

February 21, 2010

**LIZA BOYD MAKES IT THREE WINS  
IN THE 14th AHJF HUNTER CLASSIC SPECTACULAR**

FOR  
Diana DeRosa for Press Link PR

IMMEDIATE

RELEASE

February 21, 2010 - Wellington, FL - "He is my Olympic hunter," commented Liza Boyd after she nailed her third victory in the 14th annual AHJF Hunter Classic Spectacular in Wellington FL, aboard her seasoned mount, Brunello. She won the very first one on Monday Morning in 1997 and then in 2008 tasted victory again on Fiyero. Now just 3½ months after the birth of her first child (Ellen) it was important to prove she still had what it takes. Yet, it wasn't just knowing that victory is sweet that inspired her.

Liza, second place finisher Peter Pletcher riding Vibe and third place finisher Louise Serio and Castle Rock talked about the stress leading up to this class because of how important it is for them to qualify. Liza recalled that as she entered the arena for her final round it was the stress of the week that motivated her. As she entered the arena she said to herself, "Liza you have got to win this so you are prequalified for next year."

After her final round she left the arena and didn't look back. She knew that everything had fallen in place but it wasn't until she heard the sound of her dad's melodious voice that she surmised she had won. "I was very happy with my round but I didn't look back at the scores. I heard my father and I know his tone so I thought it was good."

All smiles, Liza admitted that it wasn't just for herself that she was happy. "It is a team effort and I was happy for the horse and everyone who supported us. Everyone was thrilled even Wayne who takes care of Brunello was hooting and hollering. It's really fun to win this class," she added.

This conquest was the final one on her check off list to prove she still has what it takes. After having her baby, the first time back on a horse she trotted around once, cantered around once and then jumped over a fence. Her brother Hardin watched in disbelief. "I just needed to prove to myself I could do it, that my eye was still there." Once she knew that motherhood had only enhanced her life she started back on the road to rebuilding to what was needed for her to be able to enter this class.

Qualifying with Brunello gave her a certain level of comfort. "My horse has done this before and so I felt pretty good about him going around. My biggest concern was having just had a baby... I was just hoping that momma and the horse could still do four feet...I love when a plan works. It all fell together."



Liza Boyd and Brunello

### **Brunello, Vibe and Castle Rock Take First, Second and Third**

So, on Saturday night, February 20th at the FTI Winter Equestrian Festival Liza and her 12-year-old, 16.1H, chestnut Hanoverian gelding thrilled a crowd and Brunello's owner, Caroline Morrison. As the 29th combination to go out in a class of 31 in the first round they took the lead with their score of 91. In the second round the pressure was on when Peter and Vibe scored a 91 to be combined with his first round score of 88.16. With little room to spare Liza knew that brilliance was what she needed. Her final score of 91.83 gave her just the margin she needed to wear the championship cooler and claim her bye.

Castle Rock ridden by Louise Serio claimed the third spot with defending champion Kelley Farmer and Second City fourth. (Brunello  $91+91.83=182.83$ , Vibe  $88.16+91=179.16$ , Castle Rock  $86.83+89.66=176.49$ , Second City  $86.25+89=176.49$ ).

Being so close to victory was good enough for Peter who didn't even expect to place well on Becky Gochman's six-year-old, 15.2H, Cassall Warmblood gelding. The small bay had qualified out of the 1st Year Green division to Regular working hunter Brunello.



Peter Pletcher and Vibe

"I was pretty surprised at how good my horse did. I was a little concerned about the lights but thought, 'Just try it. It doesn't matter. It will be a good experience. And then he went around that ring under those lights as well as any horse I have ever ridden,'" commented the Magnolia, TX resident and former World Champion Hunter Rider Pro winner.

"He is amazing," continued Pletcher. "He is a small horse but he has the biggest stride. I let him gallop and he was superb. He is fun. It is horses like him that are truly what make me want to get up in the morning and do this."

Louise was equally as proud of Bryan Baldwin's 11-year-old, grey, 16.2H, KWPN Dutch Warmblood gelding. "Castle Rock was great. He does the working hunters and he is an awesome, beautiful, good moving horse," explained the Kennett Square, PA resident and also a former WCHR Pro winner.

## The AHJF Hunter Classic Continues to Command the Rider's (and Spectator's) Attention

Years ago the sport of hunters was at a crossroads and the road ahead was leaning in the wrong direction but then Louise Serio came along with a goal of breathing new life into the sport. She worked with a handful of others to create the American Hunter-Jumper Foundation and the organization developed a national series and the AHJF Hunter Classic Spectacular. Now years later it continues to be the class riders want to qualify for and guests want to watch from the fundraising dinner held in the tent overlooking the beautiful outdoor arena.

Many consider it the kick-off event of the season. "We all plan our winter show schedule around this class," explained Louise.

This was Peter's third time and to him it is all about the great crowds that this event attracts, something you never see at hunter events. "The crowd at this event has to be comparable to a jumper grand prix," he commented.

Liza echoed their sentiments. "It is our first big class of the season. You start to see everyone's new horses and it is a good fun start to the year. It is also fun for our owners and has become very social for them."

AHJF Executive Director Michele Perla chimed in agreement. "It has become a happening for spectators, competitors and vacationers alike. It has become a focal point."

AHJF President Keeley Gogul agreed. "You can tell from the weeks leading up to the event how important it is because it is the talk of the horse show. All of the riders and horses really come to the table for this class. Everyone focuses on putting on a show and doing it as good as they can do it to try and be the big winner. There is a lot of hard work that goes on behind the scenes."



Liza Boyd and Brunello with ringmaster Cliff Haines, Frank Cunniffe of Whipstick Farm, AHJF President Keeley Gogul, Mr. & Mrs. Craig Lindner, co-chairs of the fundraising party; Susan Van Dine Isaacs of Tailored Sportsman, and Meg Kruger, Sponsorship Director of ESP.

"It is so nice for a hunter rider to have goals and classes like this," commented former AHJF President Serio. "This is a big deal for us to be highlighted in the main ring and show off our horses, our riding and our abilities and it is really exciting for us to do that class. All week you are focused on getting into it."

Peter, with his usual high energy happy go lucky attitude reinforced that noting, "It is such a high pressure week of showing these horses. This year most of my horses are really young but I still wanted to do the class because it is such a great class to go in. Qualifying is always in the back of your mind."

Looking around that evening one could not help but be impressed by the many guests who supported the AHJF and the competitors by purchasing tables at the dinner party, organized by Kim Tudor of Tudor & Company. In the seats and Tiki Hut surrounding the arena enthused spectators enjoyed the competition while at the same time having a chance to socialize with friends, shop at the variety of boutiques or purchase food from one of the fast food vendors.

## Maintaining Their Cool Under Pressure

With so much pressure on them to get into the class you wonder how they manage to maintain their perspective, their nerves and their desire to win once the night arrives.

For Peter his nerves may very well be to his benefit. "I am nervous a lot," explained Pletcher. "But a friend of mine said, 'Good, you should be. That is the drive that makes you want to win.'"

Peter, who you can always count on to keep an audience laughing even recalled a moment in the class where the huge jumbotron displaying his round actually distracted him. Normally you worry about all the things that could distract your horse but for a second he got so caught up in thinking, "wow, that is huge that I almost forgot about the black and white fence coming up," he said with a chuckle.

"I tell myself my life isn't going to change that much if I mess up," he continued. "I try not to go off course and make a fool of myself but once you get in there you try your best to win," explained Peter, who also talked about how the long lines in such a big class can play a role in your demise or victory. It's those long lines where you can gallop to show off the brilliance of your horse but meeting the next fence right is also the key.

"When there aren't any numbers and there is an actual line there is always a question. Is it a 9 or 10 or 11 stride? I just stop counting and you as a rider feel the horse and go with your gut."

Yet Louise emphasized that she still has to count even if that count changes because that is one way for her to keep her cool but also, "I tell myself my life isn't going to change that much if I mess up. I try not to go off course and make a mistake but once you get in there you try your best to win," she affirmed.



Louise Serio and Castle Rock

## A Big Thank You to the AHJF and Equestrian Sport Production

The AHJF was formed in 1992 to further the development of the equestrian sport of show hunter rider and show jumping competition by providing a national office to organize, coordinate and support hunter rider and show jumping equestrian competition. Other programs of the AHJF include the World Championship Hunter Rider Awards, Bowling for Equestrians, which is a fundraiser to benefit the benevolent arm of the AHJF (the Emergency Relief Fund) and the AHJF Junior Hunter Challenge.

Since its inception in 1997, the AHJF Hunter Classic Spectacular has been a highlight. Champion and reserve champion riders, who are current members of the AHJF, qualify throughout the week in the various hunter divisions to compete in this prestigious two-round competition under the lights. This year a total of \$42,200 (through 12th place) was awarded with \$12,000 guaranteed to the winner.

Six judges were paired in teams of two and positioned in three places around the arena. Thirty-one horses competed in the first round and the top eight came back for a second round. The height of the fences varied from 3'6" to 4'.

Mr. & Mrs. S. Craig Lindner along with Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy Jacobs chaired the gala dinner party which took place in the Internationale Club. The annual dinner party overlooking the main arena is one of the AHJF's major fundraisers.

This year in addition to its usual extensive media coverage the event was also featured on a local radio program, "TudorTalks," was chosen by WHDT World Sports TV as one of the featured four programs they cover each week, was streamed live from the horse show grounds so even those not in attendance could view the event and was featured with its own section on the USEF's ClubEquestrian.

Thanks to out to many people for its success but special accolades go to Michael Morrissey, David Burton Jr., Mark Bellissimo and the entire staff of Equestrian Sports Production. "Without their support and recognition of the value of this event, the night would not be possible. Over the years our partnership with the management of this Wellington winter circuit has succeeded in creating an event that all hunter riders aspire to compete in," commented Perla."

In addition to the prize money being distributed, the winner of the class received a custom jacket for the winning rider, owner, trainer and groom from Whipstick Farm Ltd. Tally Ho Products sponsored garment bags for 1st-6th place and boot bags for the 7th-12th place ribbon winners. The grooms of the 1st through 4th place winners received a cash award sponsored by a Friend of the AHJF. Essex Classic sponsored riding shirts for the WCHR High Score Riders and the winner of the Peggy Cone Adult Hunter Classic which takes place the following day.

All competitors were in contention for the "Strapless Challenge," with a trophy and check going to anyone winning the class four times.

Liza received "The Dark Continent" trophy, courtesy of Jim Green and the "Let's Dance Trophy," which was established by the AHJF in 2005 in honor of friend and horseman Eugene R. Mische for his support of the AHJF Hunter Classic Spectacular.

In addition to the Classic, special honors are presented throughout the week. Peter Pletcher, Kelley Farmer, Louise Serio, Scott Stewart and Sandy Ferrell tied for a WCHR High Score of 90 in the Pro division; Laura Sexton, Jane Gaston, Stephanie Riggio and Stacy Arani tied for the WCHR A/O 3'6" High Score of 90; Emily Wygood was the WCHR A/O 3'3" High Score winner (88); Victoria Colvin was the WCHR Leading Hunter Rider with the highest score of the week (92). There was a tie for Grand Junior Champion between World Time, ridden by Victoria Colvin and owned by Scott Stewart and Madison, ridden by Lillian Keenan and owned by Stewart Moran. They won the Lyrick Trophy. Zoom owned by Laura Sexton received the Mark R. Gregory Memorial Trophy for Excellence as the best conditioned horse in the first round.

In 2010 the AHJF also hosts the WCHR Professional Finals (October 8 in Upper Marlboro, MD) and the 2011 AHJF Hunter Classic Spectacular will be back in February of 2011.