

Joie Gatlin Races to the Win in the Wind at Thermal

\$125,000 HITS EMO Grand Prix Survives Mother Nature

Kathy Hobstetter for PhelpsSports.com
Reporting from
Monday, February 4, 2008 :: Posted 07:42:18 AM CST



Steve Bond in the GP ring following a huge wind storm that wreaked havoc at Thermal

Thermal, CA - February 3, 2008 - - On a day that will go down in record books for the Coachella Valley, HITS managed to bring a successful close to a Grand Prix that fought an uphill battle. Thirty nine competitors braved intense weather conditions, but the class managed to find its way to the end.

Starting right on time at 12:00 noon, on a bright but cool Sunday, the class reached about the mid-way point, when out of nowhere the wind came swooping across the valley and cleared everything in its way, no matter how big or small. The first nineteen horses had jumped the jumps with four of them going clear when Mandy Porter, on Wild Turkey Farms Summer, entered the ring-jumped the first jump and the domino effect for the rest of the course started to play itself out. Jump after jump fell over while the ring crew scrambled for sand bags.



Oasis Club



Hunter Ring

The VIP area, the Oasis Club, was packed with everyone enjoying a wonderful lunch when the wind hit there. At first it was just a strong steady wind then it seemed like the wind fans kicked into overload as the gusts reached ninety six miles an hour. With sustained winds of fifty five to sixty miles an hour, the more ferocious gusts made child's work of the viewing area. Chairs fell over, plants went flying, plastic dishes looked like flying saucers, trash cans became flying missiles but the most dangerous was the tables that actually went flying down the length of the Oasis Club, clearing the place as they went.



even the porta-johns fell victim

Riders sent horses quickly to their barns, owners took shelter in the restaurant or bar, and the wait began. The wind did not subside, if anything it got stronger, and a tent covering one of the food areas became airborne ending up slamming into the side of the restaurant, sending the inhabitants scurrying out the doors on the other side.



Across the desert, throughout Palm Springs and the adjacent towns, the wind managed to blow trucks over on the freeway, giant trees became huge road blocks sending traffic to find its way to their destination and golf carts went traveling wherever the winds took them with no drivers

Dale Harvey (left) met with riders in the bar and declared the class was on hold till 4:00 pm where there would be a riders meeting at the GP gate. At that time the winds had decreased enough to start the class again at 4:40. Mandy was the first rider back and all of us hoped for a clean first jump so she could

continue on without faults. It stayed up but another along the way did not, so a final score for her of eight faults ended her dash for the top.

Before the dreaded winds had played havoc with the class, there were five clear rounds. Kaskaya and Jill Humphrey, Chianto and John Pearce, Tommy Gun and Ashlee Bond, Cristallo and Richard Spooner and Callisto and Jill Henselwood. The second half played out with three with no faults, Archie Bunker and John Pearce, Black Ice and Jill Henselwood and finally Camaron Hills Shan Roe.



Summer and Mandy Porter

The afternoon had slowly melted into dusk and then evening as the crowd whooped and hollered as each horse went on course. In spite of the weather issues earlier in the afternoon, the berm was packed, the back gate was humming and Thermal folks actually got into the mood of the class.

Jill Humphrey returned on Leone Equestrians Kaskaya for the first on the jump off. A very fast but conservative trip around the course, she opened up and blazed to the last fence. Clear in 46.330 and a great start to the race for the \$125,000.

Next John Pearce, riding Chianto (right) for Alison Moore, really took a run at it, opening up the stride on the very long gallop past the ingate to the last fence. His turn off the combination just before the last big run, was so sharp we actually thought we saw his foot go through the standard, but alas it did not. John ended with four faults in a quick time of 44.707.



Ashlee Bond has got to be one of the most entertaining individuals we have on the circuit. Always a smile and a laugh, she takes every class seriously but not so much that it makes it less fun. Entering the ring, she sort of set the pace for everyone to have a great time trying to run faster than everyone else. Riding Little Valley Farm's Tommy Gun, she blasted around the course and made a mock speed run at the last fence, finding it right on stride. Clear and a super super fast 41.588. We were sure we had seen the winner, after all her time was almost for seconds faster than the others who had gone.



Ashley Bond and Richard Spooner

Richard Spooner, of course, had his usual "Master of the Faster" mind in play and he made Ashlee's trip look just a little slow. Riding Show Jumping Syndication's Cristallo, with a run to the last fence that made the crowd stand up and yell "go for it", he was just a tad off on one fence for a rail to fall, but a time of 40.170 and four faults. Wow, was he flying!!

Jill Henselwood on Equine Canada's Callisto, made a quick start toward the first fence and the horse decided that tonight would not be his, and he didn't jump the first fence. Jill came zinging off; the horse galloped away and then came back to her. It was a long way across the ring to the out gate, but she still had another chance with another horse.



John Pearce, on Forest View Farms Archie Bunker, came in for their shot at the money. As usual, John took the quick efficient route, leaving all the jumps up in a time of 44.582, just .06 faster than Ashlee who was in the lead at this point.

In the ring next, was Jill Henselwood on Juniper Farms & Stacie Ryan's Black Ice (left). Starting off on a good note, and fast, two rails hit the ground and she slowed up a bit for eight faults in 46.400. Jill arrived at Thermal the beginning of Week I and immediately caught that nasty flu/cold that is traveling it's way along the coast. Not able to show last week, and most of this one, she is back in the saddle and feeling better every day, just not feeling super yet.



Joie Gatlin and Camaron Hills Shan Roe

Last to go was Joie Gatlin on Camaron Hills Shan Roe, for Molly Talla who is pregnant with her second child. It was obvious from the beginning that Joie was having a great time and really enjoying the ride on Tim Calandra's nice horse. With a very fast opening gallop to the first fence, she never let up anywhere on this course. After the left roll back to the combination, Joie swung quickly to the right, started laughing while the rest of us were yelling "RUN RUN RUN," and she did just that, smiling all the way. I tell you she was at flat out speed and I don't think "Cash" (the horse's nick name) was even touching the ground. Finding the last jump right on stride she cleared the jump for a clean round in 41.947, and the win.

\$125,000 HITS Grand Prix presented by EMO
Course designers Leopoldo Palacois and Anthony D'Ambrosio

- 1st Camaron Hills Shan Roe/Joie Gatlin/Cameron Hills Farm 0/0/40.947
- 2nd Archie Bunker/John Pearce/Forest View Farm 0/0/41.582
- 3rd Tommy Gun/Ashlee Bond/Little Valley Farm 0/0/41.588
- 4th Kaskaya/Jill Humphrey/Leone Equestrians INC 0/0/46.330
- 5th Cristallo/Richard Spooner/Show Jumping Syndications 0/4/40.170
- 6th Chianto/John Pearce/Alison Moore 0/4/44.707
- 7th Black Ica/Jill Henselwood/Juniper Farms & Stacie Ryan 0/8/46.400
- 8th Callisto/Jill Henselwood/Equine Canada 0/fall
- 9th Incandescent/Macella O'Neil/Melanie Rapp 1 time fault
- 10th Suncal's King/Joie Gatlin/Joie Gatlin 4
- 11th Airtime/Chris Pratt/C&S Partnership 4
- 12th Don Francisco/Alicia Jonsson/Alicia Jonsson 4

Another Grand Prix 'in the box' as the day ended with cold, but beautiful weather. Everyone hit the bar, just in time to watch the end of the Super Bowl and those great commercials. With the HITS staff from the east coast, lots of riders from the west coast and Canada, the cheering at the end of that exciting game was loud, robust and wild at times. A nice way for us to end not only the class, but Week II of what is turning out to be a great HITS Desert Circuit.



Joie Gatlin

"Obviously I thought the course was a great one," laughed Joie. "We love the ones we win on! It was big, challenging and the triple was certainly a test, especially coupled with the open gallops. It was interesting and fun, so well laid out for us to really have a great end to this class. That is a nice way to end, considering all the problems of the weather today. It's also interesting that there were just about the same number of clear rounds before the break as after, made it a fair test for sure."



Declan, Mark and Molly Talla

"The footing here is holding up really great so far. It feels so good we all know we can open up and gallop to the big jumps but at the same time it is amazingly firm and we can turn and press off the ground without worrying about the horses. It really lets the riders focus on the ride and not worry about what we are riding on. All and all, the improvements are super this year. Seems like we are all able to really enjoy the experience instead of having to deal with footing and our horses. It's really nice and they should be commended from all of us," she went on.

"The horse's nick name is "Cash," and I love calling him that. I am OH SO grateful to have this ride while Molly is out. Ginnie Bryant helped me the last couple of days with his flat work and I feel like I got to know him much better. It was great to have her help and it paid off. I can't thank her, Molly and Tim enough for this opportunity. This is only our fourth Gran Prix and I am beginning to figure him out," she ended.

As the evening wore on, the bar was rocking and rolling with the winners, the owners and the one who didn't win but were there to celebrate anyway. A day of lots of emotions and worries that ended with a great time for all of us.