

Education & equitation meet with a \$10,000 prize for trainers in exciting new class in June.

by Kim F. Miller

"They are the Harvard educators of the equitation world," says Georgy Maskrey-Segesman of the presenters in the all-new Whitethorne American Tradition of Excellence Equitation Challenge. Georgy is the mastermind behind this unique, three-phase class.

It's open to all riders of all ages, both juniors and amateurs, and debuts this summer at the Blenheim June Classic III show in San Juan Capistrano. Prizes include a \$10,000 cash award for the winning trainer and a new Butet saddle for the winning rider.

Rounds 1 and 2 are set for Tuesday, June 20, and round 3 for Wednesday, June 21.



Highly renowned professionals Bernie Traurig and Stacia Madden will judge, and equally well-known mentors will be available to all throughout the competition. These include Karen Healey, who will serve as Technical Delegate and mental skills coach and amateur rider Tonya Johnston.

Georgy's motivation for creating the Challenge is to bring more educational opportunities to the West Coast equitation world. After delving into competitive dressage herself, she noticed the lack of feedback available to equitation riders. She feels that the written comments received after a dressage competition detailing each movement and what needs to be improved are a priceless source of instruction and motivation. She aims to give West Coast riders a chance to explore what the judges are looking for and gain knowledge while competing.

"It is my gift to all the people who want to do equitation --- whether it's an adult-amateur who wants to learn more, or a junior who does plan to go east, or a parent who wants to know more about the discipline," she said. "I'm looking for it to be something that's enjoyable and educational and something that people can walk away from and say, 'Wow, that was a great

experience. I want to do it again.”

The Format

Phase One will consist of a Hunter Derby type track set at 3'3", designed by Karen Healey and Mauricio Garcia. The two judges will produce one score that will be announced in addition to providing commentary that will be logged and shared with each competitor upon the conclusion of the phase. Phase 1 starts at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, June 20.

The second phase, starting Tuesday at 6:30 p.m., is purely educational. It begins with a presentation created by international competitor and EquestrianCoach.com founder Bernie Traurig: "Equitation - An American Tradition of Excellence." That will be followed by a Q&A between the judges, trainers and riders. Tonya Johnston will also present "Mental Preparation for Medal Finals."

Phase 2 is mandatory for Challenge riders and it's open and free to all others who would like to audit.

Riders who scores above 60 in phase 1 will be invited to Phase 3, set for Wed, June 21 at 8 a.m., again on the grass Grand Prix field. This round will be over another Hunter Derby style course. Tonya will be available to riders during the course walk and throughout this phase for psychological counsel and strategic planning. As in phase 1, scores will be announced and notes taken.

Upon adding the scores from the first and third phases together, the top six riders will be called back for additional testing. Work-off scores will not be announced --- simply noted on the comment card in addition to more feedback. A press conference open to all will follow the additional testing during which the judges will comment on the final round, work-off and final placings.

An Education Advocate

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A veteran in the sport through her management of her family's Whitethorne facility in Ventura County's Somis and her own mostly sales and leasing business, Georgy called on friends and associates to bring the idea to reality. She notes that Karen Healey was instrumental in discussing ideas throughout the development and in coordinating this first year's high profile judges. Notably, Bernie Traurig will be judging the ASPCA Maclay Medal Final in November at The National Horse Show back East.

Working on the idea for about eight months, Georgy knew that the right timing would be critical. The late June dates fall when kids are out of school for the summer and right before the medal season gets underway. In addition to the formal Tuesday night presentations, she hopes that participants will take advantage of Bernie, Stacia, Karen and Tonya's availability as mentors. "Sometimes it's just one thing that changes everything in your riding," she notes. "I'm hoping this helps them find that one thing." All four experts are purposely not serving in official roles at the June Classic III so they can talk freely with Challenge participants.

Given the timing right before the big medal finals season, Georgy notes that there was ample debate about whether to set the Rounds 1 and 3 fence heights at 3'3" or 3'6". They went with the lower height because "This is supposed to be education for people considering stepping up in the sport. We didn't want it to be just for people who plan to do the Indoors circuit." She's especially excited the event is open to amateurs, who "sometimes get left out of things."

The Challenge continues Georgy's long-standing advocacy for education. She regularly brings experts in to Whitethorne for lessons and clinics. Karen Healey, Judy Martin, Will Simpson Joe Fargis and dressage stars Marissa Festerling and Charlotte Bredhal are among recent coaching guests. Whitethorne was the base for Karen Healey Stables for the last several years and Georgy is grateful that Karen and many others share her enthusiasm for this new event.

Having Butet sponsor in the form of a saddle, bridle and girth for the top three riders, respectively, is a big draw, and the Plaid Horse Magazine will provide nice gift bags to entrants. Blenheim EquiSports is "thrilled" to host the Challenge and will surely do its usual lovely job with presentation.

Class participants sign up through entry in the June Classic III and auditing is free and encouraged for all phases of the event.

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