need to be addressed.

This is distinctly apparent in the FEI barns and bathrooms, which need a thorough cleaning not only pre-circuit but each week (this now may be required due to COVID-19). Scores across the board were negative. The permanent stalls are the original ones, and are in need of repairs and refurbishing. Evaluators feel there should also be permanent wash racks with warm water.

With the addition of "WEF Premiere" week, at the beginning of the 2021 circuit, the weeks of use increase. How to address this overuse is also something to consider and another aspect that may be handled with new protocols we will be seeing in the future of our sport.

A long-established winter destination for international sport, WEF at PBIEC excels in offering top sport. Due to the sheer size of the circuit, there are inherent challenges that the staff needs to consistently address. NARG would like to see ESP also excel with top service for the horses as well as their people.





# Show Jumping Splendor South of the Border

*From footing to courses, stabling to star ratings, organizing committees south of the border made it a goal to offer FEI events similar or better than ones they attend in other countries. As one manager responded to our NARG questionnaire, “once they come to Mexico they will love it.”*

## The Social and Show Season Start at a Country Club

For two weeks beginning in mid-January, Eq Marketing kicks off the show season with a CSI3\* and a CSI4\*, including the Longines FEI Show Jumping World Cup™ Guadalajara. A boutique event, this and all shows in Mexico offer show jumping exclusively. Hosted at the Guadalajara Country Club (GCC), the venue is private and beautiful with a restaurant and other club amenities. Receiving the highest marks for a ‘good time,’ the word “fun” was often used by evaluators to describe Guadalajara.

Food concessions and the country club restaurant received kudos for quality, variety and availability. Riders pay a

reasonable fee for a VIP table, and all drinks are free. A limited but nice menu and waiter service is available. The entire show has a social and friendly atmosphere – the VIP tables are full and buzzing with friends and family. The audience is exuberant, cheering on competitors. At the end of the day the buzz continues as riders and trainers gather in the VIP talking, laughing and celebrating into the evening.

## The Competition Experience

The Main Arena and the FEI warm-up have the same sand footing. Notably the organizers brought in extra sand two weeks before the event. Evaluators indicated that the horses felt good on it, though it can get hard by the end of the day.

Course design, the arena setting and ceremony received high scores. One rider noted, “[Jumps] are well taken care of and beautiful; it looks like they paint them between classes!”

The warm-up arena is small, they limit it to six horses at a time. The FEI schooling area is a large grass football (soccer) field, with room to ride, reasonable grass footing, but not maintained.

Stabling is top notch, clean and well taken care of. Portable stalls were underground so a bit dark, but otherwise very nice and safe. Some bedding comes with the stall fee, but more would be appreciated. Security seemed to hit the mark: very strict, but friendly.

Tech services, start times, orders of go and videos of rounds are available for all the shows through one website and app, managed by FEM, the governing body. Eq Marketing worked with FEM to make this easy to use and informative. Entry fees are expensive relative to the prize money, but less pricey than other venues.

With a commendable series of twelve events in six locations ranked from CSI2\* to CSI5\* over fifteen weeks from late January to late April (some were canceled this season), spending some winter weeks or months show jumping south of the border is certainly an option. Beginning in picturesque Guadalajara and ending at the fabulous Club Hipico Coapexpan, with stops in Leon, Balvanera, San Miguel Allende and Mexico City, the footing rates well, the course design excellent, the facilities private with security, the towns full of history, the weather warm and the organizers welcoming.





# Leon Lands a Top Show Jumping Event

*A single week on the Winter Circuit in Mexico, for the last two years the Copa BanBajío CSI4\*-W featured the FEI Longines World Cup™ Leon. Although not one of the eight CSI-W events on the NAL tour in 2020/2021, the venue is well worth a consideration as a winter circuit destination. The picturesque property offers not only top notch sport, but also a clubhouse, VIP, room to roam and more. Having hosted events over a decade ago, this facility is, as one evaluator said, “completely made for horses, beautiful and very private.”*

## Rain or Shine This Show is Still Fabulous

Footing received high marks, nearly perfect on both sand and grass, though the grass arena had to be closed on Wednesday and Thursday, because of rain, and competition moved to the sand ring. The FEI warm-up ring was indoors, so stayed in great shape, but warm-up Ring 2 did get muddy with the rain. There are two FEI schooling areas, offering plenty of space, and they stayed in good condition. All evaluators agreed that maintenance was superb.

Management is looking to improve even more, stating, “On the grass field we aerated and added sand as needed. After adding drainage this year, we had to add sand on some lines because the grass didn’t grow back. It will be perfect next year.”

Stabling was good quality, safe and clean; no rain leaked into the tents even after the two days of wet weather. Security was excellent. High marks were given for course design, with a note on how well they adapted the track for sand and for grass as weather required. Jumps were

beautiful – clean, unique, decorated. Everything ran smoothly and on time.

The FEM app, as in Guadalajara, worked well – easy to use – and information and results were timely. Videos of rounds are also available. Also similar to Guadalajara, the prize money was appropriately allocated, but the fee structure was expensive.

## You Are Welcome Here

Overall, for the shows in both Guadalajara and Leon, the evaluators noted that the venues felt special and welcoming by not just show management, but by the entire town. The engaged audience and the relaxed camaraderie among competitors and fans is a noteworthy plus.

Determined to host quality events to bring up the level of show jumping in his country, Francisco Pasquel of Eq Marketing, the show management company behind Leon, Guadalajara, GCT Mexico City and more, is one of a handful of horsemen that have shown what Mexico has to offer. Evaluators agree that the experience is worth it.



# Euro-Elegance in Florida

*Chester Weber opens his gorgeous Live Oak Farm in Ocala to this two-pronged competition. Unique in that it combines two Olympic disciplines – international driving and show jumping – Live Oak is certainly a boutique event.*

*The management team does a magnificent job of putting on a show with a European feel. The show jumping portion is three-days, culminating with the final Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ East Coast Sub-League event.*

## An Ocala Oasis

Live Oak International is a big event in Ocala; the celebration includes a parade and attendant activities in town, as well as parties for the competitors on the showgrounds. Amenities were generous and appreciated, and there was a large audience of about 2,500 – standing room only – that gave the show a good feel. A beautiful tent with nice, fresh sandwiches was located near the stables, with a big lounge that had a monitor. The VIP was farther away, and was not included in the riders' package, though they could purchase access.

The footing surfaces were all grass, safe, and maintained for all three days. The FEI warm-up was on a bit of a hill, and began to get quite hard as the days went on. That particular area could use work, as the footing is not to the level of the event. The FEI schooling area provided ample space. The courses were well designed, and Live Oak's signature jumps were beautiful.

The stabling was a temporary stall tent, clean and nice, with wide aisles. Though it was a mile's ride or a 20-minute walk to the ring, it was a gorgeous trek on beautiful grass. The NARG evaluators were not particularly troubled by the distance, acknowledging that it wasn't much of a problem since they were there for a short time and the environment was relaxed.

The website was easy to use and informative with the support of Longines Timing. However the Order of Go for the Grand Prix was uploaded late, an easy fix for future events. The prize money was adequate but could definitely be higher, and the fee structure reasonable.

## A Winter Option

Although they won't be part of the NAL League in 2021, we hope the lovely Live Oak will continue to offer an oasis on Ocala. As one evaluator said, "It is fabulous, a dream come true to be able to show there; as nice as any place in Europe."





# Location, Location, Location... and Grass

*In late February and into March, the magnificent Balvanera Polo, Golf & Country Club is host to three weeks of FEI events, a CSI 2★, 3★, and 4★, produced by Equisport. Similar to the settings in Guadalajara and Leon, the picturesque setting is private and luxurious. If competing in Mexico for the winter, this venue sits in between Leon and Mexico City.*

## Glorious Grass and More

The Equisport show management team has been working on the main arena for the last seven years, and one of our evaluators pronounced it one of the best grass fields. Well rooted, it survived three weeks of jumping with no holes, no problems. As with other shows in Mexico, the courses and jumps received high marks.

The FEI warm-up is sand – it's old, but good footing, though it might not stand up to rain. The weather was ideal, so it wasn't tested this season. The schooling and lunging areas are convenient, right next to the barn.

The officials and announcers were top notch, all classes started on time, and orders of go were up the night before the class via the FEM app. Ceremony is glorious, and as always there's a cheering crowd. Food concessions were tasty, with a lot of variety, and nice coffee shops, better than in the U.S.! The restaurant on site is amazing, and like most of the shows in Mexico the atmosphere was relaxed, the chef outstanding, and the prices reasonable.

## Step Up

The stables were well located, but neither clean nor safe; you can't hear what is happening at the ring, security was not as it should be; and there were problems with the electricity. The quality of the shavings was disappointing; plus horses were on site on Monday, but there were no shavings until Wednesday. The wash rack is a bit far. Almost all of this can be easily addressed and fixed by management.

VIP is not included, everyone pays. While the prize ceremonies were nice and the audience was engaged and supportive, beyond that, our evaluators felt that little effort was made to make the show feel special. Management could give some creative thought to this.

Overall, this venue is lovely, with plenty of pluses and a few details that could improve. It's certainly a plus to stay in one house for three weeks of show jumping on a gorgeous grass field in a country club setting. Balvanera is a worthwhile and convenient stop when considering a circuit south of the border. As one evaluator noted, "It's a show we always look forward to."



# A Worthwhile Work in Progress

*Formerly HITS, the Desert International Horse Park was purchased in August of 2019. With an involved ownership group that also competes, they have big plans and major improvements on the agenda.*

*Within three months of purchase they welcomed hundreds of horses for a busy two-week fall circuit, and two months after that the 2020 Desert Circuit was underway. They hit the ground running, prioritizing clean-up and footing. The long term plans had to be put on hold. Managing Partner Steve Hankin and his team communicated openly throughout the process, and these efforts endeared them to the riders, who are truly excited about the things to come.*

## Giving it Their Best

Our evaluators, who compete throughout North America and Europe, felt that the footing in the main arena and the FEI warm-up and schooling areas was better than it had been in past years, but a bit dry. The maintenance crews did their best with what they had; and the result, while not as good as the new footing at WEF or other established arenas, had reasonable traction, cushion and spring.

The VIP was nice, and riders were given access. Management seemed to go above and beyond in their efforts to show their appreciation for the riders with amenities. There were cocktail parties, a gift bag at the jog, social events during the week, and a Riders' Lounge. Grooms, however, had to pay for food at the dining hall, and the prices were high. The competitors would like to see some accommodation made for their staff members.

## But...

The grand prix warm-up area was split into two parts to create the FEI warm-up and schooling areas, and by all accounts, it was much too small, which made it nearly impossible to flat your horse properly. Something that will need to be addressed in future years.

A higher number of entries than expected meant that the FEI stabling was inadequate. The aisles were too narrow, there weren't enough grooming stalls, and no cross-ties. They were also located close to a road, which was not safe. Essentially the worst stalls were the most expensive. However, management is aware, and plans are already underway to have permanent stabling for FEI horses.

Offering just two weeks of CSI3\* events, our evaluators felt that the prize money allocation and amount need to be reviewed and adjusted, as well as the entry fees. Some noted that even if you won, it often didn't cover the cost of entry.

Yet overall, our evaluators agreed that this first year under new ownership was a good experience. The good-natured eagerness of the new management team to learn, and their sincere desire to make things better, helped ease discontent or discomfort on the part of the competitors. Our evaluators felt that they were not only asked for their feedback, but management was listening and determined to improve. All look forward to seeing what the Desert International Horse Park will become.



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The North American Riders Group is back on the show jumping scene with renewed intensity representing riders, owners, trainers and their horses, with a keen focus on improving our sport at a continental and global level.

The role of the NARG Top 25 has changed. In 2010, there were **18** FEI CSI 3\*-5\* events in N.A., in 2020 there would have been **75**. Going forward analysis via a reliable third-party, whose primary goal is to improve the sport, is more important than ever.

*From 2010–2016, the NARG  
TOP 25 instigated major change*

Together,  
we can improve  
our sport

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## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Over the course of 6 years,  
since the Top 25 launched  
in 2010, we:

Increased # of  
WORLD RANKING  
classes and  
prize money at  
**19**  
EVENTS

Achieved mileage rule change

<b>IMPROVED FOOTING AT 26 VENUES</b>	<i>improved stabling at 13 venues</i>
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Improved production & VIP at 14 events

*Supported the Longines  
FEI North American League  
launch in 2015*

**AND NOW WE'RE BACK**

