



NORTH AMERICAN RIDERS GROUP

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# THE TOP 25 OF 2015





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**Together,**  
we can improve  
our sport.

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THE SIXTH ANNUAL NARG REPORT:

# THE TOP 25 OF 2015



In 2010, the first year of the NARG Top 25 initiative, we were stretched to find a top 25 show without issues that needed to be addressed. Most of our continent's best events were lacking in one area or another. The North American FEI World Cup™ Qualifiers were often only CSI2\*-W events with poor prize money and minimal World Ranking offerings. The only CSI5\* classes in all of North America were three weeks at Spruce Meadows and one week at the Winter Equestrian Festival. Only the Spruce Masters offered prize money over \$500,000.

What a difference six years can make. The brand new Longines FEI North American Jumping League has upped the game on this continent. With a minimum rating of CSI3\*, fourteen shows were chosen to present events with Longines FEI World Ranking classes and World Cup™ Qualifiers. In 2014 and 2015, with plans to return in 2016, the European company EEM presented one of their three Longines Masters Grand Slam events in Los Angeles, with the other two in Paris and Hong Kong. The 2015 Global Champions Tour came to Miami and in 2016 will be held in both Miami and Mexico City. With all that and more, the 2016 show schedule in North America includes seventeen CSI5\* events, including the aforementioned locations plus more on the East and West coast of the United States and at more than one location in Canada.

Clearly, the horse shows have improved. And, as we knew would be the case, when the events improve the riders do as well. In this Olympic year the top five riders on the Rolex USEF Ranking List are also ranked within the top 30 riders in the world, with three of the five in the top ten. Of the riders ranked sixth through tenth on the Rolex USEF Ranking list, four of them are under the age of 30. To increase our depth, Chef d'Equipe Robert Ridland fielded many teams that included a variety of athlete/horse combinations, with the aim of providing opportunity and development on various levels. DiAnn Langer, Developing Rider Chef d'Equipe, now has 239 riders on the U25 Ranking List, a list that didn't exist when this NARG Top 25 initiative started.

Alongside our goal of playing a role in the success of our teams in the sport of show jumping, we also want the sport to continue to flourish on this continent. For six years in a row, NARG has taken on the demanding task of evaluating, scoring, and discussing up to fifty events; and then developing our perspective on the Top 25 Horse Shows in North America. We feel a broad sense of accomplishment and are confident that this project played a role in the development of these events. As we've said before, our hats are off, not only to all the volunteers who help with the NARG Top 25, but to the efforts beyond ours that, when combined, most certainly improve our sport.

## FORGING AHEAD

In the seven years since NARG came together, we've achieved goals that range from horse and rider welfare to changing the mileage rule. Most members of NARG's Board are not only accomplished riders and trainers, but sit on numerous committees and boards in the sport, and continuously commit to upholding standards that result in top show jumping. We certainly have a better grasp on the complexities of producing an internationally recognized event, and appreciate all of the organizing committees, show managers and sponsors who make tremendous efforts to produce top events in North America.

## ADJUSTMENTS IN 2015 MEAN LOWER SCORES OVERALL

We've listened to feedback as well as reanalyzed our methods to further improve the process of ranking the top shows. It became clear that as shows improved, our original 1–5 point scale didn't leave enough room for one event's strength or weakness to be clearly delineated in a score. In 2015, we implemented several adjustments that include going to a 1–10 point scale. Interestingly, with our highest score at 88% and our lowest top 25 shows at 66%, the new scale introduced a new playing field. So this year it is important to note the comments about an event, as they are all still NARG Top 25 shows and deserving of that distinction. However, with the new scale, it is simply more difficult to earn a 10, making an 8 or a 9 the new top scores. Effectively, earning a perfect 5 on the old 1–5 scale was easier.

Notably we also expanded some areas to include criteria that we had not scored specifically in previous years. This includes additional scores to the "Technical Aspects" section: "Quality of Competitors" score, which used the Multiplier as defined by the Rolex/USEF Ranking list; size and shape of competitive ring and schooling ring 'as conducive to good sport;' and the use of Audio/Visual equipment, video boards and Wi-Fi. Bonus points for shows that offer FEI-sanctioned events, as well as to shows that offer a grand prix with \$500,000 or more in prize money, were adjusted from 10 bonus points to 15 and 12 respectively.

## NOW ON TO THE NARG TOP 25 OF 2015

In 2015, the group of select shows that have emerged over the last six years hold their position on this elite list, even if they have slipped a touch with the new scoring system or due to an unforeseen mishap. Two new events made the list, and as a result, others barely missed. We discuss that group in our Honorable Mentions page. Also four events of the fourteen in the Longines FEI North American League occurred in January and February of this year. Two of those are brand new in 2016 and would likely have made the next NARG Top 25. We will honor those in the back of the book as well.

With a change in scoring system, we won't numerically compare to previous years as we have for the last few reports.

Congratulations to the show organizers, promoters, sponsors and competitors. We all deserve top level sport on our continent. And NARG is proud to say we believe the sport of show jumping has come a long way in North America.

# 2015 SCORING

## SCORING: ONE RING FORMAT

CATEGORY	MAX. POINTS	WEIGHT	MAX. TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
FOOTING	60	4.05	243	24%
STABLING	40	3.0	120	12%
COURSES/JUMPS	20	4.0	80	8%
TECHNICAL ASPECTS	70	2.0	140	14%
FINANCIAL	60	2.0	120	12%
CEREMONY	60	2.0	120	12%
MARKETING/PRESS RELATIONS	50	2.0	100	10%
MISCELLANEOUS	50	1.0	50	5%
BONUS POINTS MAX	27		27	3%
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>			<b>1,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

## SCORING: MULTI RING FORMAT

CATEGORY	MAX. POINTS	WEIGHT	MAX. TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
FOOTING	90	2.7	243	24%
STABLING	40	3.0	120	12%
COURSES/JUMPS	20	4.0	80	8%
TECHNICAL ASPECTS	70	2.0	140	14%
FINANCIAL	60	2.0	120	12%
CEREMONY	60	2.0	120	12%
MARKETING/PRESS RELATIONS	50	2.0	100	10%
MISCELLANEOUS	50	1.0	50	5%
BONUS POINTS MAX	27		27	3%
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>			<b>1,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

## CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

### FOOTING

Quality of footing in all arenas, ability to be used in all conditions, maintenance

### STABLING

Location and proximity to main arena, quality and size of stalls, security

### JUMPS & COURSES

Quality of jumps, courses, course design

### TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Scoreboards, timeliness, quality of officials, competitor quality, announcers, audio/video, loudspeakers, arena size/shape

### FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Prize money offered, overall cost of showing

### CEREMONY

Quality of sponsorship, production quality, prize giving, VIP facilities

### MARKETING

Advertising, press coverage, website, attendance

### MISCELLANEOUS

Customer service, food, hotels, emergency response team, overall venue appearance

### BONUS POINTS

FEI classes (15 pts), \$500,000+ Grand Prix (12 pts)



# 2015 SHOW RANKINGS

EVENT	SCORE %	TOTAL	FOOTING	STABLING	COURSES	TECHNICAL	FINANCIAL	CEREMONY	MARKETING	MISC.	\$500K+	FEI
SPRUCE/MASTERS	88%	883	72	34	20	61.00	45	60	50	48	12	15
THUNDERBIRD	81%	812	78	33	20	56.00	32	53	39	47		15
ROYAL	81%	805	51	34	16	50.28	38	54	43	47		15
L.A. MASTERS	80%	800	56	30	15	51.64	36	55	41	41		15
MIAMI	79%	793	45	26	16	53.00	55	52	40	42	12	15
XALAPA	79%	788	83	34	20	55.79	40	48	19	41		15
WASHINGTON	78%	783	47	30	18	51.13	27	59	47	47		15
GOLD CUP	78%	777	76	27	18	54.72	35	49	43	40		15
HAMPTON	77%	773	71	31	17	51.43	34	52	44	42		15
NHS	75%	755	50	33	14	51.20	33	48	37	44		15
TRYON	75%	752	79	32	16	51.81	32	43	35	40		15
LAS VEGAS	75%	750	49	32	16	55.62	35	46	32	39		15
ROYAL WEST	74%	742	53	29	18	53.43	30	46	27	40		15
DEVON	74%	739	81	26	18	51.17	26	46	40	44		
WEF	72%	718	60	28	14	56.00	27	51	42	37	12	15
DEL MAR INTL.	71%	715	61	33	16	49.60	35	48	35	37		15
KY SPRING	71%	707	78	31	13	51.58	30	44	20	45		15
HARRISBURG	69%	694	49	30	18	54.25	22	31	31	42		15
SPLIT ROCK	69%	693	46	26	15	48.28	26	50	30	45		15
SACRAMENTO	69%	692	71	30	17	46.33	27	43	31	33		15
UPPERVILLE	69%	685	76	25	18	46.00	24	45	32	39		
OCALA	67%	672	58	28	16	51.62	28	44	30	33	12	15
THERMAL	67%	669	61	28	18	51.36	34	33	24	37	12	15
SAUGERTIES	66%	664	51	28	14	48.90	43	41	30	33	12	15
LIVE OAK	66%	661	46	23	16	52.84	22	40	29	39		15
OLD SALEM	66%	658	77	22	18	49.66	15	41	31	39		
BROMONT	66%	656	51	25	17	46.87	31	47	39	33		15
OTOMI	66%	656	64	32	16	46.00	24	43	24	34		15

## SPECIALTY EQUESTRIAN EVENTS SECTION

EVENT	SCORE %	TOTAL	FOOTING	STABLING	COURSES	TECHNICAL	FINANCIAL	CEREMONY	MARKETING	MISC.	\$500K+	FEI
NEW ALBANY	84%	837	49	33	20	59.56	38	59	41	49		15
TRUMP INV	73%	726	49	29	17	44.10	38	49	26	43		15
CENTRAL PARK	69%	689	45	21	16	45.10	39	45	34	39		15
NAJYRC	68%	681	54	30	17	51.00	20	37	15	43		15

1.

# SPRUCE MEADOWS







# HOLDS THE CANDLE

It is a fact that the Summer Series and the Masters at Spruce Meadows set the standard for the best tournaments in North America years before NARG started evaluating the Top 25 shows. With inordinate commitment, determination and passion to change the sport of show jumping in North America, four plus decades ago Ron and Marg Southern took an empty feed lot and created a legacy.

By 1976 they hosted the inaugural Masters Tournament, which to this day is one of the world's most challenging and richest events in our sport. Spruce welcomes thousands of fans through the gates annually, and has for years, one of many aspects where they've set a North American precedent.

Excellence is an expectation at this facility. This year the evaluations did comment on several issues, which, in usual Spruce manner, are already being addressed. Significant investment for improvements, increased prize money and four CSI5\* Tournaments are in place for the upcoming 2016 season.

## A BUSY SEASON

Although the Masters Tournament stands alone, the Summer Series did have some uncharacteristic quality issues for Spruce as a result of what seemed to be too many horses. Footing was affected – the secondary grass fields took a lot of wear, and footing in the schooling areas was sub-par. However, before we published this report, Spruce had already made a massive investment to upgrade all schooling areas.

While the stables are well-constructed, for one of the first times in Spruce history conditions in the stabling areas were filthy. Staff simply couldn't keep up with the record number of horses on the property. And finally, the large number of entries caused significant scheduling conflicts for riders and trainers. These were not issues at the Masters.

Riders, trainers and owners are willing to accept the high cost of shipping, stabling, entries and housing that is a part of the Spruce experience, but feel strongly that the above issues place an unreasonable burden on Spruce constituents.

## THAT SAID

The International Arena gets a gold star every year. With excellent grass footing, increased prize money, superb courses and course designers, for those seeking to participate in top sport and earn world ranking points in an International setting, Spruce is the spot. FEI riders are treated well off the horse with parties, VIP, meal coupons and friendly staff. The prize giving ceremonies are second to none; winning in the International Arena at Spruce is a well-earned victory. The legacy lives on.

## IN HONOR

Scott Brash made international history at Spruce in 2015, earning the Rolex Grand Slam of Show Jumping, with consecutive grand prix wins in Geneva (SUI), Aachen (GER) and then Spruce Meadows (CAN). For that monumental event and for several generations, Ron and Marg Southern, as well as Albert Kley, were present to not only oversee their vision but to meet and greet sponsors, competitors and fans. With the utmost respect, NARG honors the memory of both Ron Southern and Albert Kley, whose incredible impact on this sport will be felt for years to come.



**tbird.**

## WARM AND WELCOMING

Once again, Thunderbird maintains a solid number two position. The friendly atmosphere and the warmhearted, accommodating staff welcome all who enter. From fresh flowers in the bathrooms to management whisking a boot with a broken zipper off for repair, the attention to detail is remarkable. Thunderbird was the first to host one of the fourteen Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping Events, and they did it with splendor.

The grass field looked fabulous with a beautiful set of jumps and top course designers. It has a great base that eliminates slipping, and the all-weather footing in the secondary arenas is superb. The Jumbotron was a great addition during the Longines week. The VIP is excellent, and FEI riders are provided full access.

Completely re-worked, with the same all-weather footing as the secondary arena, the schooling areas are a good size, and well-groomed. The paths to and from the rings are well-maintained. The sound system and Wi-Fi both worked well. Riders and horses also enjoy the abundance of places to graze, and the trails that allow a relaxing escape from the ‘horse show environment.’

## JUST A FEW WOES

The grass was a bit chewed up by week two, though still good. Possibly if the rolling had been done a bit sooner, or sand applied to the worn areas, the deterioration in quality might have been avoided, but overall, the arena was well drained, and the footing solid.

Unfortunately, some of the stabling was not ready upon arrival. For those who travel long distances, waiting on a trailer can be stressful. This problem can be addressed with additional staffing, as can the frequent long delays in receiving hay, feed, and shavings. The overall stabling is good, although sizes of stalls vary and the ventilation could be better.

## WORTH THE TRIP TO LANGLEY

The excellence far outweighs the issues when considering Thunderbird. The facility is fantastic, and the crowds for Longines week packed the stands. Described as a ‘horseman’s event,’ the management not only pays close attention to both the horses and riders welfare, but does so with a smile. In 2016, Thunderbird will host a qualifier for the Nations Cup™ Jumping Final in Barcelona. This distinction will give many top riders the opportunity to discover the quality of this great venue and its management team.

3.



*The*  
**Royal**  
AGRICULTURAL  
WINTER FAIR

## FIT FOR A KING

The Royal Horse Show at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair remains one of the continent's premier indoor events, moving up two places to number three in the rankings this year. The Exhibition Place is a lovely space for this traditional November event in Toronto.

Now in its 93<sup>rd</sup> year, the staff knows how to put on an entertaining show that appeals to the public. Hundreds of thousands of spectators flock to the Royal Winter Fair every year, and the Royal Horse Show, as the highlight of the fair, can be assured of sellout crowds and a supercharged feel, creating an extraordinary atmosphere for top sport.

Also one of the fourteen Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping events, and a CSI4\*, the Royal had even more splendor this year. The four-sided Longines televisions in both schooling areas were welcomed additions. Our hope for television coverage became a reality in 2015, with a one hour television broadcast of the Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping Qualifier as well as a full webcast.

Addressing our concerns about the footing in the main arena holding in the turns meant the footing went from fair to excellent. Richard Jeffrey's course was good but difficult, an improvement over last year's course. And the fees were quite reasonable for an event of this caliber.

## TIGHT SPACES

While the main arena is good sized for an indoor venue, it isn't as large as some of the best indoor arenas, and the jumps can't be moved around, causing the footing to get a little boggy by the jumps.

The schooling area, the 'Hitching Ring,' is so small that the secondary area, the 'Horse Palace,' gets just as much use, and the footing is not good. The work crews try hard to maintain it, but it is so busy during the day, that it is difficult to keep up the maintenance. This is the weakest aspect, and in an indoor venue often the toughest to fix.

The stabling is nice but the aisles can get slippery, and ventilation could be better. Horses and riders have to pass through the public to get to the ring, but the FEI area was well guarded, with no public access.

More prize money in the big classes would be welcome at this otherwise top competition.

## INDOOR SPLENDOR

NARG commends the management for their willingness to invest in improvements, and their ongoing mission to improve the footing. As the top indoor event in North America in 2015, the Royal is truly an event fit for big prize money and show jumping royalty.





**LONGINES  
MASTERS**

LOS ANGELES

## A TASTE OF EUROPE IN LA

Sitting pretty at number four for the second year in a row, the Longines Masters of Los Angeles is a chic and unique indoor show jumping event on the West Coast. In 2014, EEM World brought their European show jumping concept to the United States for the first time, and earned a top spot then as well. As the third leg to the Masters Grand Slam, which includes sister events in Paris and Hong Kong, the event hosts a CSI5\* and a CSI2\* over a four day schedule.

Taking a non-equestrian facility and transforming it into an intimate international atmosphere with chic shopping, exquisite art displays, larger-than life horse sculptures, an exclusive VIP and Sky Box, an indoor show jumping arena, warm-up, and stabling area, is no small feat.

Notably different than the typical American horse show, the Longines Masters of Los Angeles is as European as it gets on this continent.

The organizers not only create a 5\* event, they fly in some of the world's top-ranked riders to be certain the competition is excellent. For these riders and their grooms they cover hotel expenses, and assist with transport for the horses.

With nice footing, five World Ranking classes and over \$1 million in prize money in a tremendous setting, the Longines Masters is worth the trip for show jumpers and show jumping fans alike.

### BETTER BUT...

The footing in the schooling ring as well as the stabling improved this year. Intentionally stark, the course design was sophisticated and airy with muted colors. The course designer often had a few too many clean, a delicate balance in a show in a small indoor arena.

Our main criticism is still the scheduling. Days start early and end late, but there are long breaks between classes. Riding times are early with no other chance to ride. We recommend condensing the day or allowing scheduled riding in the down times.

The entry process is still confusing with a mix of FEI and U.S. systems. Similar to European models, the 5\* is an invitational, and costs are low. The 2\* experience is quite expensive, but similar to other events where the experience is outstanding in every way, it is worth it. NARG would like to see more 2\* riders take advantage of the opportunity.

### YET STILL...

NARG appreciates the effort and expense required to create and execute the Longines Masters Los Angeles, and are pleased to see it continue in 2016. We understand the location is moving a bit south to Long Beach and we are confident it will be a superb 5\* experience.





## BEAUTY AND THE BEACH

The 2015 Global Champions Tour had a spectacular launch on the shores of Miami Beach last April, where the surf and turf was a mix of beach babes and big jumps. Miami joined the ranks as not only one of the world's fifteen select cities to be included on the elite Global Champions Tour, but it was the first one in North America with that distinction.

Offering five 5★ classes that included the Miami GCT Grand Prix and The American Invitational, large prizes, as well as free flights, hotels, entry fees, and stabling for the top 30 riders, grooms, and horses on the World Ranking list, Miami attracted the world's best. And the result was sensational, earning this show a top five spot in the NARG Top 25.

Well done for a first-time event, the all-weather footing was excellent and well-maintained. The VIP was very good, typical of GCT events. Presentations were well organized, and, as one would expect, there was an air of importance. There was a free webcast for the entire event, and some television coverage on Eurosport.

### SHORT ON SPACE

However, as often is the case with a 'first,' there were some problems that need solving, most of them relative to space limitations. The schooling area was quite small, and despite the efforts of the maintenance crews, the footing failed to hold up to the traffic, with divots developing on the takeoff and landing of the jumps. Because the schooling ring was given over to the 5★ riders in the morning, the 2★ riders had no place to exercise their horses.

While the stabling was good, there were no designated wash areas or warm water, and the tents on the beach were less than desirable, as they were surrounded by beach sand. The stalls were small (9 x 9), and didn't meet FEI standards. The tents were convenient to the Main Arena, but the path was too narrow for two horses to pass, plus the public crossed through, although there were guards monitoring the traffic. Concessions and restrooms were not plentiful.

Rider fees were negligible for those in the Top 30 of the World Rankings, but very expensive for the 2★ riders. There was very little room in the grandstand, making for standing room only on the beach if you weren't in the VIP or lucky enough to land a grandstand seat. People were three deep on the beach trying to see. Generating that level of interest is great for the sport, but not sustainable unless more seating is made available.

### MORE MIAMI

Despite some inevitable first-time problems, the organizers did a commendable job of providing a major international event in an extraordinary setting. With attention to the issues above, the potential is there to have fantastic 5★ sport on the shores of Miami Beach. Events such as this raise the bar for great show jumping events and we would love to see more Miami.

6.



## HATS OFF TO XALAPA

Mexico is making a gallant effort to produce top sport, and Xalapa is a great example. This beautiful event hosted by the Chedraui family at their Coapexpan Club Hipico continues to impress. The setting is intimate and the facility is beautiful.

With two weeks of spring shows in 2015, Xalapa offered a CSI4★ and a CSIO, including sixteen World Ranking classes and a Nations Cup™. The courses are gorgeous and designers top notch. CSIO riders don't pay for hotel, stalls, feed and bedding and had VIP access.

The evaluators rank the footing at Xalapa a perfect 10, the 'best in the world'. And wet weather is not a problem. It can, and does, pour rain and the footing is still ready for great sport. The stabling is permanent and the security excellent, with guards at the main gate and at the FEI stabling.

## A WELL KEPT SECRET

Maybe a touch too intimate, event promotion is practically non-existent. Reaching out to the world through websites, press releases, social media is essential to evolve the sport. Competitors and show jumping fans around the world should know about these top notch sporting events. With modern technology the world can watch online. Xalapa has what it takes to draw top International competitors and horses. Organizers are accommodating and are happy to help riders compete in Mexico.

In January 2016 there was a brand new CSI4★ and a Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping event in Valle de Bravo. April marks the second Global Champions Tour stop in North America, first Miami Beach then another inaugural event in Mexico City. The FEI Nations Cup™ CSIO returns to Xalapa later in April. The Mexican show calendar has 17 CSI events in total this year. Certainly these events will bring some worldwide attention. NARG would like the organizers to pick up on that and keep the momentum going.

Our hats are off to the organizers who produce world-class events south of the border. We have recognized Xalapa since the inception of the Top 25 and it, along with the aforementioned shows in 2016, follow the model for great sport.



## UNIQUELY URBAN

In 2015, the Washington International Horse Show (WIHS) became part of the Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping North American League, bringing in Longines as a partner, to lend its own prestige to this already iconic American treasure. WIHS wrapped its 57<sup>th</sup> year with one of the most successful events in its long history, and in the process, jumped from fourteenth to seventh in the rankings.

This first-class venue has a unique atmosphere and an air of importance second to none. Organizers put in 150% to produce a celebratory week of equestrians at this nation's capital, with great ceremony and abundant press coverage. The downtown D.C. neighborhood around the Verizon Center transforms into a festival of horses, drawing more than 26,000 fans. The organizers are adept at appealing to spectators, and this year they worked with SAP to develop an app that allowed the audience to judge the WIHS Equitation Finals along with the officials.

Longines representatives were on-site and part of the prize-giving ceremonies, which as always, were superb. The course design led to super competition, well done. The show ran meticulously according to the schedule. Competitors and visitors were treated to excellent VIP at the elegant ringside clubs and lounges, as well as an array of parties. The opportunity to earn points to qualify for the World Cup™ Finals, plus large prizes, drew international riders.

## MEETING THE CHALLENGE

We commend the management team for hearing us and making efforts to address the footing issues that have plagued this competition. Though it was a partial fix, it was a definite step in the right direction. They mixed a textile into the existing footing, but because it wasn't thoroughly blended in, it wasn't ready early in the week. After use and relentless maintenance, however, it did improve as the week went on - and no horses were slipping.

Issues of space plague WIHS, though they do an amazing job, given the constraints. The same improvements as in the Main Arena were made to the footing in the schooling area, but limited space and overuse kept them from being as effective. Our evaluators feel that neither the size nor the shape of the schooling area is conducive to good sport. If a second schooling area could be added, it would be a huge step up.

The cost of competing at WIHS is high, however so is the cost of producing an event at the Verizon Center. We've asked the organizers to step up on several occasions over the years, and as can be seen by the fabulous VIP, improved stabling and footing efforts, they've done so.

Despite its space limitations, the downtown Washington location creates a magical experience for all participants. To compete at WIHS is worth some big city sacrifices, and since we began the NARG Top 25 many aspects have improved. Kudos to the management team, the sponsors, and to the city of Washington, D.C. for its ongoing assistance in managing the complex logistics of this extraordinary event.



8.



## THE GOLD CUP SHINES

The American Gold Cup is another traditional event that has made an incredible comeback since moving to Old Salem Farm in 2012. Their turf grand prix field improved in 2013. With superb presentation, courses, amenities and VIP, the quaint Old Salem Farm transforms into an intimate and important place-to-be for FEI World Ranking classes as well as the competitive Maclay Regionals.

The Gold Cup was also chosen as one of fourteen Longines FEI North American League events. The management had already brought back the glamour of what once was, and adding the Longines panache made it shine that much more. As a part of the League structure there is no entry fee for the riders who qualify for the grand prix, a welcomed perk at this as well as all the other NAL events. FEI riders also had access to the lovely two-story VIP tent.

Although the dates of the Gold Cup compete with other international events, a solid group of top riders attend. Courses are excellent, the jumps are gorgeous and the uneven aspect of the grass field adds challenges, making this a unique and interesting competition. The place is packed on grand prix day, but they find a way to fit fans on grassy hillsides and in grandstands.

Although on a delayed schedule, the event was televised on NBC which we applaud.

## GOOD BUT SHOULD BE GREAT

It did rain and management did its best to preserve the grass field by shifting classes around a bit. The sand footing in the secondary and schooling arenas handles wet weather fine. However the secondary schooling area is too small and got mushy in spots.

All competitors love competing on grass, but there are several important factors to having an ideal grass field. Old Salem's field is naturally up and down hill, which is part of the charm, but NARG suggests looking at options to make the field less bumpy and a bit more secure, possibly shorter grass and more grooming.

The stalls were reasonable for FEI horses, but in some non-FEI barns the aisles were much too narrow and with the rain got muddy. The entry fees are high, so the stabling should be good across the board. The concessions outside of the VIP could improve.

Although we would like to see a few changes, The American Gold Cup at Old Salem Farm is a superb show and a NARG Top 10 event. We commend those who make it happen annually and look forward to the tradition continuing.



9.



## NOSTALGIC ELEGANCE

This nostalgic, elegant show celebrated its fortieth year in 2015. For its usual large cadre of spectators, frequently providing a celebrity sighting, and long list of competitors, the nearly perfect weather was an added pleasure. Mother nature presented no challenges to the superb grass fields, and they held up well to large numbers of competitors.

The VIP is noteworthy in that the table-holders are responsible for decorating their own space, and the results are nothing short of stunning. Certainly one of the landmarks of this must-attend social event in the Hamptons.

The FEI accommodations were spacious and the new layout of the natural jumps worked well for the riders. The show ran according to schedule and there was a Jumbotron in the main ring on the weekend. Exposure is excellent with local television coverage as well as on the USEF Network.

Riders appreciated the complimentary breakfast and lunch served in the FEI stabling area, the snacks and beverages in the Riders Lounge, as well as the sponsored events with food and gifts throughout the week. Open riders were provided VIP access. And the array of new food vendors is a plus. We thank the management for this and many other improvement efforts made over the years.

### POSSIBLE?

The secondary schooling arena can get crowded, and the schooling areas, though sizable, are also busy; so it is difficult to keep the areas groomed. The lack of a video monitor in the schooling areas would be an easy fix, and one much appreciated by the competitors.

In order for the Hampton Classic to continue to compete as a premier event, NARG suggests that some of the sponsorship dollars go toward increasing prize money and a corresponding bump to a CSI5\*. This event by all accounts is superb, but with the increase of top shows throughout the continent as well as around the world, attracting top competitors gets more challenging.

### STILL GREAT

The Hampton Classic is a classic horse show in every sense of the word. We commend the management on the magic they perform by transforming a field with little permanent infrastructure into an elegant event. The property always looks extraordinary. This show has been a 'must do' on the schedule of high-profile show jumpers for many years, and we want to see it continue to hold that status for years to come.



## A HISTORY OF GREATNESS

In 2015, the CP National Horse Show joined the ranks of many others in the NARG Top 25, as a part of the Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping North American League. With two solid sponsors, CP and Longines, committing their support to this already well-respected indoor competition, this event has all the makings for greatness.

The Alltech Arena at the Kentucky Horse Park is among the best indoor venues in the sport of show jumping. It has the square footage to accommodate a nice course and a good size crowd, plus ample space for vendors and restaurants. The Taylor Harris Club is well-presented and well-received. Once again, Gracie Street was stunning, and parties abounded. Good food is readily available in the riders and trainers lounge, which is appreciated.

A part of the National since 1933, the ASPCA Maclay Finals entered the history books when McKayla Langmeier and her mother Linda became the first mother-daughter winners since its inception – McKayla in 2015 and Linda in 1983.

## BUT PLEASE ADDRESS

There are a few reasons that the CP National Horse Show isn't higher on the list of the NARG Top 25 this year. Addressing these issues shouldn't be overwhelming. The footing in the arena needs attention, as it was difficult for the horses to gain traction in the turns. The quality of the footing in the schooling areas is sub-par, and they lack a video monitor.

The fact that the courses allowed too many into the jump-offs is an anomaly that seems to occur occasionally in the horse show world, as usually the course design is excellent.

The schedule simply needs revamping. Although it changed to accommodate the Breeders' Cup, six days is simply too long to require high performance riders on the grounds to compete with just two horses. We suggest shortening the schedule for FEI horses.

The marketing efforts and the quality of the production also need to improve. The sound system and the Jumbotron could be put to better use to create a more upbeat atmosphere. The seats were once again empty and that lack of turnout could be seen on the one-hour telecast on CBS and FEI TV.

Admittedly, the 2015 CP National was held on what might have been the busiest week in the history of Lexington, going up against the Breeders' Cup and the American Pharoah buzz. While we hoped that some of the huge racing crowds would migrate over to the Horse Park, they didn't. However in the Horse Capital of the World, investing in a strong marketing campaign that incentivizes the locals could go a long way toward creating atmosphere the CP National lacks. We know it's a challenge, but it can be done and it is essential for our sport.

The CP National Horse Show is a favorite of competitors; some of the top riders in the world come to compete. With Stadium Jumping, Inc. as the new management team, NARG would like to see the above issues handled, which would enhance this traditional indoor event.

11.



## NEW AND NICE

Only in its second year, the Tryon International Equestrian Center is a magnificent new facility. Well-planned, the state-of-the-art concept includes permanent wooden structures around the main arena for shops and restaurants, charging stations throughout the riders lounges, an on-site gym, a nice sound system, Wi-Fi everywhere, individual cabins for rent and air-conditioned restrooms.

Tryon's arena footing received high scores across the board in the show and the schooling arenas. Video screens are strategically placed throughout the grounds, including a large screen in the schooling area. With large stalls, lockable tack rooms and warm water, the stabling is some of the best. The speaker system is piped into the stables, with an option to adjust the volume. The fact that the management offers FEI classes almost every week of competition is also a draw to those interested in World Ranking points. The VIP is nice, plus there is a great diner on the property. The stands are full of cheering spectators on grand prix nights.

## WHERE TRYON FALLS SHORT

There is still construction, but overall it's well-managed and didn't cause any danger to the horses. It is our hope that once complete the final plans are a touch more horse friendly with places to graze and public riding areas and pathways. There currently are no grazing areas or places to hand walk horses but this seems to be a temporary consequence of construction.

Unfortunately the schooling areas for the secondary rings are much too small. The schooling area for the main arena is also tight, although the FEI schooling area is a good size. It appears that the way the venue is constructed leaves no possibility to expand. A disappointment, we can only hope management will attempt to change for safety reasons, as well as to give all competitors ample space to prepare.

The jumping materials are only average and we believe need sprucing up. With the top level show jumping offered at this venue, we believe new material is in order.

## GREAT FUTURE

Overall this new venue is welcoming, pleasant, sleek and modern with great potential to put Tryon on the map of top equestrian destinations. When the new amenities are complete Tryon International Equestrian Center will be one of the best facilities on the eastern seaboard, if not the country.



12.



## A WINNING HAND

The Las Vegas National made a big jump up from twenty-third in 2014 to the twelfth spot in 2015. Another of the fourteen Longines FEI North American League events, the management made a noticeable effort to raise the bar.

No other event offers hotel rooms with a closed circuit feed of the show, dining, spa, bowling, movies, gambling, an equestrian facility with permanent stalls, and an option to order room service at the barn, all under one roof. A unique facility like the South Point Equestrian Arena can only be found in Las Vegas.

The footing is excellent. The sand gave without slipping, and was well maintained. Courses were well done. The production on Saturday evening began with a Parade of Nations and rider introductions and ended with an autograph signing, both popular with the increased crowd.

Rooms and entry fee for the Saturday night class were free to those who qualified. The stabling is permanent and close to the arena with ample aisle space.

The addition of Longines as a sponsor brought in some of the panache that was lacking in previous years. With a large video screen on one side of the arena, plus screens throughout the facility, a nice ringside riders lounge with snacks, and a more sophisticated decor, the overall presentation was more attractive.

## WHAT CAN CHANGE

The footing in the schooling areas had some rocks, possibly coming from where it was stored, that would be good to remove before the show begins. The rubber mats leading to the ring were too thin; an additional row of them would be safer for the horses.

Entries for specific classes are required weeks in advance. Although there are no scratch fees, having to scratch and add horses seems time consuming and unnecessary. This also led to incorrect starting orders, and the orders provided the evening before ended up changing the day of the class due to scratches. There was some confusion about qualifications necessary for some classes, and riders were upset due to the lack of understanding about what was necessary to compete. A better system would be appreciated.

Ideally, the VIP could be more like the Riders Lounge. The arena would benefit from a VIP where sponsors, competitors and invited guests could more readily enjoy the experience, as the current set-up is not ideal.

The prize money is at the minimum for what's required. With the added press, prizes and panache this year, NARG would love to see increased prize money and possibly bumping up to a CSI4\*, which likely means more sponsors, similar to shows at the top of our list.

## VIVA LAS VEGAS

The improvements made from last year, for the riders' area and the fans, were certainly appreciated. The future is bright for The Las Vegas National. It will remain one of the best in the West if the prize money and panache continue to increase.





## JUMPING INTO THE BIG TIME

Landing a spot among the fourteen venues chosen to host the Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping for the North American League after only one year in existence is impressive. With significant commitment by the organizers, Royal West is clearly on a path to greatness.

Held in the newly-completed Agrium Western Event Centre Stampede Park, in the arena built to house the Calgary Stampede, Royal West does not have the usual space limitations imposed by an indoor facility. The main arena is large and airy, as are the schooling areas. Clean and pleasant inside, there is plenty of space outside to ride, including a track, if weather permits.

Addressing an issue from last year, management added a tent to the path between the barn and the arena, in case of inclement weather. Last year the big screen scoreboard was not positioned well, so this year another was added, as well as two state-of-the-art monitors in the schooling area. Our evaluators felt that the high-tech 50-foot LED signage display on both sides of the ring was almost as good as the display at the Longines FEI World Cup™ Finals.

The footing, maintenance, and everyone on staff are all top notch. During the Longines FEI Jumping week, the VIP ran the length of the ring and offered an array of food options. While there was no VIP the first week, with the arena located in the heart of downtown Calgary, food was readily available.

### IF YOU BUILD IT...

Attracting a crowd to provide that vibe of excitement is still a work in progress. There is no doubt that the show's creator and manager, John Anderson of Rocky Mountain Show Jumping, will continue with promotions and other innovations, to bring in the spectators. The show is not yet an event, it is still in its infancy.

Anderson feels that, with the long-standing influence of neighboring Spruce Meadows, Calgary has the most educated fan base in North America for the sport of show jumping. Over time as Royal West becomes a fixture on the yearly calendar, that should translate into more top athletes and larger spectator attendance numbers. To influence both the riders and the fans, he could consider upping the prize money as well as spending more on marketing to the potential spectators.

Ultimately, Anderson's dream is to bring the Longines FEI World Cup™ Final to Calgary. With the incredible efforts he's made in just two years, we can see his vision and it is clearly supporting our sport. Press on!

14.



## THE SPLENDOR OF DEVON

With its timeless charm, the Devon Horse Show and Country Fair once again is among the continent's best. Nestled in the heart of Philadelphia's Main Line, the horse show and fair attracts a loyal group of spectators who come to enjoy tea sandwiches, top-notch competition, fair rides, shopping, and the famous Devon fudge. As one of only three events without FEI designation to make it into the NARG Top 25, this American tradition and multi-breed competition celebrates its 120<sup>th</sup> year in May of 2016.

Several evaluators note the feeling of importance that is unique to Devon. The announcers keep the audience informed and entertained, yet another reason why the show continues to have such a robust spectator presence. With multiple days and a variety of classes, the schedule runs on time and the show office staff is particularly friendly, remembering rider names and making everyone feel welcome.

The footing in the Dixon Oval is excellent, holding up to both wear and weather. The large schooling area shares the same quality footing as the main ring. Music from loudspeakers in the ring and barns give the venue an appealing ambiance.

### LACKING NO MORE

Over the years we've commented that although an important show, Devon is missing some essential ingredients to rise above. Notably in 2012, when Devon hosted an Olympic Observation event, they did move way up on the list. While keeping the charm the older permanent stables definitely need a facelift, the prize money could increase and, as mentioned, there is no FEI rating. There is no place for riders and owners to sit aside from the barn or in a grandstand.

Lacking no more, Devon just announced that since the end of last year's show they spent over \$1 million on improvements, including reconstruction of over 200 permanent stalls and a new, two-story building that overlooks both the Dixon Oval and Gold Ring, with suites, catering, additional bathrooms, a bar and more. The prize money for the always well-attended Sapphire Grand Prix will be \$225,000, an increase of 125%, and the show will have an FEI CSI4\* rating.

Though the show's proximity to Spruce in the show calendar will always be a factor in attracting top show jumping talent, the recent commitment to great sport through the efforts mentioned above will certainly give competitors more reason to consider trading travel for tradition.



## WHY THE WORLD COMES TO WELLINGTON

In 1989, Gene Mische's Stadium Jumping Inc. launched The Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF) in Wellington. It became the place to be in the winter. Approximately two decades later, Equestrian Sport Productions (ESP) purchased the property and the dates with a vision to transform Wellington from a small town with a horse show to an equestrian mecca. Plans included a world-class showgrounds, enhanced lifestyle options for participants and involving the community.

From certain angles ESP has achieved their goals. Riders, trainers, owners and spectators from around the world come to compete. Many own farms and spend the better part of three months or more in Wellington. The city has grown to accommodate the influx of the horsey set, with every convenience imaginable within minutes. Saturday Night Lights is often packed with fans filling the seats.

The level of international competition is high. And, with top course design, great prize money, and numerous World Ranking classes, the setting has all the right ingredients.

## ISSUES ABOUT YEAR AFTER YEAR

As we have said repeatedly, WEF should be ranked within the top three in North America. However, overcapacity, maintenance issues, and a resistance by management to change, simply overshadow all the great things about this important circuit. With three weeks of Pre-Circuit before the twelve grueling weeks of WEF begin, there is no longer an 'Opening Day,' just a run-on show. The facility is a mess of dirt and manure before week one of the Festival ever begins. The special feeling of the night classes and the events held at the Stadium is a cloak that covers the fact that the property sustaining these glamorous events does not provide a reasonable working environment.

The unacceptably small schooling areas are the worst of any major outdoor show and although the sizes printed in the prize book seem satisfactory, there is too much volume for the standard size. Footing is also a concern as over time it has become much too compact and hard. It's been seven years since the footing was redone. It's time.

The FEI stabling is subpar if you are not in the permanent stables. Even the permanents, including non-FEI, are tired and need a facelift. The back tents are a disaster and desperately need drainage improvements. Parking also remains an immense challenge.

But the biggest issue, which contributes to all that was mentioned above, is that there are simply too many horses competing at this venue. There is too much focus on volume and not enough on top sport. We believe that WEF would benefit from competitive shows in the area relieving some of the pressure of too many horses.

## WE CAN ONLY HOPE

We are all invested in the future of this facility, this circuit and this sport, and continue to hope that the management of ESP sees that our requests are not out of line and will take action. These are all the same issues that we have raised for years. We support WEF, and feel strongly the overall improvements are not only possible but crucial.





## DELECTABLE DEL MAR

Set in the picturesque beach town of Del Mar at the northern tip of San Diego, the Del Mar International attracts both exhibitors and spectators. With a recently renovated stadium, a state-of-the-art Jumbotron, and a scoreboard, the venue has the ingredients to produce a world-class event. The weather is almost always ideal with the beach as well as fabulous shopping and restaurants close-by. In 2015, the event directly followed the Longines Masters of Los Angeles CSI5★ and was a part of the Longines FEI North American League, drawing an even higher caliber of international competitors and a larger crowd both at the event and online.

Evaluators praised the large indoor arena, jumbotron use, decorative jumps, and stabling. Thanks to the Longines sponsorship there were additional amenities like a monitor in the schooling area, numerous TV displays with live results and an online webcast of the three FEI classes. The FEI stabling was excellent and close to the main arena. FEI riders had free access to the VIP, and although riders paid for the Thursday FEI class, those who qualified for the Saturday night World Cup™ Qualifier didn't pay an entry fee. The show ran smoothly and management rolls out the red carpet for presentations.

### THE NOT SO GOOD

The footing in the main arena was not up to par, the horses would stick in the material. All the arenas could use a footing touchup, and the schooling areas didn't seem large enough. Unfortunately, new sponsorships this year didn't translate into a significant jump in prize money or to reducing the high stabling fees. The back office isn't ideal, and can get crowded.

### WEST COAST STAR STEP UP

Clearly, with Longines in the house, the Del Mar International raised the bar from previous years. News is that in 2016 the show will step up to an FEI CSI5★, plus host a qualifying leg for the Longines FEI World Cup™ Final. Since the event once again follows the Longines Masters of Los Angeles CSI5★, it appears that the Del Mar International is destined for a significant step up. NARG would like to see a series of top events with both FEI ratings and significant prize money on the West Coast.



## BACK ON THE FEI ROSTER

It is difficult to imagine a better Grand Prix arena than the Rolex Stadium at the Kentucky Horse Park. Nestled into the center of a beautiful park setting, it offers unlimited space for course designers to work their magic, surrounded by wide spaces for grazing and hacking. Designated horse paths separate horses from golf carts and pedestrians. Stabling is comfortable, abundant and well lit.

This year, the Horse Park invested in freshening up the already good quality Euro footing in both the main arena and the secondary arena. Our evaluators commend them for that, and suggest a deep turn between shows, to keep the footing from getting hard. Also, organizers made the decision to return to FEI status – and were rewarded with nearly sixty FEI riders. And, along with hosting a CSI2\* Week 1 and a CSI3\* Week 2 came a welcomed increase in prize money. We'd like to see the first week rise to a 3\*, but we think that's in the works.

The relocated VIP next to the in-gate to the Rolex is much more user-friendly for riders and owners, a move applauded by both constituencies. We encourage management to make this a permanent location.

## SPEAK UP AND THEY WILL COME

Course design didn't hit the mark this year; Week I courses were far too soft, with way too many returning for the jump-off. The height was good, but technical challenges were lacking. However, the designers realized the problem and quickly made adjustments, and courses improved as the show progressed. Scheduling, while much improved over last year, still needs more attention to help the day run efficiently.

Small improvements would go a long way, such as Wi-Fi that works and a move up in quality from the least expensive ribbons to some that reflect the elegance of the sport. Competitors appreciate these efforts.

Sadly, production and marketing are lacking. There's no buzz in the air, no atmosphere to lend a feel of importance, and there are no spectators in the seats. The infrastructure is in place, and the location in a town with a horse identity could bring in a cheering audience on grand prix days. The Rolex Stadium boasts a spectacular scoreboard, but it could be put to much better use. While the announcer was engaging, the production quality was mediocre.

However, hand-in-hand with improvements in the production, there must be a serious and effective marketing effort to promote the show locally. Such a thing can be done; Rood & Riddle's 'Hats-off Day' during the summer show brings in good crowds. That, along with the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event, serve as models. Seems working with the Horse Park to increase the audience would only benefit both parties.

## COME SPEND THE SPRING IN THE BLUE GRASS

The organizers of the Kentucky Spring Shows have so much to work with, and our hats are off to them for the efforts they continue to make to improve. They produced two nice Spring shows. Don't keep this a secret, let competitors and spectators know that the Bluegrass is the place to be in the Spring.



## SEVENTY YEAR HISTORY

2015 marked the seventieth year for this important show that we know as Harrisburg. This long-time fall season tradition is held in the comfortable surroundings of the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex & Expo Center in Harrisburg, PA, which has what many indoor facilities lack – space. With a good size arena and schooling area, clean and ample stabling, plenty of parking and permanent bathrooms, the venue is one of the best indoor facilities in North America.

The arena footing is quite nice and the course designs were top-notch. There is a jumbotron in the arena and large monitors in the schooling area as well as at the in-gate. Classes ran on schedule, always a plus for the riders, though days are long.

### LACKLUSTER

While we commend management for improving the footing in the small schooling area, footing in the large schooling area is still not as it should be, even with grooming.

Our evaluators noted this year, that though food was provided in the exhibitors' lounge, it was only available during the day. This is a simple fix for management. Food should be provided as long as classes are running.

While there are three FEI classes, the prize money remains below average for a Top 25 event. Bringing in a sponsor would go a long way toward alleviating this problem. The prize money should match the quality of the event and the facility, and at \$85,000 for the Grand Prix de Penn National, it does not.

Like many of our venerable top-tier shows, Harrisburg could use an injection of excitement. Having a good announcer is no longer enough. The sophisticated audio/video equipment must be put to innovative use to create an energetic buzz that draws in spectators. And cheering crowds generate their own vibe. This year, our evaluators noted, the stadium, while half-full, had an empty feel. Some creative marketing, as well as production, is needed to create an exciting atmosphere.

### UPGRADE IN 2016

On February 2<sup>nd</sup> the management team announced increased prize money and FEI designation for the 2016 show. Now a CSI3\* event, with a \$100,000 Grand Prix de Penn National, the organizers are moving in the right direction. Along with these changes, this self-described 'horseman's show' should improve footing in the schooling area, increase competitor benefits and then continue to promote this event at one of the best indoor facilities as an important one on the show jumping calendar.



19.



**SPLIT ROCK**  
JUMPING TOUR

## EXCITING AND NEW

Jumping onto the NARG Top 25 list in its first year, the Split Rock Jumping Tour's fall event, The Bourbon International CSI3\* in Lexington, Kentucky was a breath of fresh air in a world of multi-ring, multi-discipline horse shows. With an intimate European feel, the one arena focus is quite nice and so much less taxing on horses, riders, trainers and grooms.

The attention to detail for the competitors and their horses is remarkable. Upon arrival Split Rock staff is there to help unload and get settled, no matter what the hour. If an issue arises, a solution is found as quickly as possible. The ringside VIP offers table seating with delicious options for both breakfast and lunch, plus a lounge with couches and a massage service. Keeping traffic to a minimum, Split Rock bikes are parked throughout the facility for quick transport.

The brand new ESI footing held up beautifully after a deluge of rain. With a new set of jumps made for the event, the course looked gorgeous. Along with a podium presentation after each class, Split Rock awards a car to the Leading Athlete of the week and presents a gift certificate to the best Fist Pump of the show. Announcers are engaging and informed, and there is a webcast each day.

There is a jumbotron and an extra-large monitor in the schooling area. The one-ring schedule allowed everyone enough time to enjoy the social events offered each evening. The entire experience is sold as a package, with a variety of options, that include stalls with mats, entries, hotel and VIP.

## A FEW WOES

One reason this fall event was closer to ideal are the lessons learned from the spring event, namely footing. Making a large investment to improve what wasn't right in the spring made a big difference, especially with the rain.

The quaint charm and incredible customer service at this private facility outweigh the expense of the packages, the longish, but lovely, walk to the ring and the slightly odd oval shape of the main ring. Ideally the event remains intimate. If it gets too big, the schooling area will be too small.

For a first time event, the prize money was super, possibly increased sponsorship will raise that bar. With a nice vendor area including live music, as the community learns about this event the audience will grow.

## MORE SPLIT ROCK

Property owner and the visionary behind The Split Rock Jumping Tour concept, Derek Braun, announced that the Lexington International CSI3\* event will return May 25 - 29, 2016. He also seeks to offer the Split Rock experience at other venues. NARG commends his efforts and commitment to the sport.



## SUPERLATIVE SACRAMENTO

Continuing its trend of moving up in ranks, the two-week Sacramento International is one of the few shows on the West Coast that offers a chance to compete in an indoor arena for both FEI World Cup™ points and prize money. For several years now, the management has built a nice event at an average facility. As one of the fourteen Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping North American League events, the added elegance of the title sponsor bumped up amenities in and out of the arena.

The reputation for top-notch, consistent footing continues, with the same material in both the main arena and the schooling ring. Regular drags keep the cushion and traction intact. Courses and course design were both very good.

Sacramento International also recognizes the importance of offering special classes and good prize money for Young Horses. With a unique aspect, similar to Europe, the Young Horses compete for “judges” who noted abilities beyond a clean round.

### PERKS?

During the day, the show ran smoothly and on time, though the night classes did tend to run behind schedule, which can be taxing on horses and riders.

Prize money is at the minimum required amount, increasing that and the FEI rating is always a plus. Aside from no entry fee for those qualified for the grand prix, which is a mandate of the FEI for NAL events, there are no perks to speak of for FEI riders or competitors overall. No riders lounge, and the VIP is only available if paid for. The hotels aren't close, and evaluators noted no known accommodation discounts. If perks were offered, our evaluators weren't aware; it would be great to let riders know about available benefits.

The general ambiance is good, seats fill up on Saturday night, but not much press is released aside from the FEI on the main class.

### STAYING POWER

Sacramento isn't an equestrian hub, but the show management does a great job of sprucing up the venue. The signage and decoration shined even brighter this year with Longines on board. We encourage increased prize money and more attention to competitors, but we commend the efforts in producing this NARG Top 25 event.

21.



## EXQUISITE SITE

We welcomed this Virginia-based horse show into the Top 25 last year, and now we congratulate them on their move up to number 21. Located under the shady oak trees of Grafton Farm since its inception 163 years ago, Upperville is the oldest show in the United States. Unmatched for the sheer beauty of its grounds, and wearing the mantle of age with grace and elegance, the show is a local tradition in this community of horse lovers.

Upperville and Devon are two of only three non-FEI shows to make our list this year. Both of these historical events have made efforts to improve the quality of the experience for horses and riders while keeping their traditional charm.

Once again, the Euro footing in the main arena received perfect scores. As promised, improved footing was installed in the secondary arenas and schooling areas this year, earning nearly perfect scores. Although tents, every stall has a view of the ring and there's plenty of room for grazing. Courses were well designed and classes ran on time.

The VIP is exquisite, with excellent catered food offerings, and the food concessions are also tasty. There are riders' lounges on both the hunter and jumper sides as well as exhibitor parties every night. During the day, golf carts drive through the barn areas offering free coffee, tea, and hot chocolate in the morning, and iced tea and lemonade in the afternoon.

## MINOR DETAILS

Historic Route 50 separates the hunter and jumper sides, but most of the area drivers are aware and respectful of this iconic show, and police are there to facilitate the crossings. The show doesn't have a video display, though the jumper rings have a scoreboard. A boon for trainers, schooling areas for the main ring and the secondary ring are next to each other.

With low prize money and no FEI ranking, Upperville is a wonderful event, yet doesn't attract international level show jumping.

## MORE PRIZE MONEY AND FEI IN 2016

With three CSI4\* classes, including the \$216,000 Upperville Jumper Classic, plus all the aforementioned accolades, this event will certainly step up in 2016. NARG is pleased to report that significant increases in prize money plus an FEI CSI4\* rating mean that Upperville is an excellent choice for top sport this summer.

This spectacular venue at the foot of the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains, the large appreciative crowds, and the organizers' meticulous attention to detail, make Upperville one of the last great Southern shows.





## A MILLION AND MORE

Tom Struzzieri is the force behind the next three events on the NARG Top 25 - #22 HITS Ocala, #23 HITS Thermal, and #24 HITS Saugerties. After four decades of producing horse shows through his Horse Shows in the Sun (HITS) circuits, Struzzieri has developed a formula to fit a wide market of competitors in five areas of the country – central Florida, southern California, upstate New York and smaller circuits in Arizona and Virginia. Differing from the traditional boutique horse show as well as from the elite model of developing a high-end equestrian event, the HITS model intentionally reaches the American market. However, some years ago, Struzzieri recognized that riders and trainers with international goals were competing at HITS, so he added more grand prix classes and derbies with large purses, and over time they've 'grown' in importance.

In 2015, HITS Ocala offered two highlight show jumping events – the \$273,000 CSIO4\* Division and Nations Cup™ during week five and the Ocala \$1 Million Grand Prix during the final week of the 10-week circuit. Due to this HITS Ocala gains valuable bonus points on the NARG evaluation – 15 points for offering FEI and 12 for offering a grand prix of \$500,000+.

The above named events have nice Euro footing, top course designers, a custom set of jumps, good prize money, plus one week has World Ranking opportunities. HITS offers a nice VIP and attracts an audience, all the makings of a NARG Top 25 event.

### THE ISSUE IS...

During the two weeks HITS expects the high end riders and a slew of spectators, they do an admirable job and around the arena there is an aura of importance. The biggest issue is the watered down effect of hosting a 10-week circuit. As we've noted with other long-running circuits, the facility is often overcrowded and shows the wear and tear of heavy use. NARG realizes that the horse show circuit suits thousands of riders and trainers. The truth is we are looking for shows that separate themselves from the American model.

### NONETHELESS

Even though we see shows differently, we respect the model that has made HITS Horse Shows a very successful American show circuit. And we commend Struzzieri for hosting FEI events and \$1 Million Grand Prix classes for clients whose aspirations are high level show jumping.

23.



## SHOW JUMPING IN THE DESERT SUN

After almost two decades of producing the HITS Desert Circuit and numerous West Coast FEI World Cup™ qualifiers over the winter season, HITS Horse Shows was chosen to host a 2016 Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping North American League event during Week IV. In addition, the first \$1 Million class of the Triple Crown of Show Jumping culminates the eight-week HITS Thermal Desert Circuit.

Also at this same desert location, HITS stepped up to offer a \$350,000 Sunshine Grand Prix CSI5\* in November. Now Thermal has a place among other West Coast fall show jumping events in Sacramento, Del Mar and Las Vegas, all NARG Top 25 events.

The HITS Desert Horse Park has come a long way in the past few years. The trees are maturing, the property has developed nicely and it was well planned out with plenty of space for riding and parking. The footing in the show arenas and the schooling rings is quite good. Both the VIP and the concessions are well run with an excellent selection of items. It is a good place to settle in for a few months and bring all levels of horses and clients.

### WHERE IT LACKS

As of 2015, HITS Thermal was out of sync with the rest of the world of show jumping. Other than the \$1 Million, the next highest money class was only \$50,000, which was disappointing. With only two weeks of FEI competition and minimal prize money, the series didn't offer top riders the opportunity they need to stay in top form or competitive with the rest of the world.

Although we appreciate the Young Horse classes, you can jump the same level in open classes and get better prize money. It would be great to offer the Young Horses more prize money and potentially discounts.

The show schedule wasn't dependable. Rings wouldn't run on time, sign-ups weren't adhered to, and the changes made it difficult to negotiate conflicts. When the days are long with multiple rings, it makes such a difference when competitors and trainers can count on the schedule.

The jump material is fine but it gets dusty and dirty, so the jumps lack flair. Overall the event is very generic. Similar to other series with multiple weeks in a row, everything feels routine.

### WEST COAST WANTS

In 2016, HITS Thermal added a \$350,000 Grand Prix during Week III, and the Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping event was the following week. And the Sunshine Series in November has a \$350,000 Grand Prix. NARG appreciates FEI events, top prize money in grand prix classes plus having a Triple Crown Series of Show Jumping class on the West Coast. Although we respect the model that has made the HITS Thermal Desert Circuit a success, we hope that the special events will continue to rise above the routine.

24.



## UPSTATE SIZZLES

Coming in at #24 on our list is the HITS location in the quaint and trendy town of Saugerties, New York. Following the same model, HITS takes the circuit northeast for eight weeks of summer. Similar to the central Florida and southern California desert locations, HITS-on-the-Hudson produces an FEI CSI5\* featuring the Saugerties \$1 Million Dollar Grand Prix, the third of the Triple Crown Jumping Series, during one of the final weeks of shows.

HITS certainly has an economic impact in each area they produce events, with shops, restaurants and hotels filled with competitors and their families. This is especially true in Saugerties, where the main office of HITS is based. In December of 2011, Struzziere opened the doors to his own 30-room boutique establishment, Diamond Mills Hotel & Tavern. This lovely location hosted a nice black-tie party for the draw the night before the grand prix.

Once again the facility is set up so a trainer can settle in for several weeks. Struzziere has spent time and money on finding the right footing, and as a result, each facility has good material. There is plenty of room to ride, the main arenas are ample size. The grand prix riders had access to the VIP for the final week. And there are also good concessions available on the grounds. The horse shows offer something for every equestrian. Our focus is the final week where the event focuses on high performance sport, and the horse show seeks to step up to present a CSI5\*.

## NOT UP TO PAR

Although the facility has its pluses, by the time HITS-on-the-Hudson Week VII, the Championship Week, comes around it is tired. The footing was inconsistent, and it got hard. Better hard than deep, but this footing was too hard for a CSI5\* competition. More grooming would help this situation. The stalls are a good size, but not super clean and the manure pile bled into the washing area. The distance from barn to ring is a touch far, on a path that is shared by horse, foot, and golf cart traffic with no separation.

With interesting jump materials, the course for the \$1 Million was tough, as it should be, but based on the results of only one clean and one with time faults, it had too many tricky aspects including a tight time allowed. There's no jumbotron or video screen in the schooling area, so although the schooling area is close, you can't see what is happening in the ring unless you are at the in-gate or watching from your horse. The grandstands, VIP and sponsored tents with tables are full, but the atmosphere is typical horse show, nothing particularly special. They did see some exciting show jumping, with poles falling on every round but two.

The facility lacks flair. There are plenty of sponsor banners but no real landscaping, no grass to speak of and it gets quite dusty.

## SPRUCE IT UP

The prize money is excellent, the FEI ranking is fantastic but NARG would like to see the footing improve, the stabling cleaned up and the special aspect elevated a bit for this HITS CSI5\* event. Overall, HITS has stepped up to offer what we want in North America – prize money and world-ranking classes. Making these events rise above the ordinary horse show is the next challenge.



25.  
TIE



## PRIVATE AND PRISTINE

Held on the bucolic Live Oak Plantation in Ocala, on a gorgeous green blanket of grass and trees, this unique event blends world-class combined driving competition with international show jumping, the only show of its kind on the continent. The private and pristine setting is refreshingly welcome after weeks of competing on winter circuits.

Clearly, management is committed to producing a top-notch event. The grass field was well-prepared and presented no issues. The footing was nice to jump on, with no slippage and good traction. Grooming wasn't necessary, as it held up well, and the weather was good. There is plenty of room to ride, few classes and the schedule runs smoothly. We note with gratitude the addition of a live feed to the schooling area.

The focus on hospitality is appreciated by the competitors. Complimentary food was available outside the stable area for grooms and riders, and riders had free access to both the VIP and the competitors tent. Shipping of horses was available free of charge through Brookledge, and there was an air charter to and from Wellington.

This 'day in the country,' with its combination of events, draws spectators with both interests, and as a result, the VIP, as well as the stands, were both at capacity. A crowd of 5,000 provided a contagious vibe of excitement, and the competition was webcast for free on the USEF Network.

## THE DOWNS

The costs are high and the prize money is low. In keeping with the easy schedule, adding a bit to the offerings would make the costs more worthwhile. The temporary stabling was also expensive, with few amenities, and it was a bit of a walk, though a lovely one, to the arena. The Competitors Party requires the purchase of a ticket, and tickets were sold out well in advance.

The late fees are harsh, and can pile up. Looking toward 2016, we envision an event of this caliber will address these issues.

## A JUMP UP

Live Oak is the final qualifier for the 2016 Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping North American League. This important distinction brought a much-needed increase in prize money. That, and the aforementioned improvements, combined with the pristine setting, and atmosphere of importance, are sure to take them one step closer to their dream of someday being 'America's Aachen.'

25.

TIE



## COUNTRY CHARM

Old Salem Farm, with its picturesque setting and rolling grass field, always draws a large and engaged crowd, giving it a feeling of importance and a festive vibe. The courses and the jumps both received high marks. The footing is good where it's new, and the best it can be in the field, and there is nothing like show jumping on a grass field.

The footing in secondary arenas and schooling areas is very good, an appreciated improvement over last year, but there are some inherent issues related to space. The size of the secondary rings and schooling areas is less than adequate. The only fix for this is to move and reconfigure the arenas. The stabling is adequate but not permanent. Although competitors appreciate the party, ice cream social, and free drinks and snacks, the available food concessions were few and expensive. Once on the grounds the setting is lovely, but there are no hotels close to the venue, and no discounts provided.

Old Salem Farm has made several improvements in recent years. It is one of several nice options for competing in the spring season. Riders enjoy this venue, with its air of country charm. The two weeks in 2016 offer a CSI2\* and a CSI3\*, so spring in Old Salem is certainly enticing.

25.

TIE



## REFURBISHING A JEWEL

A small town with a European flavor, Bromont moved from Honorable Mention into the Top 25 this year, and will doubtless continue to climb as they prepare the facility for the 2018 World Equestrian Games. In 2015, they were the first to launch an East Coast leg of the Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping North American League, and will continue to do so in years to come. Knowledgeable about equestrian sport, the enthusiastic crowds return every year, lending a feel of prestige and importance.

Improvements include new euro footing in the main arena. The staff, from the maintenance crews, to security, to judges and stewards, to the on-site veterinarian, to customer service; are kind, helpful, well-organized, and engaged, and riders are given access to the well-located VIP.

Plans are underway to replace the footing in the secondary arena and the schooling areas, which were rendered unusable in the rain. The permanent stalls need refurbishing, and ventilation issues must be addressed. Our evaluators would like to see a video screen in the stabling and schooling areas, and some improvement in the food concessions.

Once an Olympic site, this aged yet extraordinarily beautiful venue is no stranger to world-class events. We look forward to watching it regain its glory.

25.

TIE



## BEAUTY SOUTH OF THE BORDER

Held in a luxury gated community near picturesque San Miguel Allende, Otomí offers FEI-rated classes, gorgeous grass fields, and superb ceremony, amid truly beautiful surroundings and tight security. The course design and the jumps both received high marks, and the grass footing in the main and secondary arenas received good scores with some reservation. Improvements were made to the footing in the schooling areas, and the jumbotron can be seen from all arenas and the schooling areas.

Maintenance crews roll the grass footing in the arenas, and it can get hard and slippery. If rain gets heavy, they become unusable. Stabling is in a permanent structure with large stalls, lovely from the outside, but very dusty inside.

Our evaluators noted that the fees can be up to double the costs of other venues, and prize money lags behind. The VIP required a large fee and the food was sub-par.

Otomí remains a nice place to show, in a magical town. The surroundings are beautiful and the atmosphere is great. We hope management can make it a bit more inviting for horse and rider.



# 1.

## SPECIALTY



### THE NEW ALBANY CLASSIC & FAMILY DAY

How do you critique an event that is nearly perfect? The New Albany Classic, still #1 on our Specialty Shows list, is a well-planned, well-managed, and beautifully executed day in the country. Held on the lush 550-acre Wexner estate, it is truly an invitational. The thirty riders that are asked to participate pay no entry fees, stabling expenses, or hotel costs, and are simply asked to make a tax-deductible donation to The Center for Family Safety and Healing. This group, dedicated to breaking the cycle of family violence, receives all proceeds from the event.

There's something for all ages: a carnival with amusement rides, food concessions, costumed characters and dog agility demonstrations, archery instruction, and even a tween concert, all wrapped around a \$125,000 CSI2\* Grand Prix. The announcer draws the animated and enthusiastic crowd (estimated at 18,000 this year) into the competition, generating excitement and engaging them in the sport.

The opening ceremonies began with a thrilling skydiving demonstration. The parachute troop landed an American flag on the grass field to officially mark the beginning of The Classic.

The impeccable grass field provides excellent turf for jumping in the arena, as well as the schooling areas. Stabling is spacious, comfortable, and close to the arena. The Richard Jeffrey course was super, with jumps unique to the venue, and all technical aspects were well done. Press coverage before and during the event was abundant and effective, and NBC Sports did the webcast.

Our thanks go out to the Wexners for brilliantly presenting great sport and a fun day to legions of potential fans, while raising money for a worthy cause, at an extraordinary venue.



# 2.

## SPECIALTY



### TRUMP INVITATIONAL

For the third year, the exquisite Trump Invitational kicked off the 2015 Winter Equestrian Festival, and held on firmly to its second position in our Specialty Shows ranking. The only equestrian event ever to be held on Palm Beach Island, it is hosted by Donald and Melania Trump at their gorgeous Mar-a-Lago Club, the former Marjorie Merriweather Post Estate.

An exclusive one-day affair with only two classes, 36 world-class Grand Prix riders are invited to compete in the highlight grand prix event. For future events, potentially more of the invitations could be given to riders from the Longines FEI World Ranking or Rolex USEF ranking lists.

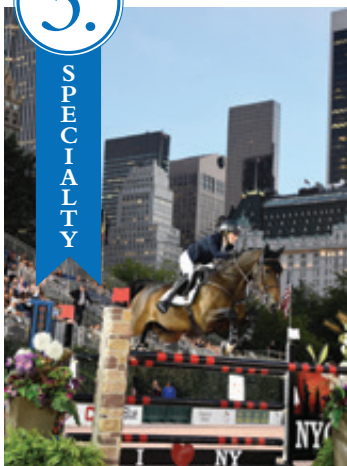
One could say that the spectators were hand-picked as well, with the cream of Palm Beach society filling the VIP, and no other seating available. Riders, owners, and trainers were graciously welcomed into the VIP, but no food was provided for the grooms.

The production was very well done, with a short concert to open the event. The show ran on schedule, and *The Chronicle of the Horse* provided a free webcast. Onsite stabling the day of the event is small, with no grooming stalls, wash stalls, or warm water; but until that day, horses are stabled at The Stadium, with excellent amenities. Though the arena is quite small for a Grand Prix, the grass footing was beautiful and held up well.

This exceptional day, with its exquisite surroundings and high-profile hosts, does wonders for promoting the sport. The exclusivity that is its downside, is also part of its incredible ambiance. Put on hold in 2016, we are uncertain of the future of this specialty event which had come a long way in three years.

3.

SPECIALTY



## ROLEX CENTRAL PARK HORSE SHOW

Building on its initial success, the second annual Central Park Horse Show once again brought show jumping and more to Manhattan. With a cityscape backdrop second to none, high-profile sponsors, and the famous New York City vibe, a feeling of importance is assured. In 2015, horses and riders were sharing the city with the Pope, so the FBI was on hand, and security was tight, making all participants feel quite safe.

The \$212,000 FEI 3\* Grand Prix was part of the inaugural Rolex Open Jumper Competition, which combined the Speed class with the Grand Prix, and offered a \$25,000 bonus to the winner. The ESI euro-blend footing was good, as was the weather. Press coverage was widespread, all the action was streamed live, and the Grand Prix was telecast on a delay by NBC Sports. The Guilherme Jorge course design, adjusted to the size of the venue, worked well.

Some challenges remain to be sorted out, and some that result from space limitations and a location in one of the world's busiest cities, simply have to be accepted. Stabling was too far away from the arena, and was not quite ready when competitors arrived. Bigger schooling areas would be a bonus, but may not be possible. Also video monitors in the schooling area are much appreciated by competitors. The announcer was a bit loud and distracting – an easy fix.

Access to the sold-out VIP was not available to competitors. However, food and drink were provided in the riders lounge. Overall fees were reasonable, but you pay to play in Manhattan, and it is an expensive venture. Putting in more non-VIP seating, if that is possible, would be a nice addition for drawing a bigger audience.

The sheer adventure of riding in New York City's iconic Central Park, the unlimited sponsorship potential, and world-ranking classes, make this show a must on the fall calendar. NARG respects the management for taking on the challenge to bring our sport to the Big Apple.

4.

SPECIALTY



## ADEQUAN/ FEI NORTH AMERICAN JUNIOR & YOUNG RIDER CHAMPIONSHIPS

Since this is truly a Specialty Event, we decided to move NAJYRC to this category. As the foremost multi-discipline competition on the continent for Junior and Young Riders, it should have a distinct feeling of importance for the rising stars of Show Jumping, as well as other FEI disciplines. Show management does make impressive efforts for the prize-giving ceremonies, as well as opening and closing ceremonies. Located at a beautiful venue in the middle of horse country, NARG would love to see more of an audience for this unique event. These bright young athletes, who compete for no prize money, are the future of our sport.

The footing in both the Rolex Arena and the schooling arenas is excellent, it drains well, and is well maintained. Stabling is roomy and accommodating, and the stall fees are reasonable. All other fees are waived.

Food and drink were available in a riders tent, and also in a VIP tent provided for the families. Management's efforts to make riders and families comfortable despite the Kentucky heat, was appreciated. The Alan Wade courses, progressively more difficult as the week went on, challenged riders from day one.

Sadly, there was no live stream. Despite being in the backyard of the USEF, they couldn't get the feed to work. Additionally, the jumbotron in the arena wasn't used for video replay, and there are no video screens in the schooling area. The equipment is there and this event is important enough to use it.

Despite the inevitable glitch or two, this is a well-managed event that runs smoothly, with several disciplines competing at the same venue. Filling the stands takes some creative planning, but it so important for creating the buzz and prestige this Championship deserves. Possibly getting the riders themselves involved on Social Media would create some organic promotion. Potentially NAJYRC's move to the Colorado Horse Park this summer will inject some new welcomed excitement.





# HONORABLE MENTIONS



## BRAVO VALLE AND WELLINGTON

We would be remiss if we didn't recognize two excellent events that evolved for the sake of top level show jumping – Valle de Bravo and Wellington Masters. Both chosen to be a part of the Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping North American League, each location hosted beautiful and well-attended shows in January and February of 2016, which likely would have ranked on our Top 25 list had they occurred in 2015. Positive comments abound for both events, as they each had a superb setting and offered show jumping at its finest.

## AND MORE

The honorable mentions below continue to produce popular, well-run horse shows; and either consciously choose to serve an audience that may not be top-level show jumpers; or they are working towards making the list. These management teams uphold standards we value in top shows, including excellent footing, great courses and nice stabling, which make up 40% of the score. For developing a string of young horses and training clients, a solid number of top level competitors choose to compete at these shows throughout the year.



## WE APPLAUD PIN OAK.

A Texas tradition that attracts a social crowd and raises significant money for charity, The Pin Oak Charity Horse Show hosts a very nice two weeks of shows at the refurbished Great Southwest Equestrian Center in Katy. Low prize money and no FEI rating keep it just off the list, but the turnout is terrific.

## CALEDON IS NEW AND NICE.

The completely refurbished Ontario facility that hosted the Pan American Games has all the amenities to produce excellent events. Currently the show schedule includes a few CSI2\* shows with low prize money. If the management group chose to step up the potential is clearly there.



## WE LOVE LAKE PLACID.

Known for their incredible competitor hospitality and beautiful location, Lake Placid is a lovely place to compete. The grass field is gorgeous, but did have to close for several days due to rainy weather. The arena and schooling area footing is fantastic, definitely an improvement. Not a CSI event, yet still a favorite.



## TERRIFIC TRAVERSE CITY.

Under new management, the Great Lakes Equestrian Festival has potential. The main arena is quite nice, but other areas need work. The stabling and parking areas were quite dusty, easily remedied. The newly expanded seven-week schedule includes FEI classes in August. If issues are addressed, this location is a super summer show option for the whole family.



## BLENHEIM EQUISPORTS IS TOP NOTCH.

With grass fields, plenty of grand prix classes, free entries for young jumpers and international level course designers, this southern California show management produces 20 weeks of quality horse shows from Spring to Fall at nice facilities in San Juan Capistrano and Del Mar.



## DEL MAR NATIONAL HAS A LOYAL FOLLOWING.

This traditional southern California show still attracts a loyal audience. Located at the state-owned Del Mar Fairgrounds, the facility is home to the Del Mar International in the Fall. With an exceptional main arena and a jumbotron, this remains a Southern California favorite.



## WONDERFUL ROCKY MOUNTAIN.

Another Canadian location that has great intentions. The setting is wonderful and the management works hard to produce nice horse shows. The facility is still developing, but has some excellent amenities.



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To unite professional riders, trainers and owners to use their collective strength to make show jumping in North America the best in the world.

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