

Free-Jumping Provides A Valuable Alternative Exercise For Your Dressage Horse

Building a jumping chute will help develop any horse's athletic potential.

Charlene Strickland

How do you keep a dressage horse alert, active, and enthusiastic? Spice up his routine by adding free-jumping, as practiced by respected German trainers.

"Nothing is better to get the back through than to free-jump," said Stephan Kiesewetter, head trainer at the International Academy for Equestrian Studies in Warendorf, Germany. He includes free-jumping in the work schedules of the dressage horses there.

"Jumping is good for the horse's mind and body," agreed trainer Marion Ostmeyer, also on the faculty at the academy. "It makes them

stronger, and they use and stretch their backs, lifts their shoulders, and gets them more supple through their bodies."

Ostmeyer and Kiesewetter regularly free-jump their dressage horses to allow the horses to use themselves as athletes.

As a gymnastic exercise, it helps horses improve their balance and strength as equine athletes. It's also a refreshing change for the horse bored with arena work, and it prepares horses that must free-jump at breed approvals.

Ostmeyer recommended free-jumping for horses of any age, from 2 years old and up. To vary work, she advised, "You can hack outside, ride in the arena, free-jump, work in the ring, and hack on the trail. Giving the horse different situations helps him in dressage, so he's less likely to spook at the flowers in the ring."

She also advocates free-jumping yearlings, letting them choose to jump on their own. "In

the wintertime, put yearlings in the arena and put cavalettis everywhere. Let them run around and play with them. You'll see the ones who take the jumps and those that go around the jumps."

Build A Safe Jumping Lane

To make a chute so the horse stays on the line and focuses on the jumps, place standards and rails to form a jumping lane and add plastic tape to make the lane into a chute.

Place your lane on the long side of an arena, either along a wall of an indoor arena or the fence line of an outdoor arena. (The fence should be tall enough to keep the horse from jumping out.)

"It's important that all is as safe as possible, because it's the horse making his own decisions," cautioned Ostmeyer.

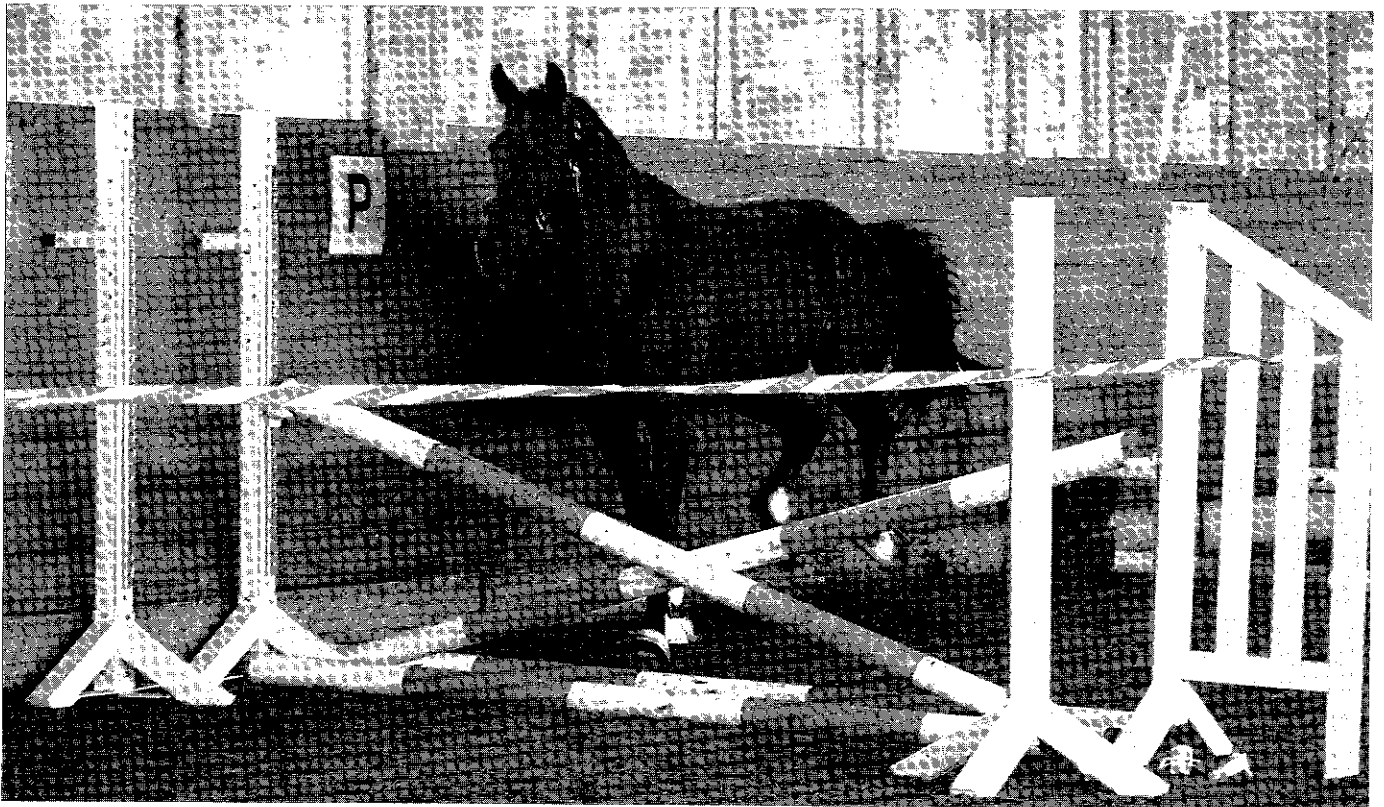
For older horses, plan four jumping efforts, reducing the number to three for a younger horse. In the diagram shown on p. 68, the order of jumping efforts includes:

1. A cavaletti (to become a vertical later).
2. A crossrail.
3. An oxer.
4. A vertical (to become an oxer later).

You'll need a minimum of 15 standards: 12 for the jumps and three extra to hold the tape at start and finish. (See the Xs on the diagram.) For jumps and ground lines, plan for 14 rails.



Introduce a horse to free-jumping with a cavaletti and a low crossrail. Note the tape to form the lane and that the jump cups have been removed from standards not being used.



(Charlene Strickland Photo)

Stephan Kiesewetter demonstrates how to hold the lead rope before putting the horse into the jumping chute. By opening his index finger, he can release the rope.

If you have four wing standards, use them as the "inside" standards for the four jumps.

You'll need a roll of colored plastic tape to stretch along the inside standards to form the chute.

On the lane's placement, Ostmeyer said, "The first fence is quite deep in the corner, so the horse won't speed up to start.

"For the last fence, make it so the horse can finish the lane, and he's not afraid to jump it. Make room so he can stop after the last jump," she added.

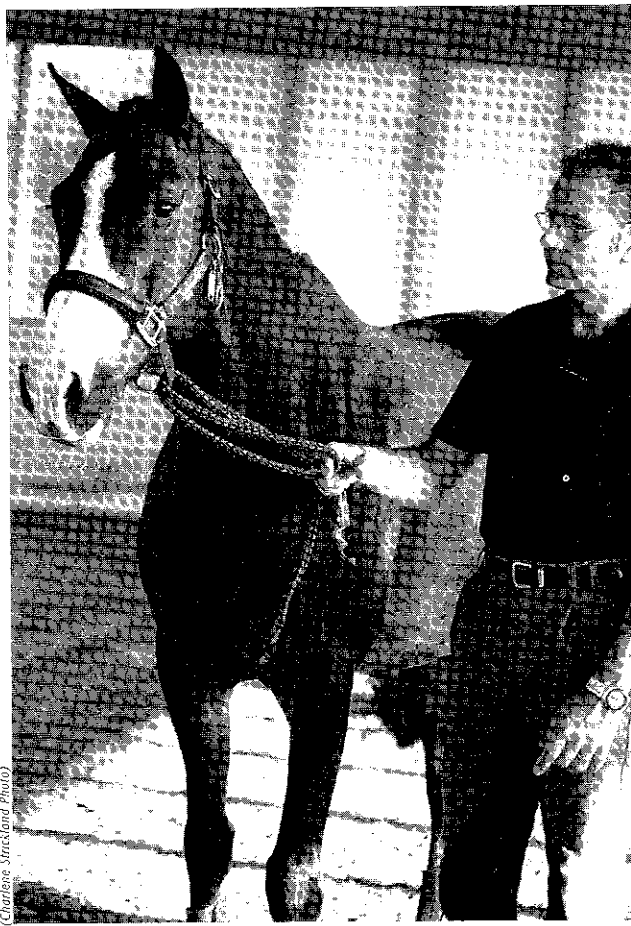
Set your standards to start the lane, at the distances in the diagram. You'll use two standards for the cavaletti, two for the crossrail, four for the oxer (set the wing standard for the front rail), and four for the vertical (again, set the wing standard for the front rail).

"Take the cups off the back standards," advised Ostmeyer, replacing them when you make the vertical into an oxer.

You don't need to set the "outside" (wall side) standards so they touch the wall or fence. Standards can be a few inches out from the wall, to stand on level ground.

Position two standards to form a curved entrance, to guide the horse into the lane. At the finish, add the final standard. Remove all cups from these guiding standards.

With standards in place, add the rails. For



Charlotte Strickland Photo

an experienced horse, you might set the rails at these heights:

1. One rail for the cavaletti, flat on the ground.
2. Two rails for the low crossrail, plus one for the groundline.
3. Two rails for the oxer, both set at 18 inches, plus one for the groundline.
4. One rail for the vertical, set at 24 inches, plus one for the groundline.

When you're starting a horse in free-jumping, use only the first two jumps the first day. You'll increase the height and number of jumping efforts according to the horse's age and ability.

Once you've adjusted the positions of the standards, attach the tape. You can loop it around the tops of standards or fasten it in place with duct tape.

If your horse has jumping experience, start with the oxer and vertical higher, say 18 inches for the first two rounds. For a first-timer, place all the rails on the ground in the lane and lead him through the lane to become used to walking over the rails. Then place the rails on the cups.

Prepare The Horse

Outfit the horse in a stable halter for this exercise. "I prefer a tight halter—not a too-large halter that shakes on his head

or flaps," said Ostmeyer. "It can influence the horse's performance."

She added that you could use a bridle, without the reins.

Ostmeyer likes to use bell boots on the horse's front feet, and sometimes she puts galloping boots on all four legs. "I prefer boots 10 times to polo wraps. They're better protection if the horse hits himself," she said.

In addition to yourself, enlist at least two other people for free-jumping. When you first start a horse, aim for a person at each jumping effort and another to catch the horse at the end.

Each person can hold a longe whip. "You don't chase the horse into the jump," cautioned Ostmeyer. "Have a whip so if the horse spooks, you help him with a little crack."

If your horse hasn't seen jumps, lead him along the lane so he becomes used to the sight. When you're ready to send him into the lane, unsnap the lead rope from the halter ring. Double the rope, and run the end through the ring.

Hold the rope loosely so when you open your hand, the end slides free from the halter ring.

Guide The Horse

Lead the horse into the chute and pick up the trot. As he's trotting forward, you "launch" him by releasing the lead rope. Step back and cluck as you crack the whip.

"Do it quietly, so the horse figures it out," said Ostmeyer. "If he spooks, give him time to think about it.

"Stay quiet. Lead him to the fence, and don't chase him so he spins and gets crazy. Don't run after the horse," she added.

She cautioned against overuse of the whip. "The whip distracts the horse from looking at the fence. The whip can interrupt the horse," she said.

How do you "help" the horse? You and your assistants can cluck to encourage him to jump or use tactful cracks of the whip.

Watch the horse's attitude his first time through the lane, letting him make his own decisions over these low fences. Observe if he tracks straight or veers too close to the wall or tape.

Don't worry about his gait—he can trot or canter. What's important is that he maintains forward momentum and makes jumping efforts. When the horse finishes, the person at the end of the chute catches him.

For the first-time jumper, leave the first rail on the ground throughout the session.

Our Experts

Stephan Kiesewetter is head trainer at the International Academy for Equestrian Studies, Warendorf, Germany. He was formerly the chief training conductor and deputy director of the German Riding School in Warendorf. Kiesewetter holds the Reitlehrer FN certification.

Marion Ostmeyer, a successful trainer of jumpers, is also on the academy faculty. She holds both a teaching degree and the Pferdewirtschaftsmeister (master's degree). She has also received the prestigious "Goldenes Reitabzeichen" award from the German federation.

The horse is beginning to use his neck and back in an early trip through the jumping chute.

The first day, you might raise the crossrail so the cups are as high as 24 inches. The next day, you could repeat the first day's setup for the first two trips, and then add an oxer after the crossrail.

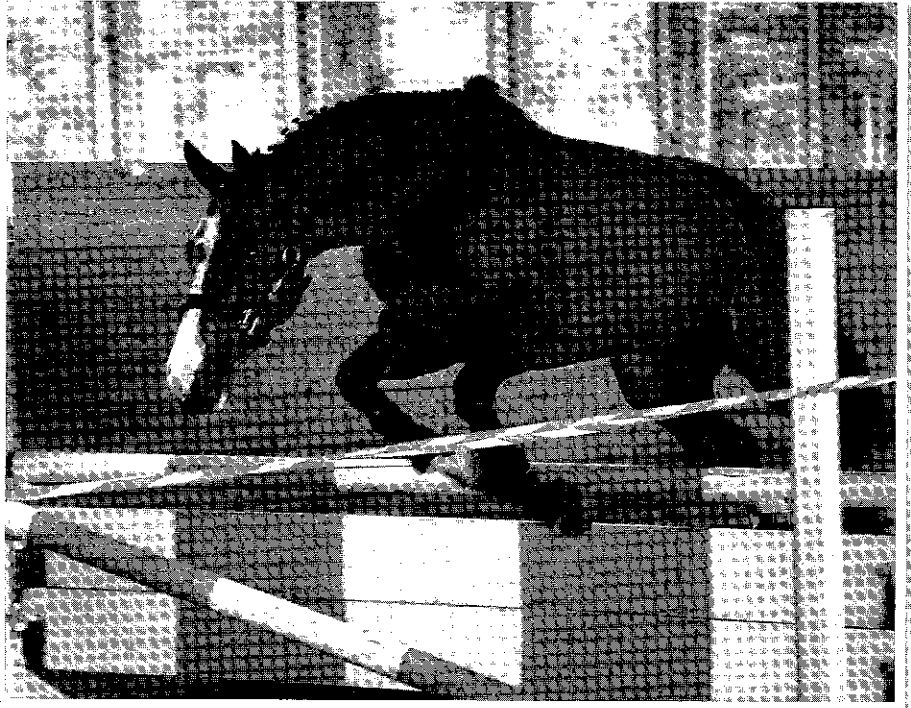
"Let the horse tell you he's ready to jump more," said Ostmeier. Let his comfort, balance and relaxation tell you when to raise the jumps. Most horses are ready for more after two or three times through the chute, but some need more time.

"You can't improve the horse if you overchallenge him. He needs to jump with relaxation. Push him only if he has the physical ability to jump," she said.

If the horse jumps too close to the wall or gets too deep at fences, you can adjust the lane. Ostmeier suggested adding a plank against the wall between fences 3 and 4, to guide the horse more toward the center of the next fence.

To help a horse that twists over the highest fence, "I'll raise the top rail of the vertical at fence 4. That will help him to raise his knees and not twist his body."

For horses that rush through the chute, "I'll add a plank on the ground one stride

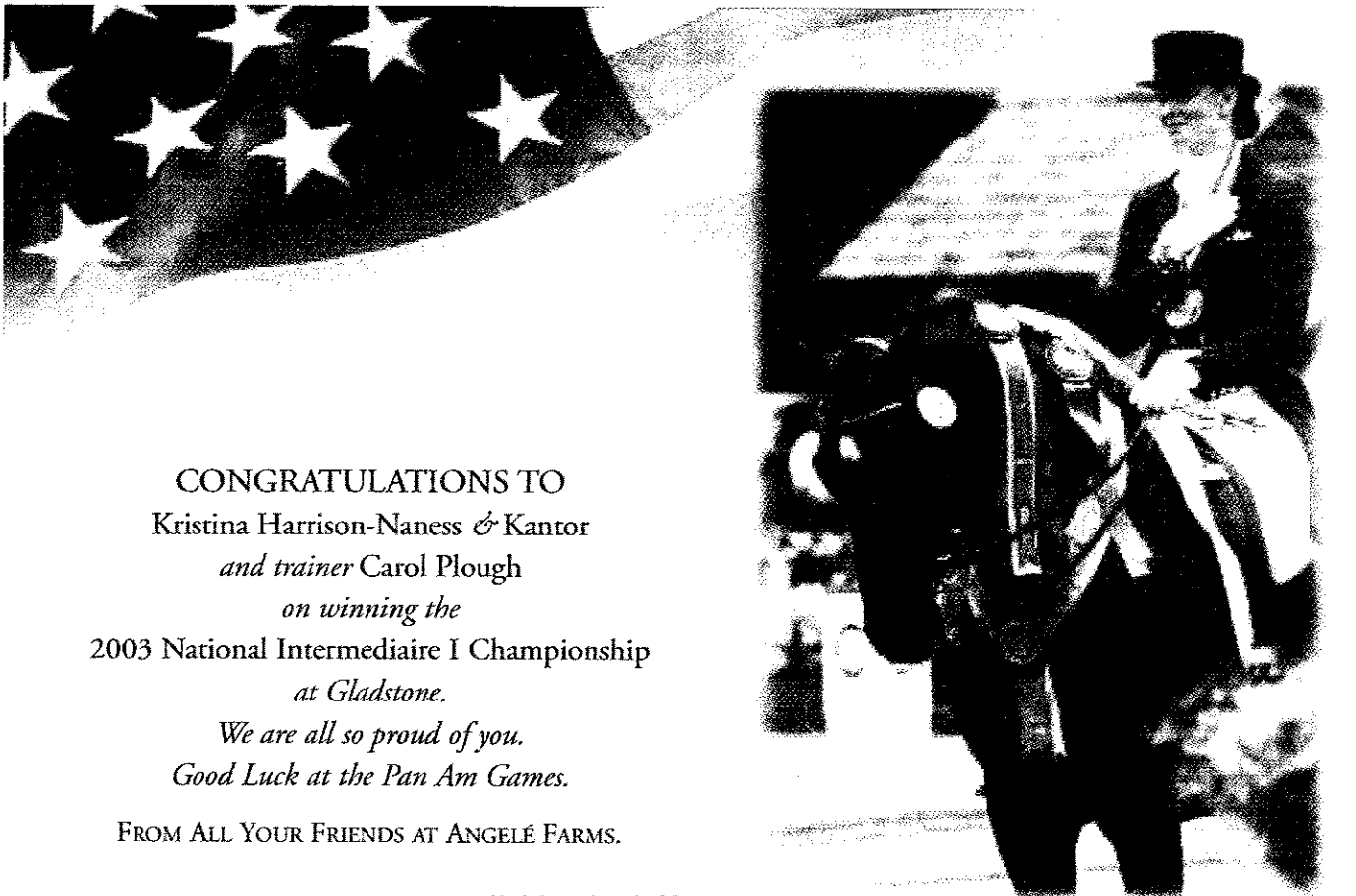


(Charlene Strickland Photo)

before fence 4. I use a plank instead of a rail—it's OK if the horse steps on a plank, but not if he steps on a pole." She noted that when you're riding through a gymnastic line, poles are acceptable.

Evaluating Athletic Ability

Ostmeier said not to give up on horses that can't seem to figure out how to jump on their first couple of trips through the chute.



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Nicole Lever/Chronicle of the Horse

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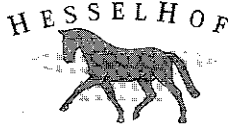
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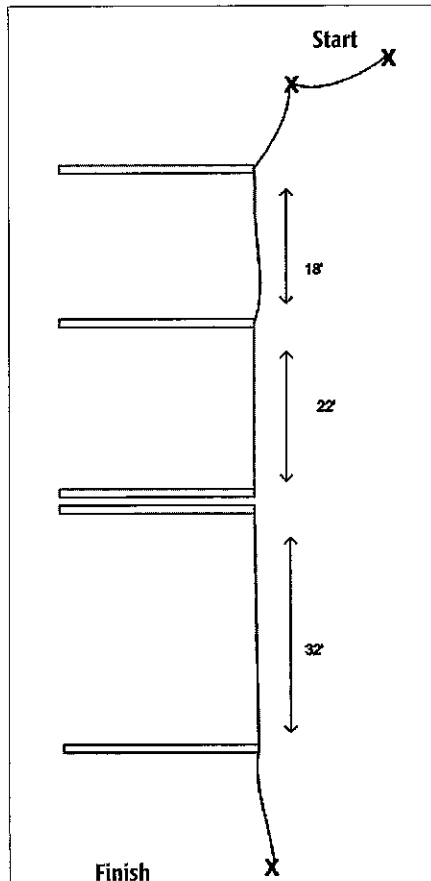
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DRESSAGE HORSES

DRESSAGE



The jumping chute begins with a cavaletti, followed by a crossrail, an oxer, and then a vertical that can become an oxer.

"Some need to warm-up, and others can spook at the beginning," she said.

What if a horse stops and knocks down a fence? "Don't overreact," she said. "Be with him, and use your cluck."

Judges at breed approvals will evaluate a horse's jumping ability by giving separate scores for style, scope and natural aptitude, using a scale of 1 to 10.

The judges look for a horse that stretches through his back and uses himself. They evaluate how he uses his forehead and if he clears the top rail without twisting. For aptitude, the judges expect the horse to figure out the distances and adjust his stride.

Ostmeyer noted that free-jumping can help a jumper prospect. "A horse may be ugly and not a good mover, but when he's a baby, you can see if he can jump. It's too expensive to raise him until he's 4 years old and then find out," she said.

Kiesewetter added, "I would not want to ride a dressage horse that can't free-jump. The horse is an athlete. Horses that are not able to handle jumping have a problem in their bodies."

Indy Dressage Classic

CARMEL, IN—JUNE 6-8.

JUDGES: Cara Whitham, Gary Rockwell, Marian Becker.

Open USDF Intro. Level, T. A - 1. Solo, S. Montgomery, 49.50%; 2. Solo, 56.66. **A/A Trg., T. 1 - 1.** Grande Tiara, R. Ulrich, 70.00; 2. Ravel, K. Stanton, 68.63; 3. Redson, D. Redlich, 65.90. **Trg., T. 1, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** A'Dur, K. Barteau, 66.36; 2. Beauty's Bandito, 56.36. **A/A Trg., T. 4 - 1.** Ravel, 66.53; 2. Grande Tiara, 66.15; 3. Rosabella, R. Hopfner, 65.76. **Trg., T. 4, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Vorvik, K. Barteau, 70.76; 2. Hungarian Esprit, T. Chartier, 66.15; 3. Marker, C. Buechley, 60.76. **Open Trg., T. 4 - 1.** Crowd Pleaser, T. Williams, 59.61. **A/A 1st Level, T. 1 - 1.** Rosabella, 72.22; 2. Chassara McCoy, L. Rickords, 67.03; 3. Kyra, G. Rodecker, 65.55. **1st Level, T. 1, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Celeste, K. Jones, 59.25; 2. Double Duty, J. Sharp, 55.18. **Open 1st Level, T. 1 - 1.** Siglavy Bellamira, B. McCuiston, 48.14. **A/A 1st Level, T. 4 - 1.** Kyra, 69.16; 2. After All, J. Rude, 62.22; 3. Frankly Speaking, J. Sloan, 61.94. **1st Level, T. 4, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Celeste, 62.50; 2. Vorvik, 59.72; 3. Vaudou, M. Owen, 56.38. **Open 1st Level, T. 4 - 1.** Ovation, J. Conour, 70.27; 2. Siglavy Bellamira, 62.77; 3. Crowd Pleaser, 59.16. **A/A 2nd Level, T. 1 - 1.** Prince Charles, B. Zeitler, 61.84; 2. Nip Of Silk, A. Goodwin-Volpert, 58.68; 3. Vychedga, D. McFarland, 56.31. **2nd Level, T. 1, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Vaudou, 55.26. **A/A 2nd Level, T. 4 - 1.** Vychedga, 53.72. **Open 2nd Level, T. 4 - 1.** E.M. Windspiel, Y. Barteau, 65.88. **A/A 3rd Level, T. 1 - 1.** Dynasty, R. Hopfner, 54.44; 2. Bretteur, D. Denis, 52.50; 3. Verbeau, C. Kamenish, 50.27. **3rd Level, T. 1, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Victor, E. Denis, 61.94. **Open 3rd Level, T. 1 - 1.** Gabriella, 69.16; 2. Isabella, 61.11. **A/A 3rd Level, T. 3 - 1.** Bretteur, 55.33; 2. Dynasty, 48.66. **3rd Level, T. 3, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Victor, 58.66. **Open 3rd Level, T. 3 - 1.** E.M. Windspiel, 55.77. **Open 4th Level, T. 1 - 1.** Liberty, K. Barteau, 63.48; 2. Dior, N. Kleiner, 60.69. **Open PSG - 1.** Letam, J. Conour, 65.00; 2. Sorcerer, C. Roseberry, 59.50. **Open Int. I - 1.** Laramie, K. Levy, 56.50. **Open Int. II - 1.** Fascination, J. Conour, 57.56. **USDF Open Intro. Level, T. A - 1.** Ravel, L. Miller, 72.50; 2. Solo, 63.50. **USDF Open Intro. Level, T. B - 1.** Ravel, 71.42; 2. Solo, 56.19; 3. Beauty's Bandito, 55.71. **A/A Trg., T. 2 - 1.** Ovation, K. Stanton, 75.38; 2. Keeghan, A. Gleason, 71.92; 3. Grande Tiara, 68.84. **Trg., T. 2, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** A'Dur, 71.15; 2. Beauty's Bandito, 54.23. **Open Trg., T. 2 - 1.** Kantor, A. Combs, 54.61. **A/A Trg., T. 3 - 1.** Grande Tiara, 69.58; 2. Chassara McCoy, 68.33; 3. Portabella, N. Andersen, 62.08. **A/A Trg., T. 4 - 1.** Rosabella, 71.92; 2. Tie, Feuerwehr, B. Skitt & Keeghan, 64.61. **Trg., T. 4, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Vorvik, 70.38; 2. Drachenhart, E. Powers, 64.61; 3. Kissittalgoodbye, L. Griffin, 64.23. **Open Trg., T. 4 - 1.** Kantor, 59.61. **A/A 1st Level, T. 2 - 1.** Chassara McCoy, 65.29; 2. After All, 62.35. **1st Level, T. 2, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Celeste, 61.76; 2. Double Duty, 59.70. **Open 1st Level, T. 2 - 1.** Primethii, A. Pisano, 55.86; 2. Siglavy Bellamira, 53.23; 3. Crowd Pleaser, 51.47. **A/A 1st Level, T. 3 - 1.** Siglavy Bellamira, 63.14; 2. Romana, R. Pemberton, 61.71; 3. Shakim Not Stirred, T. McGuire, 59.14. **A/A 1st Level, T. 3 - 1.** Kyra, 69.16; 2. After All, 67.22; 3. Rosabella, 64.72. **1st Level, T. 3, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Vorvik, 64.16; 2. Sjoerd, T. Todosijevic, 59.16; 3. Celeste, 57.50. **Open 1st Level, T. 4 - 1.** Piroutte, P. Bruveris, 63.61; 2. Primethii, 54.72; 3. Crowd Pleaser, 52.22. **2nd Level, T. 1 - 1.** Sjoerd, 59.73; 2. Sachem, K. Rillo, 57.36. **A/A 2nd Level, T. 2 - 1.** Tie, Nip Of Silk & Roving Ruler, M. Kerr, 56.21; 2. Prince Charles, B. Zeitler, 55.40. **2nd Level, T. 2, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Vaudou, 56.48. **Open 2nd Level, T. 2 - 1.** Sachem, 61.89; 2. Brigadier, P. Bruveris, 57.02. **A/A 2nd Level, T. 4 - 1.** Lamiro, K. Huff, 60.00; 2. Minerva, J. Kelly, 55.29; 3. Vychedga, 53.72. **2nd Level, T. 4, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Vaudou, 53.72. **Open 2nd Level, T. 4 - 1.** E.M. Windspiel, 65.29; 2. Sachem, 61.56; 3. Piroutte, 58.23. **A/A 3rd Level, T. 1 - 1.** Toffson, M. Kerr, 58.33; 2. Verbeau, 52.77. **Open 3rd Level, T. 1 - 1.** Sjoerd, 57.50. **Open 1st Level, T. 4 - 1.** Geissler, 54.44. **3rd Level, T. 2 - 1.** Toffson, 54.52; 2. Minerva, L. Hooser, 54.28; 3. Xtraordinaire, R.M. Ridgeaway, 52.61. **3rd Level, T. 3 - 1.** Gabriella, 65.11; 2. Bretteur, 56.66. **4th Level, T. 1 - 1.** Liberty, 63.02; 2. Victor, 62.32; 3. Bretteur, 53.25. **4th Level, T. 3 - 1.** Dior, 57.39; 2. Victor, 53.04. **PSG - 1.** Letam, 63.00; 3. Sorcerer, 55.00. **Open Int. I - 1.** Laramie, 56.00. **Open Grand Prix Test Of Choice - 1.** Fascination, (B), 52.70. **A/A Trg., T. 1 - 1.** Feuerwehr, 69.54; 2. Redson, 65.45; 3. Avanti, A. Tepoch, 50.00. **Trg., T. 1, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Beauty's Bandito, 54.09. **Open Trg., T. 1 - 1.** Ovation, J. Conour, 74.09. **A/A Trg., T. 2 - 1.** Grande Tiara, 70.00; 2. Scribblewood, C. Kamenish, 65.38; 3. Ovation, K. Stanton, 64.23. **Trg., T. 2, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Beauty's Bandito, 56.53. **Open Trg., T. 2 - 1.** Kantor, 61.92. **A/A Trg., T. 3 - 1.** Portabella, 70.00; 2. Angie's Little Step, M. Anglea, 57.50; 3. Cuero's Gold, R. Rizzo, 52.50. **A/A Trg., T. 4 - 1.** Rosabella, 76.53; 2. Chassara McCoy, 68.84; 3. Feuerwehr, 66.53. **Trg., T. 4, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Vorvik, 75.76; 2. A'Dur, 66.92; 3. Kissittalgoodbye, 61.53. **Open Trg., T. 4 - 1.** Kantor, 61.92. **A/A 1st Level, T. 1 - 1.** After All, 62.22; 2. Romana, 60.00; 3. Vent, T. Thomas, 58.14. **Open 1st Level, T. 1 - 1.** Siglavy Bellamira, 57.77; 2. Primethii, 55.18. **A/A 1st Level, T. 2 - 1.** Chassara McCoy, 63.00; 2. Lelik, A. Tepoch, 53.23; 3. Mon Ami, S. Moran, 46.76. **1st Level, T. 3 - 1.** Celeste, 62.57; 2. Lelik, 56.57; 3. Double Duty, 55.42. **A/A 1st Level, T. 4 - 1.** Rosabella, 70.27; 2. Kyra, 64.44; 3. Lamiro, 62.77. **1st Level, T. 4, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Vorvik, 68.05; 2. Sjoerd, 63.33; 3. Celeste, 61.94. **Open 1st Level, T. 4 - 1.** Piroutte, 59.72; 2. Primethii, 56.94; 3. Crowd Pleaser, 50.00. **2nd Level, T. 2 - 1.** Prince Charles, 61.62; 2. Sjoerd, 58.91; 3. Roving Ruler, 56.75. **2nd Level, T. 3 - 1.** Sachem, 60.00; 2. Brigadier, 57.87; 3. Vaudou, 57.44. **A/A 2nd Level, T. 4 - 1.** Lamiro, 64.51; 2. Minerva, 58.82; 3. Roving Ruler, 51.37. **2nd Level, T. 4, Jr./Y.R. - 1.** Vaudou, 56.27. **Open 2nd Level, T. 4 - 1.** Brigadier, 59.80; 2. Piroutte, 55.49. **3rd Level, T. 1 - 1.** Toffson, 61.11; 2. Isabella, 59.72; 3. Sirius, 55.27. **3rd Level, T. 2 - 1.** Bretteur, 58.57; 2. Sirius, 57.36; 3. Xtraordinaire, 54.76. **3rd Level, T. 3 - 1.** Gabriella, 70.00; 2. Victor, 65.33; 3. Bretteur, 57.33. **4th Level, T. 3 - 1.** Dior, 63.47; 2. Victor, 62.17. **Open PSG - 1.** Letam, 69.00; 2. Sorcerer, 55.50. **Open Int. II - 1.** Fascination,

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