

Adult Amateurs get the spotlight in California's innovative Equine Insurance/CDS RAAC Show Series.

by Jennifer M. Keeler, Yellow Horse Marketing for the California Dressage Society

During the week, they're hard-working accountants, managers, students and medical professionals, juggling careers, family and a love of horses. But on the weekends, legions of adult amateurs can be found at the barn or in the arena, pursuing their goals both in the saddle and in the show ring. And thanks to the Equine Insurance/CDS Regional Adult Amateur Competition program (or RAAC), California Dressage Society members have the unique opportunity to earn special accolades among their peers in recognition of their well-deserved achievements.



The Equine Insurance/CDS RAAC series was created with a mission to provide adult amateur

October 2016 - Right On for RAAC!

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Friday, 30 September 2016 22:31

riders from all walks of life with an opportunity to qualify and compete against others of similar skills and experience, and a goal that the regional nature of these shows would provide CDS members with a developmental path for gaining competitive experience, promote excellence and increase awareness of and support for CDS' Chapter organizations.

Riders can qualify to participate in one of three RAAC shows held in easily-accessible venues in the Northern, Central and Southern regions of California, each offering a chance to compete for fabulous prizes at all dressage levels from Basic to Intermediaire I in Elite as well as Novice divisions which provide an inviting introduction for exhibitors to become familiar with the experience and atmosphere of a licensed dressage competition. Reflecting the ongoing enthusiasm generated by this innovative program since its inception in 2008, all three of this year's RAAC shows held throughout the month of August recorded significant increases in participation.



Jae Chaney

Jae Chaney of Rancho Santa Margarita (Los Angeles Chapter) is exactly the type of rider the RAAC program was designed for. "This was my first time competing in RAAC, but I had always heard such great things from my dressage friends so I wanted to try it for myself," Chaney explained. A show jumping competitor for 20 years, she now pursues winning rounds in the dressage arena when not working in her career as a senior finance director.

Her mount Bugatti is also a recent convert to dressage: originally trained as an eventer, the 8-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding came into Chaney's life just over a year ago and has blossomed in his newly-adopted sport, progressing from First to Fourth Level in under a year.

At the Southern Region RAAC on August 13-14 in Del Mar, the pair claimed the Third Level Novice title. "I enjoyed the RAAC very much, especially since it was held at one of my favorite venues at Showpark," said Chaney. "I think it's a wonderful program, primarily because there really is a different vibe with just amateurs showing. Even though it's competitive, there is a camaraderie among the amateurs for everyone to have a successful show. I also very much enjoyed the Friday party and had such a great time socializing with barn mates and friends."

Jennifer Danier

Next up on the calendar was competition in the Northern Region on August 21 in Santa Rosa, where former junior/young rider phenom Jennifer Dainer of San Ramon (East Bay Chapter) continues to fuel her passion for dressage as an adult amateur, as well as add even more accomplishments to her resume as part of the RAAC program.

"After FEI Juniors and Young Riders, I decided not to pursue a career in dressage as a professional, but riding is still a big part of who I am," said Dainer, who works as an assistant store manager while attending nursing school.

"RAAC is a great experience because I'm competing with other riders similar to me. We're all hard-working adults who are competing because of our love for dressage, and I'm proud to be one of them."

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Dainer topped the Fourth Level Elite Division with her 12-year-old Thoroughbred cross gelding Little Big Man or “Reggie,” who’s been part of Dainer’s family since he was just a 4-month-old foal. “Reggie has a big heart and every time we enter the show arena he gives 100%. He’s very kind natured and easy-going, which makes showing him a lot of fun for me. We had a great experience at the RAAC show, and I’m especially happy with how we were able to improve from our warm-up test to the competition on Sunday. This was only our fourth show together, so I was very happy with his performance.”



Gretchen Walters

Also thrilled with her results was Gretchen Walters of Sonora (Delta Sierra Chapter), who competed at the final installment of this year’s RAAC program in the Central Region on August 27-28. With her young Dutch Warmblood gelding G-Force, who she’s had since he was just 2, Walters went home from the Paso Robles Horse Park with an armload of awards including both the Training Level and First Level Novice titles; the High Percentage Novice honors; and a special Roses Award for her division, which celebrates the achievements of adult amateurs age 50 and over.

“I work full time as a registered nurse and began riding dressage 25-plus years ago,” said Walters. “The majority of those years I was a ‘do it yourself’ amateur, riding and showing non-Warmbloods/crosses with a few ‘real’ lessons interspersed. But now I ride semi-regularly with Chelsey Sibley, and she introduced me to G-Force who she bred. He has a great mind and attitude and learns quickly, and I have exposed him to a lot, including gunfire, as when we’re not doing dressage I also compete with him in Cowboy Mounted Shooting.”

Walters previously competed in the RAAC program in 2012, and after a positive experience she began showing G-Force in June and made returning to the RAAC a goal for this year. And the event lived up to her expectations as she was impressed not only with the program but also with

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the venue.

“The Paso Robles Horse Park just opened last year, and it’s fabulous with large stalls and perfect arena footing. Kudos to the organizers and volunteers - the show was well run and everyone was so friendly and helpful. I especially enjoyed the Saturday evening pizza and wine mixer and spending time meeting new friends,” Walters explained. “I wanted to be involved in RAAC because it is a special competition devoted to us as amateurs. I wanted to support - and thank CDS - for investing in this program because it makes us feel special and appreciated. I also was so grateful for the support and camaraderie of my fellow competitors and to hear the variety of stories we shared with one another. I felt the competition was of a high caliber, and of course I was nervous but my horse was such a superstar in the actual tests, so obedient and wonderful for where he is at in his training. I couldn’t have been prouder.”

Thanks to an automatic qualification process for division winners, many of this year’s RAAC series competitors including Chaney, Dainer, and Walters are now looking forward to the grand finale of this year’s show season: the 49th Annual California Dressage Society (CDS) Championship Show and Great American/USDF Region 7 Championships, which will be held at the Los Angeles Equestrian Center in Burbank on September 29-October 2. “Going to the CDS Championship Show has been a personal goal for me for a long time,” said Walters. “I am working on finally making it happen this year, and I am so excited to attend!”

Article provided by the California Dressage Society. Complete results are now posted on the California Dressage Society website. For more information about the RAAC program, visit www.california-dressage.org

CDS would also like to extend special thanks to RAAC title sponsor Equine Insurance as well as Dressage Today, Dara James Designs, and Circle Oak Equine for their support of the RAAC shows.