



Eventing High Performance Director Erik Duvander likes what he sees out West.

by Kim F. Miller

The annual fundraising clinic at Galway Downs celebrated its 21st year in January and the concept of having 20-plus trainers work all weekend with a flow of new horse/rider pairs is a familiar phenomenon for most who took part.

But it was all new for USEF High Performance Director Erik Duvander, who served along with Ian Stark as coach for the highest level of participants. “To see that many trainers and horses simultaneously, I’ve never seen anything like it and I’m very impressed with the initiative,” he said. “It’s nice to see coaches putting that time in for free, to see the funds it brought to the sport. The whole experience was really good. I thoroughly enjoyed it and I hope to be invited back again next year.”

Hopefully he will be, but he’s also set to spend plenty of time in California well before that. Erik is a Swedish Olympic eventer who now lives in New Zealand with his wife and kids. The States, however, have been his second home since becoming U.S. eventing chef d’equipe in late 2017. He hit the ground running, jumping in midstream of the preparation for the World Equestrian Games last fall. Prior to that, he hadn’t coached in the United States or had much chance to get

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familiar with its current and rising stars. He's rectifying that now as the hunts for the Pan American Games, this August in Lima, Peru, and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics take shape.

January was the first of what Erik expects to be three visits to California in the early part of this year. Giving equal attention to high performance riders throughout the country is a priority, he explains. Although the East Coast continues to have higher density of these horse/rider pairs, Erik notes a "much wider (geographic) spread of riders" on the selectors' and his watch list this year.

With two Californians on the USEF's eight-member Pre-Elite Training List, there's extra urgency for Erik to come west. During his January visit, he traveled north to work one-on-one with Frankie Thieriot Stutes, who, along with Tamie Smith, is on that list. With this level of riders, Erik "prefers to spend time in their home environment, to see their horse management program – how they gallop and condition their horse, for example."

"It's really nice that he's making a huge push to come out and help us," says Frankie, who had a spectacular 2018 highlighted by winning the Rebecca Farms CCI3* and the CCI3* National Championships at Fair Hill with her self-developed star, Chatwin. "He feels it's important to see every rider in their home facility and this last visit was really helpful for me." Chatwin lives in Frankie's hometown of Sonoma County's Occidental, where Erik spent a few days during his visit.



Chatwin is not back in full work yet after winter break, so Erik observed them working on the flat and reviewed film of their jumping.

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"That spoke volumes about his dedication to knowing all of the horses and their training programs," Frankie says. "He does a good job of seeing us as individuals. That's really important, especially with my unique situation. The other seven riders on the list are probably riding 10 horses a day, but I'm only riding Chatwin."

During Erik's visit, he suggested Frankie work with physical therapist and fitness trainer, Britta Pederson of The Performance Refinery, on non-riding exercises to help build sport-specific strength, especially important to Frankie. She's an amateur with two young boys and two businesses, who rides only her one horse.

Frankie looks forward to working more one-on-one with Erik when he returns before Twin Rivers and Galway Downs competition this month, all in preparation for a hopeful appearance at the Land Rover Kentucky CCI5* in late April. Getting to know Erik before Kentucky is a big help, she adds.

While Frankie and Tamie are Erik's immediate focus on his visits out West, he also has eyes out for general talent spotting among up and comers. Some are on his radar screen already and he'll try to arrange a quick coaching or check-in session with them. Along with those on the USEA's U25 and U18 developing rider lists, some may get his attention by referral, great results or exhibiting impressive skills while he's watching. "I take notes at the competitions and keep my eyes open for anyone that catches my eye."

The strongest international hopefuls will welcome the attention, he says. "When I'm in town, the right type of rider will want to show off and present the best side of themselves." For those who don't envision themselves reacting so positively to the prospect of riding in front of the chef d'equipe, Erik says that kind of pressure is something people can handle better with practice and experience.

Erik praises the quality of riding and horses he saw during the Galway Downs clinic, but notes that his measuring stick is set against the world's best, who are constantly upping their game. American riders must keep doing the same. "Everyone has work to do," he adds, and talent and horse quality are only the beginning. "There's a lot of other areas to be considered: diligence, focus, work ethic, etc."

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He was happy to get reacquainted with the Galway Downs venue, which he first visited many years ago. “The key is always having the best ground possible, and the ground there was very good. Cross-country has plenty of undulations and good water features.” Along with good show jumping and dressage arena footing and course designers that build to challenge and educate, the venue has the needed ingredients to prepare pairs for top sport quests, he says.

Erik is set to return right before the Twin Rivers Winter Horse Trials March 1-4, then again before the Galway Downs International Horse Trials at the end of the month.

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