

Parra Prevails At Paxton CDI

Sara Lieser

Despite constant rain and cold temperatures, Cesar Parra and Horses Unlimited's Galant du Serein showed a strong performance in the CDI Cincinnati at Paxton Farm to win the Grand Prix and the Grand Prix freestyle on May 12-14 in Batavia, Ohio.

"The weather was awful. It was raining every single minute," said Parra. "But the footing stayed good, and I was so impressed at how helpful everyone was. The Paxton family took care of every single detail. They tried to really make it the best for us."

This was Parra's first time at the Ohio CDI in almost six years. He's been competing the 14-year-old, Selle Français stallion (Apache d'Adriers—Sojornet) often this season to work on re-creating the harmony and pizzazz that they have at home in the show ring.

"We tried to fiddle around with the warm-up so we can get him to show his best in the class," said Parra, 43, who splits his time between Jupiter, Fla., and Whitehouse Station,

N.J. "He's really improved a lot. At home he looks ready for the international competition, but I don't seem to reproduce that so well in the ring."

Parra hopes to represent his native country of Colombia in the World Equestrian Games this summer in Aachen, Germany, with Galant du Serein. The pair contested the 2004 Athens Olympics as well, and this time Parra hopes to be more competitive.

"The test is pretty clean now; you don't see any faults. But we need to get some more brilliance," said Parra. "He doesn't look as sharp in the ring as he does in the warm-up. We're really trying to figure out how to keep him fresh and get him to look his best in the ring."

Parra said that the strength in their test came in the harmony. "You don't see any weak part," he said. "You don't see mistakes; it looks organized. He knows it and is willing to do it."

He explained that sometimes just performing the movements in a flowing manner with no mistakes is the best you can hope for. "But with Galant, I know he can do better, so I really want to try for it," said Parra. "I have to

push for more cadence, rhythm and brilliance. In the whole picture, I'd like to see him a little bit fresher. I think it's coming."

One of the ways Parra is improving Galant's freshness is by getting him a bit fitter. "He comes out in the morning to walk for 45 minutes in the hills. Then I ride him, and he goes back out in the afternoon and walks again. I think that's helping him to get a little bit more condition," he said.

They also have to take into consideration Galant's breeding schedule. After a heavy season of showing and breeding in Florida this winter, Parra gave the stallion a few weeks off before tuning him up for the CDI.

"This was our first show back, and now he's really ready for the next one," said Parra.

► He's Living Up To His Name

While Parra was searching for a little extra spark from his steed in the Grand Prix, Katherine Poulin-Neff's ride, Brilliant Too, was just getting confirmed in the small tour classes.

"Zuel" won the Great American/USDF Region 2 championships at third and fourth level last year, but Poulin-Neff had no expectations that he'd excel in the small tour classes so quickly.

"There's no pressure with this horse. Whatever he's capable of doing while remaining happy and healthy—that's what I do," said Poulin-Neff.

Poulin-Neff's parents, Michael and Sharon Poulin, bred Zuel (Brilliant—Blue Brigetta). When the Dutch Warmblood-Thoroughbred cross failed to grow beyond 15.1 hands, Poulin-Neff earned the ride as the shortest member of her family.

"A lot of people come up to me and ask, 'How big is your horse?' But I've never had a judge make a negative comment about his size," said Poulin-Neff. "Spectators just can't believe that a horse his size is doing what he's doing. It tells people that you don't have to have a big, fancy horse to make it with the big boys."

Poulin-Neff is especially proud of the fact that Zuel is an American-bred warmblood. "I was the first person that ever sat on the horse, and I'm still training him," she said. "There's always one particular



(Photo: Tony Stone)

Galant du Serein and Cesar Parra displayed strength and harmony to win the Grand Prix and Grand Prix Freestyle at the Paxton CDI.