



One Dollar 'Rockstar' Horse Takes Final Title Of 2022 US Dressage Finals Presented By Adequan®



Bridget Bursey and Forty Creek in their winning lap of honor.
Photo by SusanStickle.com

November 13, 2022 - Lexington, KY - Under a dusting of wintry snow, the Kentucky Horse Park played host to the fourth and final day of action in the 2022 US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan® on Sunday, November 13. The remaining 11 champions of the year were crowned at a show where competitors travel from all over the country to vie for the more than \$120,000 in prize money.

Bridget Bursey's powerful, harmonious test on the "wild child" mare Forty Creek, which she bought for one dollar, vanquished all comers in the Fourth Level Freestyle Open. Two judges awarded the pair over 74%, and they finished on 72.989% to net the biggest win of their career to date.

"I'm super excited because 'Stella' has had a couple of injuries and a baby," said Bursey of the 12-year-old by UB40. "I started her at four, and she became mine when she was five — I got her for \$1. She was a wild child, but we got along pretty

well, so my clients decided she was best with me. I can't thank them enough because she's wonderful — my little rockstar."

Bursey was due to compete in this class last year, but injury ruled them out just before the show. This year the mare, who was bred by Susen Shumaker, picked up two eights for music, to a score compiled by Hailey Guard of Guardian Dressage — who also owns Forty Creek's full sister.

"It was worth the wait; Stella's a fantastic horse," added Bursey, who hails from Stillwater, Minnesota, and drove 14 hours to ride at Finals. "She's a diva, she likes things her way, and you have to do it that way; then you're good to go."

Before lunch time, the hard-working Heather Mason had already picked up two champions' sashes and a reserve champion title. She dominated the top two placings in the First Level Freestyle Open championship, winning on Manuscript SCF with 72.341% and following behind

with 74.867% on Shmoky Quartz. Manuscript delivered a second win in the Second Level Open final. His 72.341% performance delivered Mason win number seven of a victory-stuffed week. Not to be outdone, her nine-year-old Oldenburg gelding New Beginnings added another reserve champion title, finishing behind Bursey.

Ronin Finds His Groove Under Martin Kuhn

Martin Kuhn was the only man to pick up a championship title on a day otherwise filled with girl power. He piloted Ronin, his wife Kathryn Fleming-Kuhn's nine-year-old gelding by Blue Hors Romanov, to

credit her with a lot of the successes here, as well as our long-time coach and mentor, Gerhard Politz."

Rita Mae Johnson Is 'On The Money' for Kristen Ort

"Out of my mind happy" was how Kristen Ort described her winning result in the AA Prix St. Georges championship. The three judges unanimously gave her and Rita Mae Johnson the nod and a final score of 69.559%.

"I had good expectations for the show because we have taken a step back this year to make a lot of changes and fix a lot of holes in our riding," reasoned Ort, who has brought the mare up from Training Level.

"I've trained really hard, and I said that I thought she could do it. Today she was just on the money."

Ort bought Rita three years ago from her trainer, Bahsi Neidhardt-Clark, who bred her. She is by the Ramiro Z son RJohnson, out of a Dutch Harness Horse mare.

"I got to ride her and loved everything about her, and I just had to have her," said Ort, who is a commissioner on the Cecil County liquor board. "I have such a great support team. I live in Maryland and keep Rita in Pennsylvania about half an hour away."

So how will she celebrate her win? "With food — and maybe a couple of cocktails," she grinned.

Back With a Bang — After a 27-Year Break

Laurie Saldana-Rich was shocked to win the AA Third Level Freestyle title after a dressage showing break of 27 years during which she raised Thoroughbred/Quarter Horses. Riding her horse of 18 months, the eight-year-old Straight Horse De Milla, the 55-year-old scored 70.244%.

"I never even thought I'd come to Finals," said Indiana-based Saldana-Rich, who trains with Jennifer Conour — herself a winner here too. "I just hoped that I would show and do okay and not make a fool out of myself. To get a first place — I never dreamed it. Cynthia Collins did my freestyle, but I can't tell you what the music is because the mare picked it out. I rode outside yesterday so this [the Alltech



Linda Kimbell and Louis Vuitton MTA will soon head to Florida — as the AA First Level Freestyle champions.

Photo by SusanStickle.com

75.784% — bolstered by a high score of 77.647% from the judge at C. Ronin was bred by Marcia Boeving, and the Kuhns bought him as a two-year-old. The pair shone in a strong class of 23 in which the top eight all achieved over 70%.

"He was with me every step of the way, which hasn't historically always been the case," said Kuhn, who is based out of Springfield, Illinois. "He has struggled with confidence but he's coming into his own now. I just wanted him to have the best possible experience."

"It's always fun here. There are very few shows where we get to see our friends from all over the country, and there's good camaraderie," added Kuhn, whose pre-show training paid dividends. "We were very fortunate to have [Canadian Olympian] Cindy Ishoy come to coach us, and we



Martin Kuhn and Ronin claim the Open Prix St. Georges title with 75.784%. Photo by SusanStickle.com

Arena) was way better. I just had to get over my nerves of going in there."

De Milla came from Helgstrand Dressage and is by De Niro out of the Blue Hors Zack mare Zackonik, who herself is at Grand Prix level under Chris Hickey.

"Stella [De Milla] is a Ferrari," added Saldana-Rich, who winters in Florida where she trains with George Williams. "She's the perfect little red-headed amateur mare. She's the exception to the rule. I know when I'm doing it right with her because I don't have to do much, and she just takes me. It's so exciting to be back showing again."

Another of Jennifer Conour's students was victorious in the AA First Level Freestyle. Linda Kimbell was so happy with Louis Vuitton MTA's 72.211% win that she shed happy tears.

"I'm shocked," she said. "You dream about this. This is my fifth trip to Finals. Louis came last year at Training Level and was 11th, so we hadn't done

the lap of honor — and then he won. And then I cried."

Kimbell bought the Canadian-bred six-year-old gelding by Totilas two years ago, and she keeps him at home in Indiana, where he lives out all day. Both best friends Saldana-Rich and Kimbell will head to Florida for the winter season, where they stay together and ride with George Williams.

"My goal is to get Louis to Grand Prix — I've never done it before, so I don't know how lofty or realistic that is, but we're both learning together," added Kimbell, who is a retired veterinarian but works remotely doing book-keeping and property management.

From Rodeo to Ribbons

When Catherine Bowman took a young Felix to his first show, they were kicked out "because it was like a rodeo." On Sunday, the seven-year-old gelding by Fashion Maker held it to come last year at Training Level and was 11th, so we hadn't done

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"I just had to have her," says Kristen Ort of her AA Prix St. Georges champion, Rita Mae Johnson (69.559%).
Photo by SusanStickle.com



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US Dressage Finals

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gether supremely to lay claim to the Training Level title with 73.103%. The cold snap took Bowman by surprise.

"I'm from Florida, and I've never seen snow," said Bowman through chattering teeth. "I took

my coat off before the test and I couldn't feel my fingers, but as soon as I turned on to the centerline, I felt my fingers and I thought 'Let's go!'"

Bowman used to ride Quarter Horses on the hunter/jumper



Former hunter/jumper rider Catherine Bowman — who had never seen snow before — rides Felix to 73.103% to top the leaderboard in the Training Level championship.

Photo by SusanJStickle.com



Moving from California to Florida pays dividends for Celsiana William and Prima Ballerina, whose 70.694% earned the Fourth Level Jr/YR title.

Photo by SusanJStickle.com

circuit, but decided to switch to dressage and imported Felix when he was four.

"It's really a jump going to a big German horse and learning to ride the energy forward," added the 28-year-old, who works at Publix in the pharmacy but would like to be a professional rider one day. "Felix really tries for me, but I wouldn't be here — and I wouldn't have a big ribbon — without my trainers Shelley Van den Neste and her daughter Hannah Lisecc. With a bit more time and miles I think he'll be a rockstar."

William's Long



Scenes from Sunday at the 2022 US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan®. Photo by Katie Lewis

Journey to Finals Yields Results

Celsiana William's move across the country to pursue her dressage dreams proved a good call when she and Prima Ballerina captured the Fourth Level Jr/YR champion's sash with 70.694%. The mare by Bon Bravour was awarded a high score of 72.361% from the judge at C thanks to lots of eights.

"This was my first time competing at Finals, and I was nervous," admitted the 20-year-old. "I've never ridden in an arena like that before. I felt the pressure, but Bella was so easy that she gave me confidence. When you get a good mare, it's the best thing ever. She was very focused but she's only nine. I wasn't expecting to win, that's

for sure. She sometimes gets a little nervous at big shows and she's never been to Finals before, so it was a big deal for us to get here."

William bought the mare sight unseen after falling in love with the horse on a video when she was a four-year-old. Initially, she produced the mare almost totally by herself.

"I grew up in a rural part of California and there weren't many dressage trainers around, so I worked with Brian Hafner — who is my coach now and has been for 10 years — but I didn't see him often," she explained. "It's been quite a journey. Now we live in Ocala, Florida, and I get to ride with him all the time. We're going to try to make the Young Rider team next year, as it



Scenes from Sunday at the 2022 US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan®. Photo by Kevin Reinig



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will be my last year to do it."

In the day's other two young rider classes, Lauren Polk's score of 72.356% was boosted by a high mark of 76.724% from the judge at M for a charming test in the Training Level championship. She and Diano, a 19-year-old gelding by Don Renoir, topped a class in which the top five combinations all achieved at least 70%.

In the Second Level Jr/YR tussle, Taylor Allen came out on top, riding the 12-year-old mare Fleur De Lis, by Tuschinski. Their score of 69.405% topped the field of 18 starters.

Sunday's classes conclude competition in the 2022 USDF Finals. Catch up with all the action via the USDF Facebook page, the US Dressage Finals

website, and on the USEF Network. To learn more about the US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan®, view results and day sheets, and read daily news releases, visit the official US Dressage Finals event website. Next year's USDF Finals take place November 9-12, 2023. Mark your calendar!

About USDF

Founded in 1973, the United States Dressage Federation is a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to education, recognition of achievement, and promotion of dressage. For more information about USDF membership or programs, visit www.usdf.org, email usdressage@usdf.org, or call 859-971-2277.