

The Magic of Spruce Meadows' Masters

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It was the best of times... it was the worst of times. Life, sport, and show jumping were crammed into a microcosm of five days in September at the 30th Anniversary celebration of Spruce Meadows during the Masters. On Saturday, for the first time in history, a Nation's Cup was adjourned after the first round, as the Masters' traditional summer rainstorm stretched into some of the worst weather that international competition at Spruce Meadows has ever had to face. The adjournment was a bitter disappointment for the Canadian team, who were hoping to win this year on home turf. Then, on a beautiful sunny Sunday, overflowing grandstands watched breathlessly as the CN International came down to a jump-off between the US's Bezie Madden and Britain's Nick Skelton. With Skelton posting a clear round and an amazingly fast time, Madden and her horse Judgement put on wings and flew home to win the cup.

There is no experience quite like the Masters. It's exciting just to be here, exciting just to sit and take it all in. Soft music piped throughout the grounds makes the whole experience seem a little dreamy. It's no wonder Spruce Meadows has been voted "Best Show Jumping Venue" in the world by the FEI for four years now. The two-year award was given to Spruce Meadows in 2003 and again in 2005. The Masters is the final and largest of the summer tournaments with over \$1,250,000 in prize money given away.

Dedicated fans can arrive early in the morning to watch the likes of Rodrigo Pessoa, Bezie Madden, Eric Lamaze, Laura Kraut and Ludger Beerbaum work their horses in the days leading up to competition.

Those who are having a more leisurely holiday can arrive around ten or eleven to browse the Equifair trade show, which stretches through three riding halls. The shopping is absolutely fabulous (be prepared to spend money!), and besides the tack, clothing, barn amenities and other products, the Masters features a unique Breeds of the World exhibit. Each breed that participates has a stall set up next to their booth to showcase their horses, and ridden demonstrations are held throughout the day. For the 30th Anniversary celebrations, the Hanoverian exhibit this year was graced with eight black stallions from the Hanoverian State Stud in Celle, Germany. It was a very unique honor to have the stallions present, as for many years Spruce Meadows was the only venue in North America that they would travel to. The stallions and their riders put on breathtaking performances of quadrille dressage, showcasing some of the best of German breeding and training.

There is a bit of a 'lighter side' to competition here at Spruce – but be sure you don't say that to the competitors. The Telus Battle of the Breeds showcases teams competing for the title of Most Versatile Breed – winner to get bragging rights for a whole year. Where else would you ever see a Shetland, a warmblood and a mule competing against each other? This year saw a record 13 teams participate, including teams Appaloosa, Paint, Shetland Pony, Saddlebred, Warmblood, Canadian Horse, Trakehner, Morgan, Arabian, Welsh Pony & Cob, and the perennial crowd favorite, Team Mule.

Each breed has a team of four, with two competitors in each event, whose scores are combined to determine a final placing. Events consist of Compulsory Skills (a ridden or driven dressage test), Precision Driving (similar to a combined driving cones competition), Barrel Racing, Trail, and Jeopardy Jumping. Only the Compulsory Skills are judged; the others are won by the most points and the fastest time, to keep



Entrance to Spruce Meadows



Beezie Madden & Judgement clear the final fence in the CN International



TELUS Battle of the Breeds - Precision Driving



The Celle Stallions from the Hanoverian State Stud in Germany

the Battle as fair as possible. This can make for some rather unorthodox competitions. For instance, the Trail competition is a series of obstacles which riders can take in any order. Each obstacle is worth so many points when completed successfully. The more difficult the obstacle, the more points it is worth. Riders have only so much time to work with, and when the buzzer sounds, they must decide whether or not to attempt the bonus obstacle – a horse-sized ball that must be pushed through two jump standards. If they fail, the bonus points are deducted from their score.

Jeopardy Jumping is done much the same as the trail course. There is no set course for riders to follow; rather, each jump is worth so many points, depending on its level of difficulty. Riders must choose their own path, and have to decide whether or not to take the bonus jump at the end.

This year's Battle winner was Team Welsh Pony & Cob. Lei Broadstone and her cob gelding Gallod Syr Gwynfor (affectionately known as "Fory") have traveled from Medical Lake, WA to compete with the Welsh team for three years now. Lei and Fory competed in the final two competitions, Trail and Jeopardy Jumping, which were held on Saturday during the worst of the weather. Lei had no hesitations about trying the bonus jump, an imposing vertical, saying "Fory was jumping so well that of course I opted to try the 100 point bonus. He just flew over it! His motto for the day seemed to be 'What rain, what wind, slick footing? I'm Welsh!'" Fory ended up with the best jumping score of all 26 competitors, with 470 points, securing first place overall for his team.

As Spruce Meadows wraps up on this year's 30th Anniversary celebration, it is amazing to look back and see what has been accomplished in such a short time. From a patch of ground that was once a cattle feedlot, Ron and Marg Southern's dedication and vision have brought to horse lovers and equestrian sport a truly unique gift. As George Morris says, "It's the best it's ever been."



Field of Dreams - the International Ring at Spruce Meadows

Rain, Rain, Go Away

Rain has put an interesting twist on this year's competitions. In June, Calgary received a record 15" of rain, challenging the ground crew to maintain the excellent footing which Spruce Meadows is known for. D'Arcy Finlay, ground crew manager, says "The devil's dyke was absolutely full to the top. It does have a pumping system to keep water out of it, but the pumps just couldn't keep up." At one point in June, crews actually had to vacuum water off of the course. Hoses are run out of vacuum trucks, and giant squeegees are used where necessary. This is, of course, a last resort as it is hard on the grass.

The turf used in the International ring is comparable to a high-end golf course fairway, with the exception being that it is grown over a sand base to give the best traction possible. "And of course," Finlay adds, "the athletes weigh about 1200 lbs. -- and none of them replace their divots!"

Since June, Spruce Meadows has had an additional 3800 yards of drainage put in under the competition rings to handle excess rainwater.

Travel Tips & Online Opportunities

Calgary is a city of about one million people, situated in the heart of Canada's ranchland. Tourism information can be found online at www.tourismcalgary.com.

It is a 'tradition' at Spruce Meadows that it rains (or snows) at least once during the Masters, so be sure to bring warm, waterproof clothing. Because Calgary is close to the mountains, daytime temperatures of 85°F (30°C) can drop to 50°F (10°C) at night.

If you come to watch the international competitions on Saturday and Sunday, guaranteed seating tickets can be purchased online at www.sprucemeadows.com. Seating is available for those without tickets, but does fill up quickly so be sure to find a seat at least two hours in advance.

Want to win a trip to Spruce Meadows? Each spring, three foals are selected for a Name the Foal contest. Winners are flown in to Spruce Meadows for the Masters. Enter online at www.sprucemeadows.com.

Complete competition results are available on Spruce Meadow's website, www.sprucemeadows.com. For profiles and photos of winners of the Battle of the Breeds, Team Welsh Pony & Cob, visit www.sportponycanada.com/magazine.