

THE US DRESSAGE FINALS

A Q&A with USDF president (and hopeful Finals competitor) George Williams



Excitement is building over the upcoming inaugural US Dressage Finals Presented by Adequan, November 7-10 at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, site of the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games.

We know you have questions, so for answers we went straight to the top: to USDF president George Williams. Read on for competition specifics, qualifying requirements, details on the facility, and much more.

In 2011, at the Adequan/USDF National Convention, the USDF Board of Governors approved the establishment of the US Dressage Finals. Why did the USDF think it was important to hold a national dressage championships?

The idea for a national head-to-head competition using the Great American/USDF Regional Championships as a stepping stone or qualifying system has been discussed pretty much from the inception of the Regional Championships nearly 20 years ago. We have always seen a national finals as an opportunity to showcase dressage and to provide incentives for those competitors who want to compete head-to-head on a national level.

How will this competition differ from the established national championships held at the US Equestrian Federation Dressage Festival of Champions?

The USEF championships are for FEI levels: from FEI Pony and FEI Junior through Grand Prix, and including the Young Adult "Brentina Cup." The US Dressage Finals are designed as an extension of the Great American/USDF Regional Championships. Competitors qualify through their Regional Championships. All levels from Training through Grand Prix will be offered. And, for the first time in any national championships for dressage, there will be an adult-amateur division.

The USDF championships will be open to adult amateurs and to open riders, but not to youth. Why?

There are existing programs for youth interested in competing on a national level, but historically there has never been one for adult amateurs.

How were the dates and the location selected?

There has been a lot of discussion over the years about what time of year the US Dressage Finals should be held. We had discussed having competitors qualify in the fall at the Regionals and then holding the Finals in the spring of the following year. However, considering competition schedules, the possibility of training being interrupted over the winter in the northern climates, the possibility that horses could move up a level or two in the interim, and horses getting



STEPPING STONE: "Declared" open and amateur Great American/USDF regional champions and reserve champions will be invited to compete at the US Dressage Finals. This is Jillian Kemenosh and Nelson, the 2012 Region 1 Intermediate I adult amateur champions.

older, it always comes back to the fall being the best time of year for a championships of this type.

How will horses and riders qualify to compete at the US Dressage Finals?

The champion and reserve champion from each class in the open and adult-amateur divisions at each Regional Championships will be invited to compete.

To be eligible to receive an invitation to the Finals, a rider must be a US citizen and must have filed a "declaration of intent" with USDF. The declaration of intent must be filed by the closing date for entries for the Regional Championship that the competitor is entering.

There is no fee to file a declaration of intent. Declarations will be filed via the US Dressage Finals website, **USDressageFinals.com**.

If the regional champion, reserve champion, or both have not declared, or if one or both declines the invitation, then the invite list will move down to the next declared rider, provided that he or she has achieved a minimum score of 55 percent or better and is a US citizen. The process for invitations will continue in that manner through the fifth-highest-placed declared rider.

The list of invitations and the names of declared riders will be posted on USDressageFinals.com.

Will anyone else be permitted to qualify?

There will be a "wild card" system of qualification. Invitations will be issued to riders achieving scores above set levels, which will vary by level and division. (See USDressageFinals.com for a chart and additional specifics.)

A rider does not have to file a declaration of intent in order to receive a wild-card invitation to the Finals, but he or she must be a US citizen. ➔



INDOOR COMFORT: *The Alltech Arena at the Kentucky Horse Park, seen here before reining competition at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games*

Why must Finals competitors be US citizens, when US citizenship is not required to show in USEF-licensed/USDF-recognized dressage competition?

The US Dressage Finals policy regarding citizenship is in keeping with the rules as dictated in the selection procedures for the various USEF dressage national championships, at which qualified horse/rider combinations compete for national titles. Keep in mind that the Young Horse National Championships are based solely on horse qualification, but they also have certain requirements for owners regarding citizenship. This is not unusual: The United States Hunter Jumper Association requires competitors to be US citizens in order to participate in its Children's and Adult Amateur Regional Championships.

How many horses does USDF expect to attend?

We are expecting around 300 horses at the inaugural US Dressage Finals.

How much will it cost to enter the Finals?

Entry and other fees will be similar to those at other USEF/USDF shows. Our goal is to keep costs reasonable.

What facilities at the Kentucky Horse Park will be used for the Finals?

A number of classes will be held in the Alltech Arena, a climate-controlled indoor stadium. There is an attached warm-up arena and climate-controlled stabling nearby. In addition, we have rented the Hunter/Jumper Complex and the covered arena. We will also have a large warm-up arena covered by a tent available to competitors.

What can you tell us about the judges for the Finals?

The plans call for a panel of three judges for each Finals class. We have hired an excellent group of US judges.

Will there be any other classes at this event besides championship classes?

We will offer open dressage classes as warm-up classes.

What awards and prize money will be up for grabs?

At press time, we have \$50,000 in prize money. We are planning for other awards as well.

A few USDF regions' Regional Championships will be held just weeks before the US Dressage Finals in November. Do you think the timing will pose a hardship to competitors? What provisions will be made so that they will be able to secure hotel rooms at a relatively late date?

One of the side benefits of the World Equestrian Games' having been held at the Kentucky Horse Park is that there are now literally thousands of hotel rooms in and around Lexington, all within 20 minutes of the Horse Park. These hotel sites accommodate much larger events that are held at the KHP, so finding hotel rooms for the US Dressage Finals should not be an issue. The USDF office is currently negotiating with local hotels. By the time this issue reaches USDF members, the final arrangements should be set with the host hotel.

For several of our more southern regions, the competition season slows down during the worst of the summer heat and picks up again in the early fall. Some of these regions have found it more practical to hold their Great American/USDF Regional Championships later in the fall. When the USDF Board of Governors voted in 2011 to approve these inaugural Finals, many regions already had secured dates and contracts with facilities to host their 2013 Regional Championships.

Those riders who are competitive in their regions and who are interested in earning an invitation to the Finals will want to have tentative plans in place. This is one reason the declaration process is so important. Competitors need to know as soon as possible after their Regional Championships whether they are in line for an invitation. However, competitors routinely enter events and travel hundreds of miles with short preparation time.

For those members who can't attend, will the US Dressage Finals be live-streamed online?

Some but not all of the classes will be live-streamed.

Any other details competitors and spectators should know?

We are hoping to have an array of vendors and to offer educational and social activities as well. Check USDressageFinals.com for all of the latest developments.

Are you hoping to qualify to compete at the US Dressage Finals?

I would love to qualify for the Finals and will be trying my hardest to be there! ▲