

Ashlee Bond soars and Flexible says farewell at Del Mar National.

The Grand Prix of Del Mar, presented by Pacific Sotheby's International Equestrian Division on May 6, provided a thrilling night of competitive show jumping for a full house at the Del Mar Arena. The 29 starting horse and rider pairs were tested with Marc Etter of Switzerland's course of 15 efforts in the first round and eight fences in the jump-off.



The course included a triple combination on the rail, a vertical-vertical combination across the short diagonal and two tricky bending lines that proved to be difficult for many riders. Many efforts at jump number six, the American Flag fence, failed and the bending line from 10 to 11 and then 12 proved to be challenging as well.

The first round saw five clear rides to qualify for the jump off, including Ashlee Bond and Chela LS, Christian Heineking and NKH Calango, Peter Petschenig and Colour Your Life, Michelle

Parker and Cupilor and Jennifer Gates on Pumped Up Kicks.

Gates was more conservative with her time, ending with eight faults in a time of 50.796. Parker also had two rails for eight faults, but faster than Gates in a time of 46.344. Petschenig rounded out the top three with a clear round in a time of 48.592. Coming in second was Heineking with a clear round in a quicker pace of 45.217. Bond was victorious, claiming the blue ribbon with a clean round and a tidy time of 44.205.

Before the Grand Prix commenced, a very emotional retirement ceremony was held for the West Coast favorite, Flexible. His countless wins with rider Rich Fellers at Del Mar and around the world were remembered in a tearful tribute. There was not a dry eye in the stadium as Flexible received a special cooler and many thanks for the years of competition that many were fortunate to witness.

His owners Mollie and Harry Chapman and Fellers were present on the red carpet and they expressed their gratitude to Flexible's perseverance, athleticism and kind heart. He received a standing ovation as he made his last lap around the Del Mar Arena. He is truly a special horse and worthy of the happiest of retirements.

Hunter Jumper week concluded the 72nd annual staging of the Del Mar National Horse Show, following a week each of western and dressage competition (see dressage coverage, page 42). It is produced by the 22nd District Agricultural Association, a State of California agency, which owns and operates the Del Mar Fairgrounds.

Press release provided by the Del Mar National.