

March 27, 2010

# Fairclough and Stover Win Marathon at USEF National Driving Championships; Weber and Groves Lead Overall Standings at Live Oak International

By Joanie Morris

**Ocala, FL** - An exciting day of marathon driving at Live Oak International presented by US Trust showcased some of the very best in the US vying for USEF National Championship honors for both Single Horses and Four-in-Hands.

Jimmy Fairclough drove like a man on mission - and his perseverance prevailed. Driving Jane Clark's team, the New Jersey driver started out confidently in the first hazard and got better and better as he guided his team around the course. He won the marathon on a score of 90.86, enough for a seven point victory.

"I wanted it to be really forward and smooth," said Fairclough. "And it was all of that. I only had one mistake to mention - this combination is really superb."

Fairclough has a brand new pair of leaders that are being leased from fellow US driver Keady Cadwell: he used them both in the dressage on Thursday, but only drove Uniek today, the rest of his team was made up of his veterans (Charlie Brown, Caletta 5 and Celina 6) - but Uniek fit right in and took command of the team.

"I used Uniek today and I think I had only taken about 10 tree turns with him before the marathon," said Fairclough. "We are getting used to each other."

His route to get to the bridge at the second to last hazard 'The Gulch' was not attempted by any other team. It looked nearly impossible to fit a four-in-hand up the steep hill through such a narrow gap, but Fairclough's execution was perfect.

"The girls in the wheel are so powerful," said Fairclough. "I had to keep the speed and rhythm. In New Jersey it is very hilly so I am used to some hills. I have a lot of power, they are all relatively young horses and they really worked well together. I had enough power so I thought I would go for it."

Fairclough has the next six months to get his team perfected before the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games in September, which is the goal for most of the four-in-hands in 2010.

"I don't know his reactions," said Fairclough. "When you have a new quarterback it changes your team."

Fairclough maintained his second place position overall behind Chester Weber (who has won the last seven National titles) but Weber settled for second in the marathon after falling victim to The Gulch. His leaders split a pole coming out of the first gate. Weber stayed calm, and the horses listened to him carefully as he maneuvered them back off the post and on to the correct route. He lost precious time there, but the first five hazards for Weber were textbook.

"One, two , three were fantastic," said Weber. "Going into four I lost my rhythm a little bit, five was again pretty good. At six I had a lot of luck; I am always a big believer that you make your own luck. It is where opportunity meets preparedness. It is about getting to the solution. The horses couldn't back up because the hill was too steep - I am not sure how he got free. We were there for 45 seconds, it

seemed like an eternity then we were free and I had to organize and keep going and get them back together."

Horace, a 15-year-old French trotter, was the horse who ended up on the wrong side of the post, and was incredibly clever to right himself.

"After that everything was a little discombobulated," said Weber. "I just thought, 'Ok, no mistakes in seven.' We were there (hung up in hazard six) for 45 or 50 seconds, which is eight or ten points. We knew we were fast in the other ones, so we needed to not have a mistake. Jimmy took seven seconds from us. But it was a challenging day, it was hot and really muddy between the hazards."

Weber was proud of his horses: Rolex, Para and Boy were fantastic, but it was Horace who made all the difference. The thought crossed Weber's mind that not only was the prospect of another National Championship gone, but that the day was going to end at the Gulch.

"He was just fantastic," said Weber of Horace.

Weber's dressage score was enough to keep him in the lead going into Sunday's critical Cones portion of the competition. His two day score of 134.26 left him clear of Fairclough, who is on 146.28.

Kim Stover had a fantastic marathon to win the second phase of the USEF National Single Horse Championship. She drove Laughlin in an impressive effort through the seven hazards on the course designed by Richard Nichol, for a marathon score of 75.1, giving her the marathon victory by 6/10ths of a point. Robin Groves took the overall lead in the Championship, Stover lies fourth - but less than six points separates them.

"It was a beautiful course," said Stover. "I love when Richard designs. He asks fair questions, they are not a gift but they are not over-taxing."

Stover's nine-year-old Connemara/Thoroughbred cross excelled in the final two hazards where power and stamina came in to play. Stover

had plenty of both in Laughlin and was incredibly pleased with his efforts despite heavy ground between the hazards due to all the rain in Florida this winter.

"For whatever reason, he loves the challenge," said Stover. "The marathon is becoming his strength - he's getting better on the flat but that is his weakest phase. He's an adrenaline junkie but he is easy to drive because he doesn't pull. It was extremely heavy between the hazards, but as long as the footing is good in the hazards, you don't back off."

Stover hasn't driven at Live Oak in eight years, but she won the marathon on her last visit as well.

Stover had a narrow victory in the marathon because Mary Ruth Marks drove very quickly with Adeszko to be just over half a point on her heels.

Marks lives in Verona, WI and has only been in Florida for a few weeks.

"We came right out of the snow," said Marks. "We've been going up and down the roads and doing circles in the intersections because we have no indoor."

Marks bred three generations of Adeszko's line, and named her 10-year-old German Sport Pony/Arab cross after Henry Adeszko, who was head of the Alaskan Driving Society.

"He's very strong and very handy and very quick," said Marks. "He sees the hazard and he is like 'let me at it.' He's quick to seek out the path you want to put him on; I just have trouble rating the speed."

Marks is third overall, dressage winner Leslie Berndl dropped down to second and with the placings so close, the Cones promises to be influential.

Scott Monroe had the lowest score on the marathon, but missed a compulsory flag after the final hazard which sadly meant that he was eliminated after his great effort.

It was a banner day for the Live Oak event, the management was superb and spectators enjoyed a glorious day of competition which included Intermediate through the FEI level and single ponies through Four-in-Hands.

For more information, complete results please visit <http://www.usef.org/IFrames/breedsDisciplines/discipline/competitions/liveoak.aspx>

For photos, please visit: [http://www.clubequestrian.com/coverage/live\\_oak\\_2010.aspx](http://www.clubequestrian.com/coverage/live_oak_2010.aspx)