



Entries rolling in before Sept. 14 deadline for inaugural AON/USHJA National Championships in Las Vegas.

by Kim F. Miller

Entries for the inaugural AON/USHJA National Championships are off to a strong start as the Sept. 14 deadline nears. Held concurrent with the Las Vegas National CSI4*-World Cup Nov. 13-18, in Las Vegas, this long-in-the-works competition fulfills what organizer Pat Doyle sees as a big hole in the sport. A prominent horse show manager based in Chicago, Pat estimates that a majority of exhibitors want and are inspired by the “energy and excitement of a real national championships.”

The AON/USHJA National Championships will feature National Hunter Championships for Amateur Owner Hunters, Junior Hunters, Pony Hunters, Green Hunters, Adult Amateur Hunters and Children’s Hunters. They will also include the USEF/USHJA National Jumper Championships with eight sections of Jumper competition from 1.10m to 1.40m for Junior, Amateur and Open Jumper competitors. The Championships will feature the first of its kind USHJA Affiliate Championships at fence heights of 2’ and 2’6”, and the Championships will offer the USHJA National Equitation Championships for riders 14 and under and those 15-17.

USHJA members need to qualify for the Championships through points and classes in their zone. The top two in each division by the September 9 end of the qualifying period are assured invites and it’s likely that invitations will extend well beyond that. If qualified riders from other zones opt not to make the trip, more spots open up. It could happen that a majority of spots are

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Thursday, 30 August 2018 04:36

filled by Californians and that's fine by Pat.



On top of advocating for a national championship for nearly 10 years, Pat lobbied for a West Coast kick-off. Given the cross-country trek that Californians normally have to make to compete in the major medal finals or other division national championships, “We wanted to have it somewhere that the West Coast could get really excited about.” Future locations are up in the air, with the possibility that it may stay in the West another year before rotating to the Midwest and East Coast.

The Las Vegas National is the perfect fit, says Pat of the host show managed by Stephanie Wheeler and the Blenheim EquiSports team as the finale for their busy year of Southern California competition. “Everybody loves the show and having the FEI World Cup class is great.

“My passion is to give the other 90 percent of exhibitors who have not had the opportunity to say ‘I’m a national champion’ their chance to do that,” Pat continues. “It’s exciting and is something so many riders can aspire to all year.”

Education, Fun & Money!

Renowned horse and human physical therapist Sharon Classen headlines an in-progress roster of educational presenters during the Championships. With separate talks geared to pros and owners, amateurs and youngsters, Sharon will talk about horse and rider fitness and care. Another idea in the works is having the judges of Saturday’s West Coast Equestrian Finals, Diane Carney and Chance Arakelian, offer commentary and Q&A sessions during national equitation championships classes earlier in the show. “It should be a great way to get kids energized and focused on what the judge is looking for,” says Pat.

Championship riders and their families receive free VIP access and social activities are likely to

September 2018 - Calling All Contenders

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include a fun gathering before the Saturday night World Cup jumping class.

Good prize money is another draw. For example, each hunter division, from Green to Amateurs, Juniors and Ponies, offers \$4,000, with \$2,500 awarded in the Classic. All jumper divisions offer \$1,000 Warm-Ups and Speed classes, with \$10,000 Classics, from Adults at 1.10-1.15M to Open Jumpers at 1.4M.

“We are thrilled to offer championships for hunter, jumper and equitation sections that have never before had championships at the national level,” says USHJA President Mary Babick. “With riders qualifying by zone, we are looking forward to seeing members come from across the country to compete in these exciting Championships.”

Entries are available online through www.horseshowsonline.com, or members may mail their completed entry form to Ryegate Show Services.

For more information, visit www.ushja.com. The prize list is available at www.showpark.com.

The Gallop welcomes news, tips and photos. Contact Kim F. Miller at kimfmiller1@mac.com or 949-644-2165.