



ADEQUAN GLOBAL DRESSAGE FESTIVAL

AGDF TIMES

WEEK 5 • FEBRUARY 6, 2025



MEET PALM BEACH EQUINE CLINIC'S
DR. CHRIS ELLIOTT

411 ON THE US EQUESTRIAN OPEN
OF DRESSAGE

ANNA MAREK UNDER THE LIGHTS

ANNA MAREK & FIRE FLY BRING THE HEAT in World Cup Freestyle

**By Alice Collins
for Wellington International**

As temperatures dipped in Wellington during AGDF 3, Anna Marek and Fire Fly turned on the heat to claim the FEI World Cup™ Grand Prix Freestyle, sponsored by Douglas Elliman Real Estate. They logged 77.755% for their performance during 'Friday Night Stars.'

Kevin Kohmann (USA) finished second with Dünensee, scoring 77.545%, and Germany's Felicitas Hendricks, rounded out the podium in third with 76.365% on Drombusch OLD.

Ocala-based Marek paired up with Fire Fly, Janet Simile's 15-year-old gelding by Briar Junior, just over three years ago and the duo claimed team gold and individual

bronze at the 2023 Pan American Games. Their freestyle, set to music from the *Stranger Things* soundtrack, carried a high degree of difficulty and included 13 two-time changes on a curve and metronomic, drumbeat passage.

"This freestyle is really fun to ride, and I love the dramatic music," said Marek, whose groom Cheyenne Duncan was awarded a check for \$500 courtesy of the

Lövsta Future Challenge.

"This is my favorite freestyle venue to ride at; you can feel the atmosphere, and the horses get excited in a really good way—I knew he'd get pumped up.

"Fire Fly is a very sensitive, spooky horse," continued Marek, who trains with Anne Gribbons. "When I

started riding him I told his owner it might take me a while for us to show Grand Prix together, but we keep getting better and better. It's taken us a little while to get on the same page, but now I feel like he'd do anything for me. It's really exciting."

Kohmann and the 16-year-old Dünensee's score was just shy of their career high of 77.72% set in December 2023. They performed an energetic freestyle with a high degree of difficulty, coming straight out of the first halt into canter pirouettes and curving changes to a modern compilation including the lyrics 'At least we stole the show'. He even rode a piaffe pirouette in the middle of the walk section.

"That was my best ride on him," beamed Kohmann, who currently sits atop the FEI



PHOTO • SUSAN J. STICKLE PHOTOGRAPHY



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was too big for his now wife Devon Kane. The horse was sold, which did not work out, and he returned under the saddle of Kohmann's trainer Christoph Koschel, who advised Kohmann to keep the talented son of Dancier.

"Thank God I listened to Christof because he was absolutely right and this horse is helping me so much," added Kohmann, who hopes to compete him in Europe over the summer. "Tonight, I was actually a little worried as we just clipped him and it was very cold, but the horse really performed all the way through. I can't thank him enough."

Hendricks and her Destano gelding Drombusch had a couple of uncharacteristic hiccups, capping the score below this pair's previous best.

"I think the cold got to us a

little today," explained Hendricks, who also trains with Koschel. "There was some spiciness that I didn't expect so I had to back off a bit which made me maybe a little too shy with my aids and led to a couple of mistakes. But I'd rather have a horse with too much energy than a horse with low energy. I know warmer days are coming and we'll be back on track then. It's all a learning experience that never ever stops."

The Dutch judge at C, Monique Peutz-Vegter, was impressed with the top three rides, saying: "They were a high standard. I told my scribe that I didn't even feel the cold anymore because I was so excited. We had fun with the music; you could see the riders had fun and the horses wanted to go, which was wonderful."

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KATE SHOEMAKER HIGHLIGHTS CPEDI3* WEEK AT AGDF

By Alice Collins for Wellington International

Week three of AGDF included three outstanding performances inside the white boards for para athlete Kate Shoemaker and her nine-year-old Vitalis mare, Vianne—culminating in a plus-80% freestyle victory in the CPEDI3* FEI Para Grand Prix Freestyle Grade IV to stand show champion.

"I had the goal of hitting 80% with this freestyle and we did it," said Shoemaker, who rode to music originally made for a horse that recently passed away, Quiana. "I think they were the best canter extensions I've ever ridden on Vianne because they were Quiana's highlight in that test, and I rode it the same way. It was special out there today, both for the partnership I have with Vianne and the honor I paid to Quiana at the same time. With Vianne I'm having a great week, but it's also been a very rough week and emotionally tough to process."

The 37-year-old Shoemaker suffers from motor control dysfunction, muscle weakness, and spasms on the right side of her body, but she and Vianne have been stepping on the training gas and Shoemaker hopes to make her able-bodied grand prix debut later this year.

"We're going to try to secure the grand prix movements this year and give that a go," she said. "I've had that as a goal for more than 10 years and this year we're going to make it a priority. It's green, but all the grand prix pieces are there. The whole point of dressage is the harmony and grace, and with good training the horse will do anything for you."

Last month Shoemaker secured ownership of Vianne, even though the arrangement with NorCordia USA had initially been intended to be temporary.

"I'm incredibly honored to have the opportunity with Vianne and I love her to pieces," concluded Shoemaker. "She was always good to me, but this fall it felt like we became one, which is an incredible feeling. The fact that she gets to stay with me for the rest of her life makes me feel so good."

Cynthia Screnci was both an athlete and an owner during week three, piloting her own eight-year-old For Dance gelding For Memory 4 to a trio of wins. They peaked in the CPEDI3* FEI Para Grand Prix Freestyle Grade V, securing the blue ribbon with 72.733%. Screnci's other two horses, Sir Chipoli and Eragon VF were in action under Grade III rider Hannah Kingsley. She rode the 18-year-old Sir Chipoli (by Sir Donnerhall) to a

71.023% win in the freestyle in their first CPEDI together. Screnci spotted Kingsley at a national show, which is how the relationship came about.

"I saw Hannah riding an older jumper horse and I was just so impressed by her spirit and her nature," recalled Screnci. "I asked her and her trainer if they would maybe be interested in taking on my old grand prix horse who could not really stand up to the work and they said, 'Yes!'. She's had him a year and a half now."

Screnci was a successful amateur jumper but smashed her ankle when she landed on her feet during a jump-off in 2015. She then came down with a bone infection and has undergone 26 surgeries on her ankle.

"I was a gung-ho type of person," she continued. "So accepting my disability was a process, but what para did for me was give me such a silver lining and the opportunity to follow new dreams and compete internationally. For Memory is only eight but he's an old soul. I've only had him a short time and he's still developing muscle and self-carriage, but he would go to battle for me. We have a special bond."

Kingsley is grateful for the doors Screnci's horses have helped open for her.

"'Chip' and 'Danny' are both big on scratches and we spend time with them outside the arena just to enjoy," said Kingsley, who had a brain bleed four years ago followed by a stroke and has no feeling in the right side of her body. "We spent two months just road walking Danny to get him fit and now he's finally fit, it's so fun to see his presence coming out—he loves horse shows. I'm really excited to grow the partnership, and we'll be coming back here for the next para CPEDI."

"This has been a big mental health journey," she added. "I was so focused on my veterinary business before [I got ill], then afterwards I asked myself what I really want. Enjoying each day and enjoying your life with horses is huge for me. Cynthia gave me the gift of riding two amazing showmen so that has really been so fun and gratifying. Taking what they can teach me has been awesome."

In the opening qualification round of the Buffalo Wild Wings Future Challenge FEI Prix St. Georges, with 14 combinations vying for a starting spot in the final, held in AGDF 12. It was a high quality field, with the top eight all scoring over 70%. The golden ticket went to class winner Molly O'Brien riding Lehua Custer's nine-year-old Floriscourt stallion, Fortunato H2O, with 73.676%. Mary Haskins Gray and eight-year-old Rock Forever gelding Rutherford claimed second with 72.402%, while Rebecca Cohen slotted into third with 72.01% on Prince Of Hope, a nine-year-old by Total Hope.

In October 2024 O'Brien received an award from the \$25,000 Anne L. Barlow-Ramsay Grant to train and compete the American-bred Fortunato H2O. The horse was previously competed by Grade I para athlete Roxanne Trunnell.

The Florida-based O'Brien said, "I've been riding Fortunato a



PHOTO • SUSAN J. STICKLE PHOTOGRAPHY

little over a year with my coach Sue Blinks' help. She's changed our world and our game, and the horse has changed into a different animal over the past few months. He's really come into his own and become super confident. My goal today was to get him in this international ring and give him a good experience, and he gave me more than that.

"This was a large class with some awesome riders in it and I just wanted to give him a positive experience. The trot tour was a highlight—he really killed it—and the cool thing is that it can still be even better," she added.



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“We are here to protect the horses; by protecting the horses, we also protect the sport.”

~ Dr. Elliott

BEYOND THE SHOW RING:

Meet Palm Beach Equine Clinic's Dr. Christopher Elliott

Dr. Christopher Elliott has established an impressive resumé as an equine veterinarian. From graduating with first-class honors from the Queensland School of Veterinary Science in 2007 to becoming board-certified in Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation, his passion for equine wellness knows no bounds.

Currently residing as a permanent veterinarian at the Palm Beach Equine Clinic and standing as the Veterinary Services Manager for the Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI) at Wellington International, the Australian native compliments the embrace of horse sport of all levels and disciplines within the Wellington equestrian community.

When asked how he found his path to equine veterinary studies, Dr. Elliott

responded, “Like most guys, I had illusions of grandeur that I was going to be playing cricket or rugby for Australia. As I got older, I decided I needed to knuckle down on my studies and veterinary medicine made sense. Since I was about 15, there was nothing else I could possibly imagine I wanted to do. My background in horses from my father’s side and my love of animals from my mother’s side led me to veterinary medicine as the perfect career and lifestyle choice for me.”

In the midst of traveling the world as an FEI vet—Dr. Elliott made his first visit to Wellington’s own Palm Beach Equine Clinic in 2012. He stepped on the grounds during the height of the busy winter season and was captivated.

“My first time at Palm Beach Equine Clinic was a fantastic learning experience and it opened my eyes to the opportunities that working in America could offer,” explained Dr. Elliott. “I had never seen anything like the concentration of elite-level horses and high-class equestrian facilities like in Wellington before. I was keen to return.”

Dr. Elliott has worked three Olympics to date, including 2024’s Paris Games. It was his time spent at the 2016 Rio Olympic Paralympics, however, that was particularly impactful. It was there that he met his now-wife and American dressage rider Kjresten Lance. After pursuing their careers around the globe, she and Dr. Elliott decided to make Wellington their



PHOTO © JUMP MEDIA

permanent residence in 2022.

Coming full circle, 10 years after his initial visit in 2012, Dr. Elliott became a part of the Palm Beach Equine Clinic team and began his role as the Veterinary Services Manager for Wellington International's Winter Equestrian and Adequan® Global Dressage Festivals (WEF and AGDF) at the start of the 2023 season.

"My role as the veterinary services manager is to be that mix between the clinical veterinarians and the regulatory veterinarians," said Dr. Elliott. "You are in the middle. As the veterinary services manager, the name suggests you manage all aspects of the veterinary services. Our number-one priority, whether it be the clinical side or the regulatory side of FEI is horse welfare. We as veterinarians need to uphold the rules, the ethics, and the morals to support these horses through their competitive career, but making sure that their health and welfare comes first."

Dr. Elliott strives to ensure the welfare of every animal in the community, not only through the enactment of his own knowledge but also by leading groups of newer and aspiring veterinarians through the clinical and competitive sides of the job.

"Currently at our clinic, we have American students, Danish students, Australian students, and Irish students all learning from us," said Dr. Elliott. "The number one thing that young vets need to learn is the basics. You've got to build the basics before you can get complicated and follow the advice of those senior veterinarians that have come before you. Follow in their footsteps and learn from them."

Whether it's show jumping or dressage, Dr. Elliott can easily be found ringside at AGDF's 'Friday Night Stars' and WEF's 'Saturday Night Lights', usually with a student learning by his side. Outside of his ringside responsibilities, Dr. Elliott can be found coordinating weekly FEI

arrival exams and horse inspections while maintaining his regular clinical work as a board certified specialist in equine sports medicine and rehabilitation, whilst still finding time to seek out a few travel adventures with Kjersten.

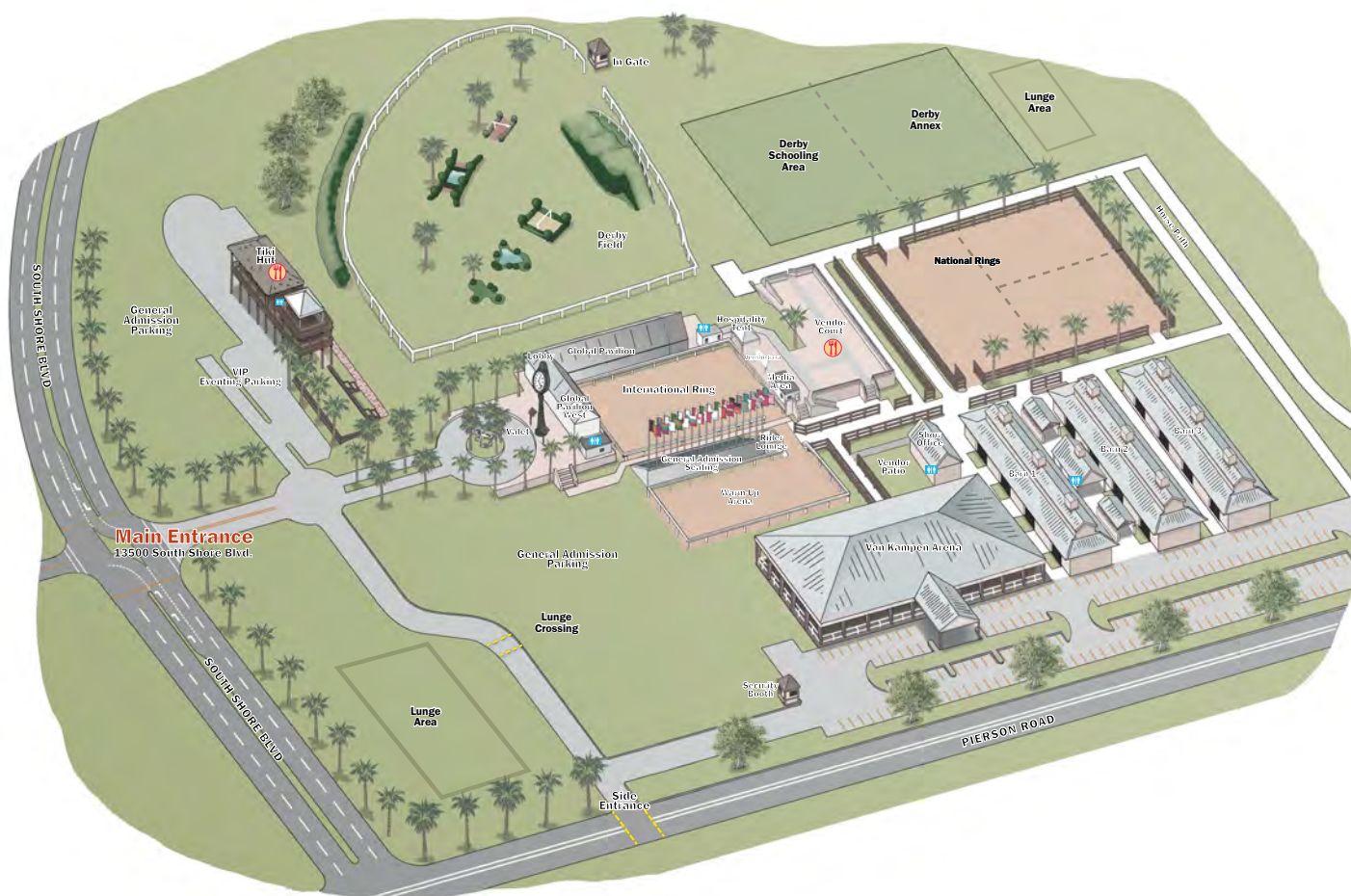
Most of Dr. Elliott's work as a Sports Medicine specialist revolves around orthopedic cases and trying to help horses either prevent, overcome or recuperate from injuries. After working in over 20 countries, Dr. Elliott has come to understand the equestrian sport on a global scale and how it can be shaped to consistently prioritize the health of the horse.

"Regardless of the competition level, each combination of horse and rider has specific aspirations, and it gives me great satisfaction to help achieve those goals," concluded Dr. Elliott. "Whether it be in the pony ring, at the grand prix level, or Olympic level, they all pose their unique challenges and are equally enjoyable."





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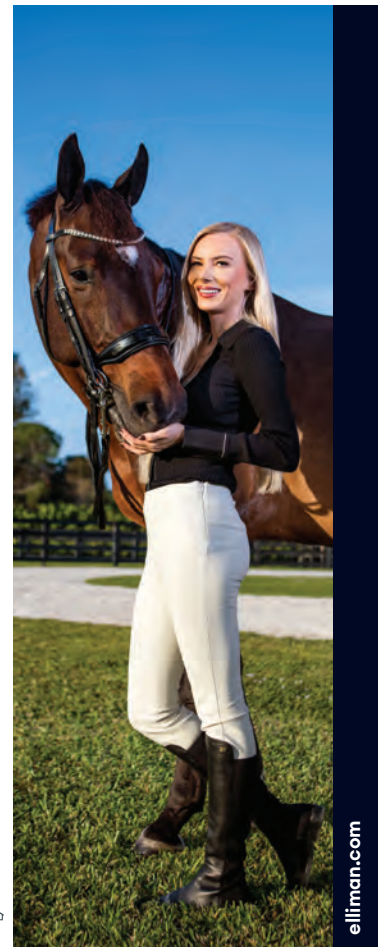
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NEW



WHAT IS THE US EQUESTRIAN OPEN OF DRESSAGE?



US EQUESTRIAN OPEN OF DRESSAGE: Follow Our Dressage Superstars all Season

This year, the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) launched the US Equestrian Open of Dressage, a new series designed to connect many of the major dressage venues across the U.S., enhance the sport's visibility, provide substantial competitive opportunities for athletes, and engage a broader audience with the horses and riders of the sport.



Series Structure and Qualifiers

The US Equestrian Open of Dressage comprises 23 qualifying events nationwide—seven at the Adequan® Global Dressage Festival—culminating with a final in California. Competitors will vie for a share of the \$200,000 prize money at the final, with qualification based on performances in the FEI Grand Prix Freestyle test at CDI-level competitions. An additional \$50,000 series award will be distributed based on rankings across the qualifiers leading up to the final.



Qualifying Events in 2025

The series features a full calendar of events, starting with a qualifier almost every week from the start of the year through to the end of March.

How Do the Points Work?

Points are available by placing, with the best six qualifier results all counting towards an athlete's season tally.



Broadcast and Media Coverage

In a significant move to increase visibility, USEF will broadcast the dressage final on ESPN. This mainstream coverage is expected to attract a broader audience, providing fans nationwide with access to high-caliber equestrian competitions.



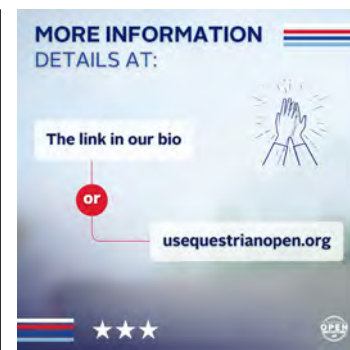
Athlete and Horse Welfare

USEF places paramount importance on the welfare of both athletes and horses. The US Equestrian Open of Dressage will adhere to stringent safety protocols and welfare guidelines to ensure a fair and secure environment for all participants.

This commitment reflects USEF's broader mission to promote the highest standards of safety and integrity within equestrian sports.

Stay Informed

For the latest news, updates, and in-depth coverage of the US Equestrian Open Series, visit the US Equestrian Open Fan Site at usequestrianopen.org. This dedicated platform offers live scores and leaderboards, weekly news, event schedules, fan guides, athlete and horse profiles, and more, ensuring fans and participants stay informed throughout the series.



Keep Up with the Action Across the Season

The US Equestrian Open of Dressage represents a significant advancement in the promotion and development of dressage in the United States.

By providing a structured series with substantial prize money and national exposure, USEF is fostering a more integrated and engaging experience for athletes, spectators, and the broader equestrian community.

Stay up to date with the latest news, standings, and updates on the US Equestrian Open Series by following us on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. Be part of the conversation using #USEquestrianOpen.



AGDF 3 SPECIAL AWARDS



Alexandra Duncan was the hands down winner of the Neue Schule Bits Best Hands Award, after an impressive ride in the FEI TOC Intermediate aboard McKenzie JHL.



Soho EDI, shown by Karen Lipp and owned by Katharine McQueen, won the Omega Alpha Healthy Horse Award. We spotted this young stallion from across the show grounds and were thoroughly impressed with his work ethic and happy attitude.



Andrea Woodard and Robe de Fontaine earned the N2 Saddlery Peak Performance Award for their stellar ride in the FEI Seven Year Old Test, winning with a 75.272 %, with coach Oded Shimoni.



LÖVSTA GROOMS AWARD



Wellington International is proud to honor the grooms of the Adequan® Global Dressage Festival thanks to generous support from Lövsta Future Challenge.

During 'Friday Night Stars' of AGDF 3, groom Cheyenne Duncan is pictured with Anna Marek and Fire Fly while being awarded a check for \$500.

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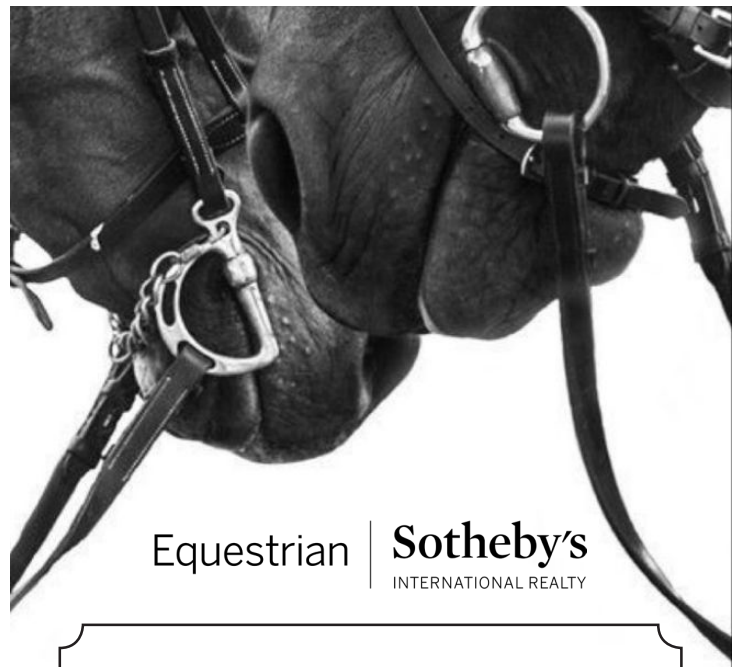
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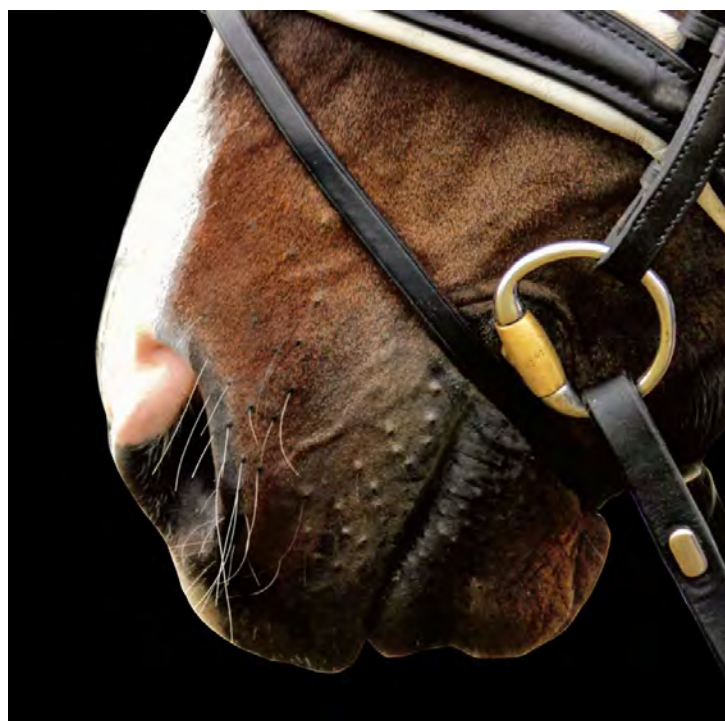
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How To Choose The Right Bit For Your Horse

A BIT ABOUT BITS

By Mette Larsen, Neue Schule USA

Figuring out the right bit for your dressage horse can be challenging. When you want to improve your riding, you go to a trainer. When your horse is lame, you call the vet. If your horse's back is sore, you call the saddle fitter to check if your saddle fits properly. But what do you do when you are having biting issues?

When I first started riding, information and recommendations came from my trainer or a respected friend. It was not science or research based; it was just someone's "opinion" that was then interpreted as fact. Fortunately, today we have many more resources. Companies like Neue Schule USA—with its commitment to education—offers courses in bits and bit fitting, as well as certifications to become a bit fitter. Today there are many resources and an increasing number of certified bit and bridle fitters offering clinics and individual fittings.

A Starting Point

There are a few questions to consider when you start to look at which bits you want to try on your horse? What's your horse's level of training? What's your level of training? What is the intended outcome you are looking for? Are you looking for more comfort or a refinement of communication with your horse? Have you tried bits that either worked well or were terrible? Asking questions is a direct line to "data" or information, which is golden.

In addition to determining which bit is most effective in enhancing your horse's performance, if you are competing you must be sure the bit you choose is legal under the show rules such as the USEF or USDF. Horse show technical delegates can be an excellent resource for information, but don't wait until the show day to ask about a bit.

Anatomy of a Bit

Let's look at the components or anatomy of the bit to understand its different parts.

When you look at a bit, the top two considerations to factor into your "bit decision" are (1) the mouthpiece and (2) the action it creates. Along with the general shape of the mouthpieces, they can come in many different variations and different materials from plastics to steel. There are four basic mouthpiece options:

1. Straight bar, which acts mainly on the tongue.
2. Single joint, which acts on the tongue and bars. (It can nutcracker into the palate.)
3. Double jointed, which gives a more even distribution of pressure across the tongue and bars and does not nutcracker.
4. And Multi jointed, which molds to the shape of the mouth, acting on the tongue, bars and lips.

The two main categories of bits based on their action are snaffle and leverage bits. The first category is the snaffle, or any bit with the reins attached directly to the mouthpiece. The pressure applied to the bit is directly the amount of pressure applied to the reins. This results in the action of the bit being mainly on the horse's tongue and bars. Snaffles are further broken down into loose ring or fixed cheek snaffles.

Loose ring snaffles: the cheek of the bit moves freely through the cannon of the bit. This design allows for more direct and dynamic communication between the horse and rider. The horse feels the action of the reins leading to increase responsiveness of the horse. Loose ring snaffles have always been very popular with dressage riders, to add more refinement to their performance.

Fixed cheek snaffles: the cheek attaches directly to the cannons of the bit, thus creating a quieter feel in the horse's mouth. Fixed cheek bits can aid in lateral stability, turning, and straightness. This is very popular across all disciplines, but particularly when training young horses. Examples of fixed cheek snaffles would include the d-ring, full cheek, baucher and eggbutt snaffles.

A leverage bit is one where the rein attaches below the level of the cannons. These bits act on the horse's poll, chin groove if they have a curb chain, lower jaw with leather curb strap, and possibly the tongue, lips, and bars of the horse's mouth. This all depends on the number of reins used and if a curb chain or strap is used. These bits should be used by skilled riders and on more educated horses.

Examples of these leverage bits, including the Weymouth curb, which has a straight bar mouthpiece and utilizes a curb chain. With the main action on the poll, chin groove, and potentially the tongue it is often utilized in dressage as part of the double

bridle. There are many mouthpiece options to choose from. For a horse's first Weymouth, start with something very mild with a little tongue relief, like the Slimma or Starter bits.

STARTER



SLIMMA



How to Choose the Right Bit

While bits and biting are topics with multiple facets and ever evolving science, the best strategy is to start simple. In the horse world, it is hard to embrace the "less is more" ideology, but many times, it is true. From there, continue to build your own knowledge base and education by reading and learning, and if possible, utilize your experts. Bit and bridle fitters are growing fields and if you need help, they can be a great resource.

Spoiler Alert

It is not always a biting issue! Looking for other signs of discomfort is an obvious piece of advice that we can overlook in our desire to help our horses. Sometimes the head tossing, grinding, or grabbing the bit is the horse trying to communicate discomfort somewhere else in the body. The reason I became involved in bits, bit technology, and specifically Neue Schule as a bit company was because of how significantly bit fit impacts a horse and performance. There are many elements to consider when evaluating health or performance of any horse and rider combination and I know bits are just one part. In my experience, if you can get even one part better, it tends to help the other parts. For more help and information contact: Info@nsbitsusa.com or go to www.NSBitsUSA.com.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mette Larsen, a lifelong equestrian from Denmark who grew up in the United States, has dedicated her life to the world of horses. With extensive experience in Pony Club, Eventing, Hunter Jumper, and Dressage.

Professionally, Mette is a board-certified physician specializing in family practice and geriatrics. Her compassion for human health seamlessly extends to her equestrian endeavors at Metlar Dressage in Ocala, Florida, where she fosters a holistic approach to horse training and sales.

Mette's journey led her to discover Neue Schule bits during a trip to Germany, where she was captivated by the science and empathy behind their design. Recognizing their potential to enhance equestrian performance while prioritizing animal welfare, she became the US distributor, bringing these innovative bits into the spotlight. In collaboration with the USEF, Neue Schule Bits proudly holds the title of the Official Bit of the United States Equestrian Federation, reflecting Mette's commitment to both excellence in riding and the welfare of horses. Neue Schule Bits USA sponsors the Best Hands award at the 2025 Adequan Global Dressage Festival.



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