

July 2015 - Show Report: Woodside Preliminary Challenge

Written by by John Strassburger & Heather Bailey
Wednesday, 01 July 2015 23:42

Hooks and Stutes rise to the top.

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In a nail-biting finish in the two divisions of the Woodside Preliminary Challenge, the victors managed to maintain their leads from start to finish. The unique competition was the feature of the Woodside Horse Trials on May 22-24.

Frankie Theriot Stutes, of Occidental, and Chatwin took the top prize in the Preliminary Challenge Horse Division, finishing on their dressage score of 26.5 over James Alliston and RevitaVet Elijah (31.4) and Erin Serafini and Another Star (32.6).

Tristen Hooks, of San Louis Obispo, and Learning To Fly brought home the blue in the Preliminary Challenge Rider Division, finishing on their own nearly flawless score of 26.5, over Ruth Bley on Rodrigue Du Granit (30.1) and Julie Flettner on Ping Pong (30.1). Bley and Flettner finished tied on the same score, but their tie was broken by Bley finishing to the optimum time on the cross-country course.



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"I would have to say it's a little bit of a dream right now," said an ecstatic Hooks. "I can hardly believe it's happened. For me as an amateur, it's our Olympics. It's pretty awesome."

Learning To Fly is a 15-year-old Holsteiner/Dutch Warmblood-cross, who Hooks developed over the last nine years from his first event at Beginner Novice. Hooks is an equine veterinarian, and found the horse standing in another veterinarian's, Carter Judy's, pasture after being given up by a previous owner following an injury. Hooks started eventing the horse at age 6, and they have been at preliminary for three years.

"Carter says he's my dog," said Hooks with a laugh. "He knows when my truck pulls in. He comes galloping across the pasture. He jumps in the trailer like a dog in the back of the truck. He's my pal."

Hooks, Bley and Flettner were within a hair's breadth of each other all weekend, and Hooks felt the pressure from her friends and fellow competitors. "The pressure was on right after dressage," she said. "There was less than four points between the top 10 people."

"I think that after the cross-country run today I was so pleased that I thought, 'I'll just ride him the best that I can ride him and the poles will stay or fall. I can't really control that.' I just tried to make the best ride I could to every fence. He actually had to do a little bit of acrobatics to bail me out," she added.

Hooks was also part of the winning preliminary team, which included her top-placed competitors Bley and Flettner, as well as 13th placed Nikki Lloyd and Paloma Paz.

Hooks and Learning To Fly had competed previously in the Challenge, finishing second in 2013 after lowering one rail in show jumping. Horse division winner Stutes is also a return competitor, and a previous winner, though this was Chatwin's first time competing in the Preliminary Challenge. But her path to victory was considerably rockier this time.

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