

Triumphs and Tributes Mark US Dressage Finals' 10th Anniversary Edition

Swan song for Grand Prix champion RTF Lincoln; trainers and students share spotlight

BY ALICE COLLINS FOR JUMP MEDIA

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUSANJSTICKLE.COM



FAREWELL PERFORMANCE: After winning yet another year's worth of Grand Prix-level US Dressage Finals championship titles, Heather Mason said her longtime partner RTF Lincoln would be retiring

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t was an emotional end to one horse's long and fruitful career at the top level at the 2023 US Dressage Finals presented by

Adequan®, held November 9-12 at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington. Dressage pro Heather Mason retired her longtime partner RTF Lincoln—a horse she bought for one dollar—after securing victory in the Grand Prix Open Freestyle with a score of 74.942%. They also topped the previous day's Grand Prix class with 69.203%.

The 2023 event was the tenth-anniversary edition of the flagship national show. Competitors qualify via the Great American Insurance Group/USDF Regional Championships in nine USDF regions, and the show offered more than \$120,000 in prize money.

All eyes in the Alltech Arena indoor sports arena were on "Lincoln" as he performed his ultra-difficult freestyle for the final time. Mason began with a one-handed double pirouette on the first center line, following that up with 25 one-time changes on a curve before a piaffe fan and another one-handed double canter pirouette.

"I'm happy because he had two really good rides," Mason said of her horse, "and it's nice to go out while he's strong. I finally let him do what he's always wanted to do in the prize-giving, which is run. I've never done that before because he gets really hot and then I'm worried about the next test, but not this time. He's really been amazing."

Mason, of Lebanon, New Jersey, bought Lincoln as a foal from his breeder, Cornell University in New York. She sold him when he was three but kept in touch with the buyer. When Lincoln injured first one front tendon and then the other, and then the owner had to have a double hip operation, Mason bought him back for a dollar.

"I knew he was good at shows, and I didn't know what else he was going to do—sit in a field for the rest of his life? I wanted to give him a chance," Mason explained. "He's proven that a difficult horse with soundness and ridability issues can actually do a lot."

The busy Mason brought two other horses to Finals and earned a remarkable seven championship titles across all her rides. Five came thanks to her talented pair of six-year-old geldings, one with Manuscript SCF (Fourth Level Open) and four with Shmoky Quartz, who was undefeated with scores all over 71%.

Mason bought Shmoky Quartz (by Shakespeare RSF) from his breeder, Maurine "Mo" Swanson, co-own-

er of Rolling Stone Farm in Pennsylvania. The rider/trainer called "Smoky" "extra supple and elastic. He's developed a lot and is now starting to find the next gear."

(For more about Smoky, who also notched the 2023 Adequan®/USDF Second Level Horse of the Year title, turn to page 78.)

Students Follow in Trainers' Footsteps

Mason's adult-amateur pupil Alexandra Krossen emulated her coach, picking up the First and Second Level AA Freestyle championship titles on her own Looker SCF. The senior pharmaceutical-company manager bred "Looker," who is now seven, as a custom foal. Krossen rode the horse's sire, Zulft SCF (by Ulft); when they lost him to colic, she used some of his frozen semen that had been collected before he was gelded.

"This horse is definitely a special one for me," said Krossen, who cross-trains Looker to keep him keen. "He grew up at Heather's. I broke him and did everything with him. He's seventeen hands and gangly and has a lot of movement that we don't always know how to control. I was concerned about going into the atmosphere of the Alltech [Arena], but he exceeded my expectations."

Trainer Angela Jackson scooped a title on Ella Fruchterman's horse Holts Le'Mans, while her student Bridgid Browne fended off a quality field in her Finals debut. Jackson has taken over the reins of the 12-year-old Holts Le'Mans to give the horse exposure at small tour and took the win in the Intermediate I Freestyle Open with 73.175%.

Fruchterman's family bought Holts Le'Mans (by L'Espoir) sight unseen from Denmark during the pandemic, and she has been tremendously successful with him.

"Today he was really ready to go," said the Kentucky-based Jackson. "He even wanted to go bigger; he shows up and wants to be there for you. He can do the ones and is learning piaffe and passage," she added. "I think he'll make a good Grand Prix horse."

Browne, 26, could not stop smiling after topping the Fourth Level Open Freestyle Championship field on her horse of a lifetime, Karina Sandra TF, whom she bought as a foal.

"I love this mare with my whole heart," enthused Browne of her 15.2-hand mare by Fiderbach. "I was refreshing the results over and over again because there were a lot of really competitive, good riders in there.

"We've polished things up with Angela via video lessons," said Browne, who scored 72.492% to music from



SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST: Last to go in a field of 21, Lauren Chumley and Leeloo Dallas claimed the Prix St. Georges Open Championship title



BEDAZZLED: Dazzle, ridden by Anartz Chanca, won the Grand Prix and GP Freestyle Adult Amateur championship titles

Mamma Mia! put together by Kristin Wasemiller-Knutson. “Shrimpy’ really let me push her through the test. It felt so flowing, and she trusted me in the huge atmosphere. She’s never seen anything like it.”

A former professional rider, Browne now works in medical-device sales. She keeps Shrimpy at a nearby farm, where the eight-year-old lives with a mini companion, Chocolate.

Additional trainer/pupil combinations all picking up champion’s

sashes were Lauren Chumley and her students Taiwan “Tai” Parrish and Meghan Richards. Chumley was the last to go in the five-hour Prix St. Georges Open Championship on the American-bred Leeloo Dallas (Gaspard de la Nuit DG x Negro). The seven-year-old—equal youngest of the 21 starters—swept in to land the only score over 70%.

“I had a super-lucky draw spot, and my horse is freaking awesome,” said Chumley, who trains with Hilltop Farm head trainer Michael

Bragdell and who also is an eventer. “I bought her as a foal because she was little and black with four white socks and I could afford her. She one hundred percent has the ability for Grand Prix; most importantly, she’s got the brain,” added Chumley, of Hunterdon County, New Jersey.

Parrish and his Finals mount, Chumley’s Sandro Hit gelding Saracchi, are the same age. The two 18-year-olds claimed the Fourth Level Junior/Young Rider Championship on 69.637%.

Parrish has been helping at Chumley’s barn since he was 14. When the trainer offered him the ride on Saracchi, Parrish decided to switch from jumping to dressage.

Richards has also switched saddles—in her case, from hunter/jumper to dressage. On their fourth visit to Finals, she and Kingstown (El Capone x United) finally bagged a champion’s sash, scoring 68.284% to top the Intermediate I Adult Amateur ranks. Richards has owned the eight-year-old KWPN gelding since buying him from a video when he was three.

“This has been a great year for him,” said Richards, who runs Magnolia Creek Stables in Pittstown, New Jersey. “He was a little spooky in some spots, but it was mostly in the corners and didn’t hurt us too much.”

Living up to Their Names

Three auspiciously named Finals competitors each found success in Kentucky.

Anartz Chanca’s mount Dazzle did just that, winning both the Grand Prix Adult Amateur and the GP Freestyle AA championship titles. Chanca also captured the Third Level AA tricolor on his own Dante Rubin MR.

Of his freestyle performance, Chanca said: “We had a mistake in the one-tempis, but I had a reserve line and I knew I had to risk it, so I went one-handed to compensate for the mistake.” His strategy paid off, with one judge commenting on his “courageous riding.”

Dante Rubin, a six-year-old by Dante Weltino, was the youngest horse in the field of 18. Five years ago, Chanca and his wife, Marta Renilla, imported six yearlings from Europe that grew up on the family’s farm in Texas. One of those was Dante Rubin, and another, D Diamond MR, was also in winning form. Under Ellie Strickland, the Oldenburg son of D’Egalite won the First Level Junior/Young Rider championship with 69.444%.

The very appropriately named Bonnie Canter romped her way to three titles and a reserve on her horses Vitali and Super Susie. The petite 65-year-old retiree was unbeaten on Super Susie, racking up the First and Second Level AA titles, both with plus-70% scores. On Vitali, Canter won the Fourth Level AA title on 71.065% and was reserve champion in the AA Prix St. Georges.

Vitali, who is by the Vitalis son Vilancio, is no stranger to Finals, having won at Second Level two years ago. Since then, Canter has relocated from Texas to Melrose, Florida, and added the five-year-old Super Susie to her string.

“It’s such a buildup to Finals, and there are so many good horses in Region 3, so you just never know how it’s going to play out,” said Canter, who bought both horses sight unseen from Holland. “I’ve been working with [Spanish Olympic rider] Severo Jurado López. He’s my hero. It’s been a lucky year.”



CANTERING TO VICTORY: Fourth Level Adult Amateur champions and Prix St. Georges Adult Amateur reserve champions Bonnie Canter and Vitali

Cincinnati-based rider Jennifer Truett’s 2022 Intermediate I Open champion, Absolute Dream, is also aptly named. He seamlessly stepped up to claim the Intermediate II Open crown this year, topping the class with 68.235%.

“He came into the arena and puffed up but stayed with me. He’s so powerful and electric,” said Truett, who trains with Olivia LaGoy-Weltz. “He was much more up in his chest and sitting powerfully with his loin and croup, and that’s really new for him.”

Truett bought the nine-year-old Westfalen gelding by All at Once from Reesink Horses as a two-year-old. She said she planned to spend the winter in Florida competing at the Developing Grand Prix level before heading home to prepare for a potential Grand Prix debut this summer.

“If I Could Clone Him, I Would”

It was the very last combination down the center line in the Intermediate I Open championship class that snatched victory, with Taylor

Lindsten on Susan Skripac’s nine-year-old Georgian Grande stallion, Wallace G, proving the only combination to crack 70%.

“He showed up because he knew it was important, and he’s a showman,” enthused Lindsten, 30, who has developed Wallace G since he was five.

“At the lower levels, he wasn’t very successful because he’s so naturally high and tight in the neck,” said Lindsten, who runs Taylor Made Sport Horses in Scottsdale, Arizona. “Then at Fourth Level he started to show some great scores. What helped was doing working equitation; we are hoping to go to the 2026 World Cup in Spain. He’s multitalented; if I could clone that horse, I would!”

Homebred Horse Power

Amy Swerdlin’s two homebreds garnered a host of sashes, with Fellowship CCW taking two wins and a second, and Quileute CCW standing reserve in the Grand Prix Adult Amateur Freestyle with 70.775%.

In the Fourth Level Freestyle AA, Fellowship pulled off a unanimous



HOME TIES: Amy Swerdlin previously won at Finals with her mare Scholastica. In 2023, Swerdlin returned with Scholastica's son, Fellowship CCW, to claim the Fourth Level Freestyle and Prix St. Georges Adult Amateur championships.

74.583% victory, almost 5% clear of the field, with a program designed by Marlene Whitaker. The eight-year-old, 17-hand, embryo-transfer Oldenburg gelding by Follow Me also topped the Prix St. Georges AA.

"This was really special because I won at Finals with Fellowship's mother, Scholastica," said Swerdlin, of Wellington, Florida. "This was the

first time I've brought Fellowship, so it was fun to follow in her footsteps."

The Winning Ingredient? It's a Secret

Three offspring from the prolific stallion Secret came away with Finals titles. Emily Donaldson's faith in the Sewickley Farm Partnership

LLC's talented five-year-old, Supersonic, was rewarded with the First Level Open Championship tricolor on 73.843%.

"I'm so happy he pulled off one of his best performances here," said the Pennsylvania-based dressage pro, who found the horse in Germany as a three-year-old. "It's a bit intimidating having one this good; he's as good as the best horses in Europe."

Tyra Vernon's five-year-old Secret gelding, Sandor ASH, landed the Training Level Jr/YR trophy with 72.933% under Florida-based rider Hannah Catsulis.

The third winner by Secret at the 2023 Finals was Bonnie Canter's five-year-old mare, Super Susie.

De Niro Delivers

The mega-producing sire De Niro accounted for three more of the winning horses. AA rider Rebecca Lord and the 14-year-old Hanoverian Demetrius were unbeatable in the Intermediate II AA Championship with 67.304%.

Lord had a 31-year break from riding but at 49 felt compelled to pick it up again, taking an extended sabbatical from her work as a medical intuitive. She trains with Franziska Seidl and Alex Robertson.

"I work so hard to bring all the learning and knowledge and awareness together," said Lord, 58, who bought Demetrius in 2020. "This win was a reflection of the road of progress that 'Demi' and I are on. I'm a quintuple-A-type person and you have to be patient [with horses], so the learning curve has been Mount Everest."

Jenna Butler's six-year-old De Niro son Da Vinci HSR triumphed in the First Level Freestyle Open with 74.769%. Butler, 25, has known the Oldenburg gelding since he was

REGION 3 CLAIMS REGIONS CUP TROPHY

The winner of the Le Mieux/US Dressage Finals Regions Cup and the Regions Cup Perpetual Trophy was USDF Region 3, with an average score of 72.002%: Sandor ASH/Hannah Catsulis, Vitali/Bonnie Canter, and Fellowship CCW/Amy Swerdlin.

Region 9 took the reserve championship on an average score of 68.703%: Julia Handt/NTEC Dorian Gray, Anartz Chanca/Dante Rubin MR, Mina Veselinovic/Gorm, and Marta Renilla/Zalando B.

In third with an average score of 67.956% was Region 1: Jennifer Roth/Valor, Erin Liedle/No Limit, Megan DeMichele/Shamrok Hit, and Lauren Chumley/Leeloo Dallas.



REGIONS CUP WINNERS: Region 3 riders Hannah Catsulis, Amy Swerdlin, and Bonnie Canter

2023 US DRESSAGE FINALS PERPETUAL TROPHY WINNERS

Calaveras County Perpetual Trophy for the Grand Prix Freestyle Adult Amateur Champion, presented by Olva Stewart Pharo: Anartz Chanca and Dazzle

George W. Wagner Jr. Perpetual Trophy for the Grand Prix Adult Amateur Champion, presented by International Georgian Grande Horse Registry: Anartz Chanca and Dazzle

Janine Westmoreland Malone Perpetual Trophy for the Prix St. Georges Adult Amateur Champion, presented by USDF: Amy Swerdlin and Fellowship CCWLAND

Verne Batchelder Memorial Trophy for the FEI highest-scoring US-bred horse, presented by River House Hanoverians: Amy Swerdlin and Fellowship CCW

Jazzman Perpetual Trophy for the Grand Prix Freestyle Open Champion, presented by Donna Richardson: Heather Mason and RTF Lincoln

Veronica Holt Perpetual Trophy for the Grand Prix Open Champion, presented by USDF Region 5 and Friends: Heather Mason and RTF Lincoln

Lloyd Landkamer Perpetual Trophy for the FEI highest-scoring mare: Leeloo Dallas, ridden by Lauren Chumley

Miki Christophersen Perpetual Trophy for the Prix St. Georges Open Champion, presented by USDF Region 4: Lauren Chumley and Leeloo Dallas

Top Hat Perpetual Trophy for the highest freestyle and non-freestyle average score at the same level, presented by Janet Foy: Heather Mason and Shmoky Quartz.



LANDKAMER AND CHRISTOPHERSEN TROPHY WINNERS: Lauren Chumley and Leeloo Dallas



JAZZMAN, HOLT, AND TOP HAT TROPHY WINNERS: Heather Mason and Shmoky Quartz



MALONE AND BATCHELDER TROPHY WINNERS: Amy Swerdlin and Fellowship CCW



VICTORY SALUTE: Lyndsey Bailey's mother, a fellow dressage rider, died in 2019. In 2023, Bailey dedicated her Intermediate I Freestyle Adult Amateur victory aboard Kasparov Toja to her mom's memory.

just backed, when she landed the ride while working for Illinois-based dressage pros Kate and Martin Kuhn. After leaving their barn and setting up her own business, she was able to buy Da Vinci.

"He's very hot and sensitive, so it's been about bringing that out in a positive way," said Butler, who still trains with Kuhn, usually virtually. "He's got a super work ethic, but he's a major pistol of a horse, and he's taught me a lot about being sensitive."

Laurie Saldana-Rich's last-minute decision to alter her freestyle floor plan paid dividends. She and her De Niro mare, Straight Horse De Milla, topped the Third Level Freestyle AA for the second successive year. Their 70.492% performance to a freestyle created by Cynthia Collins put them 3% clear of the reserve champion.

"It was a similar freestyle to last year, except Jennifer [Conour, with whom she trains] had me change the ending and do a circle of changes," said Saldana-Rich, 56, who winters in Florida with George Williams. "I hadn't done that until this show, so I tried it in the warmup

and thought, 'OK, I'm just going to go for it.'"

De Milla, the "perfect amateur horse," came from Helgstrand in Wellington three years ago. Two embryo-transfer foals out of the nine-year-old mare, both by Glamourdale, are due this year when Saldana-Rich returns to her Indiana farm.

Continuing the Legacy

In the Intermediate I Freestyle AA championship, the top three all finished within 0.1% of one another. Lyndsey Bailey came out on top, riding her 18.1-hand, 13-year-old Belgian Warmblood gelding, Kasparov Toja (by Vivaldi), to 69.858%.

"The feeling when you're on him is that you can reach the stars. My mom was a dressage rider, and she passed away in 2019; this is me carrying on her legacy," said a tearful Bailey, who runs a feed and tack store in New York. "This was for her."

Bailey credits much of her success to trainer Wendi Schnittjer. "She's been with me every step of this journey," Bailey said. "At five a.m. we're out there riding, and I'm on eastern Long Island, so this time

of year it's cold and brutal. She's always there encouraging me."

"Like Riding a Couch"

"The best baby horse ever!" was Emma Batchelder's assessment of her Training Level AA champion, Eminem (by Escolar). Batchelder bought him at the Hanoverian Elite Auction in 2022.

"He's been a total love and a trouper," enthused the Florida-based nurse anesthetist. "He's just a really smart, brave boy. He listened and was so supple in the test. He's totally comfortable and easy to sit. It's like riding a couch."

Another horse taking in a big atmosphere with aplomb was the seven-year-old Valor, who won the Training Level Open Championship with 72.867% under Jennifer Roth.

"He handled the atmosphere very bravely; he's never been to any venue like this, so I was thrilled," said Roth, of Columbus, Ohio. "I've given him extra time to mature as he's a big-moving horse. I called him a spider on roller skates because it took him years to figure out where his legs were."

Following an incredibly successful tenth anniversary of the US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan®, mark your calendar to attend this year's event on November 7-10.



As part of the Jump Media team, Florida-based British equestrian journalist Alice Collins helped to handle press and PR duties at the 2023 US Dressage Finals.

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