

Written by by Kim F. Miller
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New series of four CDIs has the dressage community abuzz.

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The debut of the Adequan® West Coast Dressage Festival has competitors and fans abuzz with excitement over the circuit of four CDIs, three of them brand new. The brainchild of event producer Scott Hayes, the series begins in Galway Downs in Temecula Jan. 3-7 of next year, then moves to the Del Mar Fairgrounds in San Diego for another three weeks of international competition: Jan. 18-21, Feb. 1-4 and Feb. 14-17. The weeks between international shows will likely be filled with one or more national shows sponsored by the San Diego Chapter of the California Dressage Society.



The CDIs are all FEI-W events with qualifiers for the World Cup Finals, to be held in Paris next spring, and the World Equestrian Games, set for September in Tyron, NC. Each week of the Festival also offers qualifying classes for many championships: Juniors, Young Riders, U25, Amateurs, Young Horses, etc. An estimated \$40,000 of prize money per week is on offer.

Scott and his event management company, SH Productions, are relatively new to the dressage world but have made a big impact by hosting “Master Classes” with the sport’s best. Dressage royalty Charlotte Dujardin and Carl Hester, both of Great Britain, top the list of stars Scott has brought to the States with hugely successful educational events, including the annual West Coast Dressage Convention which is coming into its fifth year.

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“The Festival series is something I’ve wanted to do since I started in the equestrian production industry,” Scott explains. He drew inspiration from the many-week dressage circuit in Wellington, FL and believed that the West Coast could support something similar. Finding a suitable venue that is available for several weeks was challenge-one. In the process of staging the April dressage convention with Carl Hester at the Del Mar Fairgrounds, Scott made inroads with and a good impression on the Fairgrounds management. Serendipitously, there was a mid-January to mid-February opening on the calendar and Scott booked it.

“The ability for everybody to move in for the whole time makes this really unique,” Scott notes. “Competitors won’t have to find another stable between shows. They can stay right at the Fairgrounds with an arena available and certain hours of the day where they can also use the racetrack for hacking or cross training.”

Good timing in another area also contributed to the Festival’s launch when a winter of unrideable Northwest weather had many riders thinking about coming to California, to compete and to keep their horses in competition shape.

Of the many fates that aligned to make the new circuit feasible, Scott may be most excited that Galway Downs and the Fairgrounds’ window of availability meant the Festival could be staged without interfering with any existing dressage shows. “That was one of the major factors,” he says. “The Festival is meant to be a complement to the West Coast circuit, not a competition to any shows.” The dates also allow West Coasters to compete in the Wellington circuit after and were planned to not directly compete with any other shows in the country.



Going Big, But Not Alone

As those who've attended the West Coast Dressage Conventions know, Scott likes to go big. The clinics in California combined excellent education opportunities with a VIP experiences and a fun, social vibe. Going big, though, means not going alone. For ideas of his scope to play out as planned, "You have to be really willing and open to bringing in as many people as possible." An advisory board for the West Coast Dressage Festival circuit already includes top riders, owners, parents and others representing all aspects of the sport. "As we build this, we really want to make sure we get it right."

Key members of the Festival's staff are Heather Peterson and Joe Coleman, whose 2 White Feet show management firm staged a CDI in Las Vegas to outstanding reviews early this year. "I heard great things about how well that show was run and that's where I got the idea to bring them on," Scott explains. Joe will serve as the Festival's competition manager and Heather as the main show secretary and liaison with the FEI, a huge task given the extra requirements involved in holding classes that qualify contenders for the World Cup Finals and World Equestrian Games.

The selection process for the WEG teams, for example, requires that at least two qualifying scores are earned from a judging panel that includes at least two five-star judges. The Festival's officials are already booked and will comply with those rules and the many others required of international competition.

Along with their show management skills, Heather and Joe are also big thinkers. "It's a big undertaking," Scott acknowledges of the whole Festival. "When I first told Heather and Joe about the idea, they said, 'Yes, great! Let's do this!' They were 110% on board."

Sponsorship, stabling, transportation and volunteer coordination are other components of the Festival to be managed by dedicated, full-time staff members at Scott Hayes Productions, which has offices in Scott's native Vancouver, British Columbia and in Del Mar.

Adequan's title sponsorship put the Festival on the North American map of significant shows

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right away. Major United States dressage supporter Akiko Yamazaki has given her blessing and then some. The sponsor of five-time Olympian, San Diego-based Steffen Peters, Akiko has put her Four Winds Farm up as a Festival backer. Another of Steffen's owners, Bruce and Jen Hlavacek, are sponsoring the CDI 1* in memory of the late Weltino's Magic, their Grand Prix star for both Steffen and Shannon Peters.

From beyond the horse world, Albuquerque-based legal firm, Leverage Legal Group, has signed on with a major sponsorship and will also handle all the legal logistics that come with taking on such a large project. Scott reports that several other encouraging possibilities are in the pipeline and hopes to see many others come forward to support this launch.



Starting In Wine Country

January's first CDI-W and national show will be held at Galway Downs in the heart of Temecula Valley Wine Country. The venue is very familiar to eventers as it has hosted international competitions in that discipline for many years. Recent improvements have transformed the 242-acre property into an elegant setting for weddings, entertainment and special events that fit perfectly with the region's growing popularity as a getaway destination. Yet it's just 90 minutes from Los Angeles and an hour from San Diego.

When it turned out that the Del Mar Fairgrounds was not available for the first week of the Festival, Scott and Galway Downs' Robert Kellerhouse were thrilled to work together. Because the venue has so much experience hosting international FEI eventing, Scott knew the footing and other logistics would be up to the challenges of staging a dressage CDI and anything that needed fine tuning Robert was more than happy to accommodate. Robert welcomed the chance to introduce more of the dressage world to this unique showcase for the sport.

Galway will host the first Master Class of the Festival circuit. During this 45-minute presentation, top international dressage riders will entertain while demonstrating what to look for in the Freestyle competition that follows that night. The names of the “Masters” for all four shows have not been announced yet, but Scott’s track record with clinicians thus far justifies high expectations.

The organizer now has many friends and supporters among the key players in international and West Coast dressage, but he didn’t start out that way. He started by cold-calling strangers.

With an education and career background in hospitality, Scott was introduced to dressage through his now-husband Andrew Rommens. Responding to its beauty and the unique dedication it required, Scott fell in love with dressage. Seeking a position that put him in closer proximity to where Andrew worked, Scott secured a job managing an equestrian club at the center of a new planned residential development. Hosting clinics was part of his plan to put the new facility on the map, and he quickly sought to up the ante by going after the biggest names in the sport. Hence the cold-calls to U.S. Olympian and chef d’equipe Robert Dover and, a year later, the Dutch Olympian Anky Van Grunsven, asking if they would come to the Vancouver area to give clinics. The well-received educational events that resulted laid the foundation for Scott’s now wide-reaching relationships in the sport. April’s West Coast Dressage Convention with Carl Hester drew approximately 3,000 attendees and Scott continues to be a major point person for Charlotte Dujardin’s appearances throughout North America.

With the Festival fast approaching, Scott and his team have the advantage of not being easily fazed. “The first clinic I did was in a hockey arena,” he recalls. “The concrete floor was not even level, so we had to build a base on that, then bring in all the footing.” Many logistical challenges have been met and overcome since then. Those experiences, the feedback from them and a can-do spirit suggest that the West Coast Dressage Festival will be a big win for the entire equestrian community.

For more information, visit www.westcoastdressagefestival.com.