

Christian Heineking & a slew of fellow show jumpers stake their claim on Wild West city.

by Kim F. Miller • photos by McCool Photography

When the World Cup Finals first went to Las Vegas in 2000, show jumping in the “Entertainment Capital of the World” was a revolutionary idea. Gazing at a ginormous horse and cowboy statue in the hallway of the South Point Hotel & Casino, it was fun to reflect on the changes that revolution has wrought. English style equestrians have clearly staked their claim on this wild west city.



Marking its 10th year at the South Point, the Las Vegas National drew a strong contingent of international World Cup contenders, with Texas-based German Christian Heineking taking top honors in Saturday night’s marquee class aboard AJE Cluny. Pairs in the Longines FEI World Cup™ Las Vegas, presented by Interactive Mortgage, were the cream of a very big crop of jumpers who kept the South Point Arena busy, busy, busy from the wee morning hours to late in the evening.

San Diego-based Mexican rider Enrique Gonzales gave show organizers Blenheim EquiSports credit for that growth at all levels. “The kind of shows they produce all year work to produce horses for this sport that is changing,” he commented after finishing second, by 1/100th of a second, Saturday night with Chacna. “It’s turning into a very high quality sport in which horses

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and riders need to be real athletes. If you didn't have a strong program of shows through the year, this wouldn't happen."

Behind Christian and Enrique, it was former West Coast junior star Tina Dilandri Yates aboard the Dutch stallion Zalote VDL and Jamie Barge and Luebbo more than holding their own against the big guns in third and fourth place. Nayel Nassar and Lordan almost added another big blue to their trove. They nicked a second off the winning time, but took a rail along the way, for sixth place.



It was odd not having crowd favorite Richard Spooner in the World Cup class, but he and his 18 year old partner Cristallo wisely targeted Saturday afternoon's \$50,000 FEI 1.45M Las Vegas Winning Round Classic, presented by E2 Stables and H5 Stables. They won it dramatically against 47 contenders that included speedy threats from Americans Rich Fellers and Karl Cook,

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Chile's Sam Parot, Brazil's Eduardo Menezes and France's Eric Navet. In the second round, Eric and Basimodo had the lead up until Richard and Cristallo, going second-to-last, gambled and won on an omitted stride, to finish three seconds faster. Overall, a master class in speed riding.

A doubling of participation in the Interactive Mortgage U25 Series reflects growth in development of tomorrow's stars. In 2015, Gregg and Evette Delong of Interactive Mortgage, along with Blenheim EquiSports, introduced the Series and Final for young riders stepping up to the next level. Nineteen under-25-year-old riders competed in Friday's \$25,000 Interactive Mortgage U25 Final. With five returning for the jump-off, it was Egypt's Nayel Nassar aboard his up-and-coming 9 year old Holsteiner mare Acita that couldn't be beat.

The Guilherme Jorge designed track was set just right for the class. Said Nayel, "The course was brilliant. Nothing too big, but he kept you thinking the whole way." Third to go in the jump-off round, Nayel had to set a time to beat for contenders Tina Yates and Mavis Spencer who came next in the order. "I know they can be fast, so I wanted to put the pressure on," he explained. "And Acita jumped so well."

In between Saturday's big jumping classes, the fence heights were lowered for the afternoon's final two rounds of the CPHA Foundation WCE Medal Finals. But there was no let-down in the excitement among competitors. Washington rider Megan Hilton ended her junior career on a high note by emerging as winner. Following her in the top four were Joelle Hylton, Ransome Rombauer and Kaitlyn Lovingfoss.

Since 2000, the World Cup Finals returned to Las Vegas several more times and there was lots of excitement when news broke Saturday that it would come back again in 2020. Including jumping and dressage, the finals will be held at the MGM Grand Hotel's Grand Garden Arena. The hotel is well-known for hosting big-time boxing, basketball and pop music events.

And as show jumping continues to thrive in Las Vegas, our boots and breeches brigade there expands with a big dressage show, the Las Vegas High Roller Jan. 4-7. A World Cup qualifier, this will also be staged at the South Point Hotel's Equestrian Center, which seemed to lure lots of the general public into the equestrian action throughout the run of the Las Vegas National – a good trend for our sport. Hopefully, it's just a matter of time until equestrian sports make an appearance in the next Hangover sequel as a mainstream Las Vegas attraction.

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For complete results of the Las Vegas National, visit www.showpark.com.