

Inaugural Dressage World Show... Western, That Is!

By Emily Johnson

It is always a pleasure to plant oneself on the sidelines of a dressage show and soak up the many sights and sounds characteristic of these events. The finely turned out competitors and their mounts, the familiar ding of the judge's bell, the anticipatory rider and her horse proudly prancing down centerline; all these are part of the pleasure and excitement that goes with a dressage show.

The most recent show I attended was no exception as it possessed all of these distinctive moments, with a few differences. For one, the riders at this dressage show donned cowboy hats and intricately fringed chaps. They boasted colorful and bold patterns on their boots versus the classic black and sat atop Quarter Horses, Paints, mules and ponies, rather than the more traditional sport horse breeds.

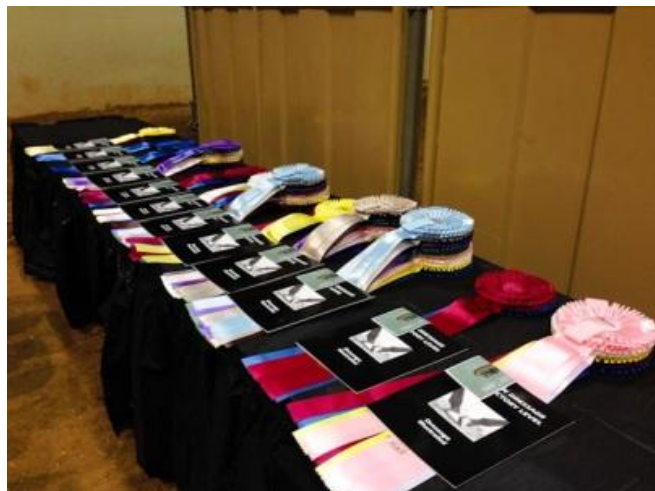
At this point, you may be wondering if I made a wrong turn en route to the arena and inadvertently found my way into a western show. But this was not the case. This

was a bona fide dressage show, a bona fide Western Dressage show, that is. My recent trip to the inaugural Western Dressage World Championship Show held November 2nd and 3rd, 2013 in Tulsa, Oklahoma inspired this article.



For those of you not familiar with Western Dressage, you may well be wondering what I am talking about. Western Dressage is an emerging new discipline that promotes and utilizes Classical Dressage principles to benefit the western horse.

Though the concept of using Classical Dressage to enhance western horses and riders is not new, having an organized and United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) sanctioned association is. The Western Dressage Association of America (WDAA) was founded in 2010 and has been on a mission to promote the incorporation of the tried and true principles, correctness and beauty of Classical Dressage, with the history, heritage and love of the western horse and western way of life. An 'east meets west' kind of deal, if you will.



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The WDAA has worked resolutely since their inception to establish their organization as the leader in education and standards for this new, and up until recently, fairly unknown discipline. Their efforts were well rewarded this past year when Western Dressage became an officially recognized discipline by the USEF with the WDAA being named the USEF Recognized Affiliate.

To organize and run a World Championship show just a first short years following the birth of a new discipline and the dawn of a new association is a remarkable feat. Notably, the association executed a very well-run and abundantly attended first show. Cowboy hats off to the WDAA!

The Western Dressage World Championship Show drew competitors from 10 different states, including Nebraska (more on that in a minute), 2 Canadian provinces and attracted over 12 varying breeds of horses, including a 25 year old pony (named Cookie Monster!) and a Mule. Every ride time across the two days was filled and the show committee and participants alike were proud to draw the attention and enthusiasm of USEF "S" judge Debbie Rodriguez as the show's official judge.



Debbie, competitors and spectators alike, were treated to two days of happy horse and rider combinations performing tests from Introductory Level up through Level 2 (Western Dressage's equivalent to English Dressage's Second Level), plus two evenings of freestyle rides. When not prancing down centerline, many of these horses work as full time ranch

horses, trail mounts or carriage horses. Some were retired reiners, rehabilitated jumpers, or former lesson horses now embarking on a new career in Western Dressage. It was a joy and privilege to watch a diverse group of horses and riders all pursuing the same goal of traveling together in balanced, forward (no western pleasure here!) and harmonious movement.

One of this year's competitors and new World Champion is the Nebraska Dressage Association's very own Kathy Lewis and her lovely mare, Simon Says I'm Solo. After competing in the Western Dressage classes offered on the Nebraska Dressage Association's show circuit the past couple of seasons, Kathy decided she and Solo were ready to take on the WDAA World Show. And ready they were, bringing home one first place and one fourth place finish in their respective Introductory Level classes. It was a real pleasure and honor to both coach and share in this momentous experience with Kathy. Undoubtedly she and Solo well represented the Nebraska dressage community!





The energy and excitement surrounding next year's event are already ripe and plans are in place for the show to become an event spanning three or more days. Kathy and I had such a great experience at this inaugural show that we have already committed to make the trip down again next year, this time with a caravan of trailers. So, mark your calendars and join us in setting your sights on the 2014 Western Dressage World Championships!

For more information on Western Dressage and upcoming shows and educational offerings please stay tuned to the *NDA Contact* and visit these websites:

Nebraska Dressage Association
www.nebraskadressage.org

Western Dressage Association of America
www.westerndressageassociation.org



About the Author

Emily Johnson of Mountain Rose Horsemanship is proud to be on the cutting edge of the new and exciting Western Dressage movement.



Emily is one of only a small group of instructors in the nation to have completed the WDAA Train the Trainers™ program and is also a proud member of the Western Dressage Association of America®, the United States Dressage Federation and the Nebraska Dressage Association. Her instruction is inspired by the principles of natural horsemanship, ranch horsemanship, and classical dressage. Her teachings reflect her passion for equipping horses and humans for success on their journey toward individual wholeness and ultimate partnership. Emily is eager to share her knowledge and enthusiasm for this new discipline with horse enthusiasts of all kind. The Mountain Rose Horsemanship curriculum now includes Western Dressage clinic offerings and instruction to serve and support you and your horse on your journey of ever increasing lightness, understanding and ultimate partnership!

