

HEATHER MASON DOMINATES AT US DRESSAGE FINALS

The New Jersey-based dressage pro took home seven championship titles from the show's 2022 edition

BY ALICE COLLINS

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THE BIGGEST WINNER: Dressage pro Heather Mason won seven of 12 championship classes entered, including the I-II Open, Grand Prix Open, and (pictured) Grand Prix Freestyle Open titles with her RTF Lincoln

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an favorite Heather Mason was unquestionably the queen of the 2022 US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan®. She rode 12 championship tests, winning seven and picking up top-three placings in all but one.

Mason's mounts RTF Lincoln and Manuskript SCF contested three classes and won them all. Lincoln, who is now 17, delivered Mason the big tour triple crown when they topped the open divisions of Intermediate II, Grand Prix, and Grand Prix Freestyle.

Their GP Freestyle—a spectacular test featuring a line of 25 lofty one-time changes as well as pirouettes and piaffe/passage work performed one-handed—was richly rewarded with a score of 76.2% and whooping from the spectators.

"I'm glad he's mature now, because the crowd doing that during the freestyle would have set him off in the past," Mason, of Lebanon, New Jersey, said of Lincoln. "I think 25 ones is the most we've ever done, but he just felt so solid. I really wanted [to win] this particular class; it's the one I didn't get last year" (they finished fifth).

Mason has the management of the quirky gelding down to a fine art. He lives out at night at home, is lunged before rides, and doesn't show too much.

Mike Osinski, the judge at C for Mason's freestyle, agreed that the rider had taken calculated risks, calling her ride "an exciting performance and a pleasure to judge."

"There were so many highlights that the crowd saw, and we saw too," Osinski continued. "Heather took so many risks, and they paid off. We love to give the big marks."

Mason herself earned the biggest mark of the 2022 Finals championship classes, winning the First Level Freestyle Open title aboard Manuskript SCF on 77.078%.

Anartz Chanca Is Untouchable

Adult-amateur competitor Anartz Chanca rode each of his two horses to double victory.

"Four out of four—I can't believe it; I'm pinching myself," beamed Chanca, who rode his own Dazzle at big tour and the five-year-old Dante Rubin M.R.

"I'm very proud of Dazzle," said Chanca, who is based with his wife, Marta Renilla, at her family's Woodlands Equestrian Club in Tomball, Texas. "He felt great in the arena. He's only ten, so it's his first year at Intermediate II and Grand Prix, so I couldn't be more proud of him."



FOUR FOR FOUR: Adult-amateur rider Anartz Chanca made the most of his trip from Texas, winning two championships each with his two mounts. He's pictured with his Oldenburg, Dazzle, who won the Intermediate II AA and the Grand Prix AA titles.

The couple bought Dante as a yearling from the Oldenburg auction in Germany. Dante was intended to be a future ride for Renilla, but "When he got too strong, I tried him and he convinced me right away," Chanca said.

Renilla herself made a strong showing at the Finals, taking the champion's tricolor neck sash at Third Level Open riding her family's German-bred Zalando M.R. (73.25%).

"My husband bought Zalando in Germany as a project, but then he had to have surgery that took him out of business for a year," Renilla explained. "He had a cyst, so we had to put four screws in his hock. I started riding him as a seven-year-old at the beginning of the year, but he felt more like a four-year-old. This was only his third show."

Double Winners: Penelope Sachs and Cecelia Stewart

Penelope Sachs' double Fourth Level champion, Frisbee 55 (by 50 Cent), likes the rain—which is lucky, considering that the pair's first championship test was outside in the worst of the weekend's conditions. ➔



TWO-FER: Intermediate I Adult Amateur and AA Freestyle champions Cecelia Stewart and Friend

“Frisbee, who is twelve now, doesn’t do well indoors,” Sachs explained, “so I was delighted to be showing outside here. We rode in the heaviest downpour, and I



WINNING COACH: Third Level Open Freestyle champions Jennifer Conour and Hofratt V.Z.

came out dripping but having done a fabulous test. The footing here is really fancy. It’s so special riding in front of the three judges.”

When Sachs decided six years ago that she wanted a new horse, she was willing to look anywhere in

the world. She sent her wish list to contacts in Germany, in her native Britain, and in the US. However, it was a lady from the next property over who sent Sachs a message that “I’ve got your horse,” and she was right.

PERPETUAL TROPHIES AND REGIONS CUP RESULTS

The US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan® have become known for an impressive array of perpetual trophies and the Regions Cup competition. Here are the winners from the 2022 event.

Calaveras County Perpetual Trophy, presented by Olva Stewart Pharo, awarded to the Grand Prix Freestyle Adult Amateur Champion: Ashley Maul riding Adiah HP

George W. Wagner Jr. Perpetual Trophy, presented in memoriam by the International Georgian Grande Horse Registry, awarded to the Grand Prix Adult Amateur Champion: Anartz Chanca riding Dazzle

Janine Westmoreland Malone Perpetual Trophy, presented by USDF, awarded to the Prix St. Georges Adult Amateur Champion: Kristen Ortt riding Rita Mae Johnson

Jazzman Perpetual Trophy, presented by Donna Richardson, awarded to the Grand Prix Freestyle Open Champion: Heather Mason riding RTF Lincoln

Miki Christophersen Perpetual Trophy, presented by USDF Region 4, awarded to the Prix St. Georges Open Champion: Martin Kuhn riding Ronin

Top Hat Perpetual Trophy, presented by Janet Foy, awarded for the highest freestyle and non-freestyle average score at the same level: Heather Mason riding RTF Lincoln

Verne Batchelder Memorial Trophy, presented by River House Hanoverians, awarded for the FEI highest-scoring US-bred horse: Ronin, owned by Kathryn Fleming-Kuhn and Martin Kuhn; ridden by Martin Kuhn; bred by Marcia Boeing

Veronica Holt Perpetual Trophy, presented in memoriam by USDF Region 5 and Friends, awarded to the Grand Prix Open Champion: Heather Mason riding RTF Lincoln

Lloyd Landkamer Perpetual Trophy, presented by Janet Foy, awarded for the FEI highest-scoring mare: DreamGirl, owned and ridden by Kat Fuqua.

US Dressage Finals Regions Cup Results

CH: Region 4 (73.078%): Vholt/Martin Kuhn, Frisbee 55/Penelope Sachs, Monique’s Minuet RSW/Raegan McCool, Ronin/Martin Kuhn

RS: Region 8 (71.478%): Shmoky Quartz/Heather Mason, Wubbo/J. Stanley Edwards, Fashion 50/Robert Murray, Ravnika FLF/Rosa Murphy

3. Region 3 (71.158%): It’s Showtime/Kathleen Petersen, Fifi MLW/Emma Batchelder, Diano/Lauren Polk, Divo/Nora Batchelder.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Sachs moved with Frisbee from Wisconsin to Illinois on account of travel restrictions, basing herself with Heather McCarthy, whom she describes as her “coach and rock.”

“Heather’s going to Florida for the first time, so I’m going; it’s very exciting,” enthused Sachs, who has lived in the US for 34 years. “I want to do FEI in a fancy coat down in Wellington—and it will be outside, so Frisbee won’t have to worry.”

Cecelia Stewart and Friend were the only combination to break the 70% barrier in the Intermediate I Adult Amateur championship, and they went on to top the AA Freestyle at the level with a score of 72.533%.

“I’m incredibly proud of everything Friend has accomplished,” said Stewart of the 12-year-old by Rousseau she bought in Belgium six years ago. “Every mistake that he ever makes is my fault; he gives his heart and soul in the arena, especially at show time. We’ve been working on the piaffe/passage with help from my trainer, Christopher Hickey, so I’m anxious to move forward now.”

Jennifer Conour: Champion and Trainer of Champions

The Third Level Open Freestyle championship class was replete with quality combinations: The top nine of the 26 entrants all achieved scores north of 70%. But it was Jennifer Conour’s charming test on Hofratt V.Z. that vanquished them all, with 73.789%. The Indiana-based trainer competes the tall Dutch 10-year-old (Tango x United) for owner Laurie Saldana-Rich, who does most of the riding.

“I just catch-ride him for the shows because he’s a chicken with a strong



BEST INVESTMENT: Purchased for \$1, Bridget Bursey’s mare, Forty Creek, won the Fourth Level Open Freestyle championship

startle reflex,” Conour explained with a laugh. “He’ll be really nice when he stops thinking flowers are scary. He’s a rock star and a quality horse; he just needs to mentally settle.”

Saldana-Rich went home with her own champion’s neck sash when she and the eight-year-old De Niro mare Straight Horse De Milla topped the Third Level Adult Amateur Freestyle championship class (70.244%)—after having taken 27 years away from competing in dressage.

“I just hoped that I would show and do OK and not make a fool out of myself. To get a first place—I never dreamed it,” said Saldana-Rich, who rode to music made by Cynthia Collins.

To round out the group’s achievements, Saldana-Rich’s best friend, Linda Kimbell, won the First Level Adult Amateur Freestyle championship. Kimbell rode her Totilas son, Louis Vuitton MTA, to the title on 72.211%.

“You dream about this,” said Kimbell, who keeps “Louis” at home in Indiana, where he lives out all day. “Louis came last year at Training Level and was eleventh, so we hadn’t done the lap of honor—and then he won. And then I cried.”

\$1 “Wild Child” Makes Good

A mare purchased for one dollar left the Kentucky Horse Park as a freshly minted champion. Bridget Bursey’s elegant and powerful mare, Forty Creek (by UB40), won the Fourth Level Open Freestyle title on 72.989%, their biggest career win to date.

“I’m super excited because ‘Stella’ has had a couple of injuries and a baby,” said Bursey of the 12-year-old. “I started her at four, and she

MOTHER NATURE PLAYS HER PART

Riders competing during the first two days of the 2022 US Dressage Finals show enjoyed sunny conditions and balmy temperatures. But as the tail end of Hurricane Nicole whipped Kentucky, weekend competitors had to contend with icy sleet and freezing conditions.

“We just wanted to give competitors all four seasons,” show manager Debra Reinhardt quipped at the 2022 Adequan®/USDF Annual Convention, held three weeks after the Finals wrapped.)



TOP-SCORING YOUTH: Training Level Junior/Young Rider champion Lauren Polk on Diano

became mine when she was five—for one dollar. 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 rock star.”

Burse and Forty Creek had qualified to compete in this class at the 2021 Finals, but injury ruled them out just before the show. The year's delay “was worth the wait; she's a fantastic horse,” said Bursey, who hails from Stillwater, Minnesota, and drove 14 hours each way to compete at the Finals.

Youth to the Fore

Junior/young rider classes, which were only added to the Finals roster

in 2021, attracted healthy entries and high-quality fields.

Celsiana William's family relocated from rural California, where there were few dressage trainers, to Florida so that the 20-year-old could train with Brian Hafner. The move has paid off, and William and her nine-year-old Bon Bravour mare, the Hanoverian Prima Ballerina, capped their season with a plus-70% victory in the Fourth Level Junior/Young Rider championship class.

“I've never ridden in an arena like that before, so I felt the pressure; but ‘Bella’ was so focused that she gave me confidence,” said the Finals first-timer. “When you get a

good mare, it's the best thing ever. It was a big deal for us to get here.”

William bought Bella sight unseen after falling in love with her on a video when she was a four-year-old. Her next goal with the mare is to qualify for the FEI North American Youth Championships, and 2023 is her last chance before she ages out.

Lauren Polk's score of 72.356% was the highest of the Jr/YR division, bolstered by a top mark of 76.724% from the judge at M in the Training Level Jr/YR championship. The Georgia-based rider and Diano, a 19-year-old Belgian Warmblood gelding by Don Renoir and owned by Julia Stainback, shone in a class in which the top five combinations all achieved at least 70%.



Alice Collins is a Florida-based British equestrian journalist with experience covering the Olympic Games, World Championships, European Championships, and World Equestrian Games.

THE 2022 FINALS BY THE NUMBERS

Horses and riders from all nine USDF regions made the trip to Kentucky for the 2022 US Dressage Finals:

Region 1: 76 riders, who rode a total of 105 championship tests

Region 2: 79 riders; 104 championship tests

Region 3: 61 riders; 88 championship tests

Region 4: 91 riders; 124 championship tests

Region 5: 25 riders; 38 championship tests

Region 6: 9 riders; 14 championship tests

Region 7: 8 riders, 12 championship tests

Region 8: 48 riders; 87 championship tests

Region 9: 32 riders; 53 championship tests.

12 hands: Height of the smallest equine at the 2022 Finals, Lovesong, a Westfalen owned and ridden by Carrie Kimmell

18 hands: Height of the tallest horse, Del Christo, a Hanoverian owned

by Emily Broilier and ridden by Samantha Fogg

456: Total number of horses that competed

1,085: Total number of tests ridden

295: Total number of FEI-level rides

201: Number of freestyles ridden

589: Number of rides at Training through Fourth Levels

11: Age of the youngest rider, Training Level competitor Walker Lefkowitz

36: Number of riders from Michigan, the state with the most riders at the 2022 Finals.