



Three CDIs added to the California dressage calendar.

by Kim F. Miller

Three new international dressage shows, "CDIs," have been added to the California calendar. The first up, the Pacific Coast CDI 3*, unfurls March 6-8 at Galway Downs Equestrian Center in Temecula. The new competition surfaced late last year. It was to be held at El Campeon Farms in Thousand Oaks as a stand-alone CDI giving top tier riders and horses an important opportunity to earn qualifying scores. In late January, the venue was changed to Galway Downs, and a national show was added.

Pacific Coast will hold a second CDI at Galway Downs on Nov 12-15, this one with a qualifier for the 2021 World Cup Finals. That's followed by another new CDI Nov. 19-22, also with a World Cup qualifier, at the Desert International Horse Park and staged by different organizers: East Coasters Thomas Baur and Monica Fitzgerald.

The Pacific Coast crew is led by Barbara Biernat, whose main business is not show organization. "I'm out of my comfort zone," says the owner of Horse And Rider Boutique that

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outfits many of the sport's top stars with dressage attire and gear. The transplanted German is a die-hard West Coast dressage supporter who recognized that "somebody has to do something" when the initially-promising West Coast Dressage Festival of 2018 and 2019 disappeared from the 2020 calendar. Barbara's prior experience includes helping manage two competitions in Paso Robles with the much-missed Lisa Blaufuss. The late organizer embraced fun additions, including a relay race, that harkened back to Barbara's equestrian upbringing in Germany.



Ripple Effect

The community had high hopes for the Festival. It sought to give the region's competitors ample reason to spend most of the season at home, rather than take their horses and their business to the long Florida winter circuit. Its demise left more than holes in the calendar. Re-igniting interest, support and faith from exhibitors, sponsors and even the USEF has been an uphill battle, Barbara acknowledges.

"The ripple effect is huge," she explains of many taking a "sit this one out" stance. Finances for Pacific Coast are "totally transparent," she states, and prospective sponsors are welcome to review them. "Most people have no idea how much it costs to put on a show," she notes, especially a CDI in which the international officials are one of many extra and significant expenses.

"We have some people in the background who have really been encouraging me," she reports. Bringing East Coast show organizer Debra Reinhart of Centerline Events and Galway Downs facility manager and competition promoter Robert Kellerhouse onto the organizing committee assured the best odds for success, even in the short time window in which they're working.

Debra manages the USDF Finals and the 650-horse New England Dressage Association Finals. Robert was the first organizer to stage a CCI4*-L (formerly called a 3*) competition in the West, with the Galway Downs International in 2010, and has led the way in staging top-flight international eventing competition. As equestrian facilities manager, he's orchestrated logistics for highest level dressage and A-rated hunter jumper competition at the venue.

The shift from a CDI-only into a CDI and National show, and the move from El Campeon to Galway Downs, was only approved in late January. By then, it was too late to catch people already planning to compete in Florida for the winter. Nonetheless, Barbara was pleased to have 20 riders entered in the CDI as of press time and healthy numbers for the national divisions.

Adequan helped everything come together by stepping up as a sponsor. And even professionals who are missing the show because they'll be in Florida are supporting remotely with class sponsorships and other help. More financial support is critical to assuring the show's success.

"Everybody wants a unicorn, but you have to start with a pony," notes Barbara. "We have to be realistic about what's possible." Rather than flashy VIP opportunities, Pacific Coast Dressage will succeed by being "communal," she continues. A low-key cocktail party during Freestyle competition will be a social highlight of the weekend.

The Pacific Coast team will hold a second CDI at Galway in Nov 12-15, this one with a qualifier for the 2021 World Cup Finals. With more time to plan, for riders and organizers, Barbara is excited about the potential for that show, too.

The Pacific Coast November show is followed the very next week, Nov. 19-22, by the third new CDI in California, at the Desert International Horse Park, which is now in its first season of ownership and management by the Apex EquiSports partnership. The "Thermal" venue has long hosted multi-week hunter/jumper circuits and the November dressage show is expected to be followed by more from the new entity in 2021.

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Back-to-back World Cup qualifiers in November could attract an unusually large number of top riders. New FEI rules mandate that each state may only stage three World Cup qualifiers, so that means riders may re-route to California before Florida, getting a jump start on the process, Barbara predicts.

Desert Dressage

“We are thrilled to welcome dressage riders to the Desert International Horse Park and to have the opportunity to host our first FEI dressage event combined with a World Cup™ Qualifier,” says Steve Hankin, President and CEO of DIHP. “We have been hard at work improving our horse park. We believe dressage riders will really enjoy the experience here.”

This coming November will be the first time a dressage event will take place at the Desert International Horse Park: “As with our jumping events, we have assembled a great team for the event, including Thomas Baur and Monica Fitzgerald. We are excited to expand the use of the horse park beyond show jumping events. Thomas has been working with us closely and we are confident this partnership will bring new opportunities for the dressage community on the West Coast,” notes Hankin.

Thomas Baur is the current Sports Director of the Adequan Global Dressage Festival in Wellington, Florida; and has served as the Discipline Manager of Dressage and Para Dressage Tyron WEG in 2018 and the Event Director of the World Cup™ Final Omaha in 2017.

“I am looking forward to organizing my first CDI in California. There are a number of dedicated and talented riders and horses on the West Coast who require good competitions to continue to grow the sport.”

Monica Fitzgerald, the current Competition Manager of the Adequan Global Dressage Festival, has been appointed as the Office Manager for Desert Dressage. The show will take place in the horse park’s Grand Prix Arena with the Freestyle portion occurring on Saturday, Nov. 21 under the lights. The Prize List will be available on Desert International Horse Park’s website late summer 2020.

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2020 California CDI Circuit

Pacific Coast I | March 3-8 | Galway Downs Temecula
Festival of the Horse | March 19-22 | Los Angeles Equestrian Center
Golden State Dressage Festival | April 2-5 | Sacramento Murieta Equestrian Center
Del Mar National | April 23-26 | San Diego Fairgrounds
Golden State Dressage Classic | June 11-14 | Murieta Equestrian Center
Pacific Coast II | November 12-15 | Galway Downs in Temecula
Desert Dressage | November 19-22 | Desert International Horse Park in Thermal