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Cross-Country at the Fair Hill CCI*** -- The Lion is King

Updated: October 21, 2006

by Karen Briggs

"I've had glimmers from him all along, but it's only in the last year and a half that it's all started to come together," said Jonathon Holling of his lanky chestnut, Lion King II.

Jonathon Holling riding Lion King II
[Photo by Karen Briggs]



"Come together" is an understatement. Perhaps "dominate" would be a better description of the way the pair (29 and 12 years old, respectively) tackled the testing cross-country course at the Fair Hill International CCI*** today. On a day when stops were plentiful and the terrain, as always, took its toll in time penalties, Holling and Lion King were one of only six pairs to smoke around the Derek di Grazia-designed course and finish on their dressage score of 50.9 penalty points—which moves them handily into first place going into Sunday's show jumping.

"I'm really proud for the horse, that he put in a round like that today, especially considering he lost two shoes somewhere along the way," said Holling. "It's deceptively difficult terrain and just a physically demanding competition that tests everything you need to test. In my experience this is the toughest three-star in the world ... so it feels great to be in this position right now."

Slipping handily into second place (from sixth after dressage) was perennial threat Phillip Dutton, piloting Tru Luck in his first three-star. "It's a big stepping stone for this horse," he said. "The course rode quite hard—I really had to work to get the time. We didn't have any scary jumps, but I could feel him working hard. The pressure was on all the way round."

Gina Miles and McKinlaigh proved that Fair Hill is one of their favorite courses by moving up from fifth after dressage, to a solid third, with 0.8 of a time penalty and a two-day total of 55.6. "I brought him here after he bled at [Rolex] Kentucky [this past spring] to make sure he was all right," she said. "We did our first three-star here at Fair Hill when he was just seven. We grew up together. He's still only 12 now, so I'm hoping he has a lot of years left."

Less than one show jumping rail separates second through sixth places at the close of an eventful (if you'll pardon the pun) endurance day. Some of the most dramatic improvements came from Bruce Davidson and Jam, who moved up from equal 18th to sixth; Kristin Bachman and Gryffindor (this year's Wellpride AEC Advanced division winners), who went from 26th to seventh; Kristen Bond and Fleeceworks Blackout, who shot from equal 32nd to eighth; and Jane Sleeper aboard UN, who rocketed all the way from 43rd to tenth, all with double clear performances.

Sleeper was even more pleased, however, that her New Moon, ridden by Buck Davidson and the very last horse on course, seemed uninjured after he fell on the landing side of the second-to-last fence on course. Both horse and human ambulances arrived on the scene, but both were ultimately unnecessary. Buck had his teeth rattled by the fall, but seemed okay. It was a sobering end, however, to a day which was riddled with problems for Buck – he retired at Fence #13, the new corner complex, on Tommy Star and had two stops with his second ride, Idalgo.

Davidson was far from alone in his misfortunes. Overnight leaders, Mara Dean and Nicki Henley, called it a day very early on, after they racked up 20 penalties at Fence #4, the *Broken Log*. First-day dressage leaders, Suzy Pettman Elliott and Sambucca, who were sitting in eighth position after dressage, also experienced some bad karma, and retired on course after a couple of stops. Fellow Canadian Jessica Phoenix managed to decapitate one of the two loons at Fence #5 on her Exploring, and was eliminated for refusals soon after. And Karen O'Connor, aboard the intrepid little sport pony, Theodore O'Connor, suffered a blemish in an otherwise sterling round when 'Teddy' lost his footing coming into the first water hazard (Fence #5) and nearly dunked Karen.

Fair weather and mostly-good footing, however, meant that problems were scattered relatively evenly across the course, and no one obstacle stood out as a bogey fence. Course designer Derek di Grazia, who has been the mastermind behind the Fair Hill track for the past eight years, seemed very satisfied with the outcome of the day,

Events this Week

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Rider of the Year

Rank, Name, Points

10

[All Leaderboards](#)

Rider of the Year

Rank, Name, Points

10

[All Leaderboards](#)

Latest Calendar Changes

▶ Pine Top Winter II H.T.(GA, A-3) - Event will run over 3 days - Intermediate all on Friday, and Novice has been added.

▶ Pine Top Spring Advanced HT(GA, A-3) - Training has been added.

▶ Texas Rose Horse Park H.T.(TX, A-5) - Several changes to listing, including days will run over2, not 3. Must use Pinny holder.

▶ MeadowCreek Park - The Spring Social Event(TX, A-5) - Draw checks to Meadowcreek Park; increase in pinny holder cost. See listing.

▶ Poplar Place Farm February H.T.(GA, A-3) - A CIC3* division has been added.

▶ Morven Park Spring H.T.(VA, A-2) -

▶ Spring Horse Trials at the Ark(NC, A-2) -

▶ Rocking Horse Spring H.T.(FL, A-3) -

▶ WindRidge Farm Horse Trials(NC, A-3) -

▶ FENCE H.T.(SC, A-3) -

[Omnibus & Calendar](#)

saying, "I really liked the way the course flowed this year. It required concentration from the riders but there were some long galloping stretches for the horses, and the faults were spread out around the course. I was excited to see some of the newer riders do so well, too."

Sunday, October 22nd will feature the final veterinary inspection at 11 a.m., followed by show jumping for \$10,000 in cash and prizes, as well as the USEF Three-Star Championship. Stay tuned for the final results!

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