

SPRUCE MEADOWS

THE NORTH AMERICAN

Riley gears up for another Classic effort

Gruelling event thrills defending champ

RITA MINGO
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Shayler Riley refers to it as a marathon for both horse and rider, but it's worth every mile, pain or camp you might be feeling at the finish line.

"For me, it was huge," recalled Riley, the Wellington, Fla., rider who enters today's prestigious Chrysler Classic Derby (25 pm) as the defending champion.

"I've always loved that event. It's one of my favourites. There's really nothing like it around the world. And I had a horse I felt really confident on and I knew we had a chance. He and I rose to the occasion on that day and it was truly amazing."

The derby marks the culmination of the 2005 Spruce Meadows North American extravaganza and provides show jumping fans the opportunity to see some of the world's top riders in a sometimes perilous, but never dull event, with horses and riders covering 953 metres of ground.

There are no obstacles, but what obstacles! The Devil's Dyke heads the list of jumps scaring to both the inexperienced rider and horse, but there's also the dry ditch, the double Liver-

pool and the most extensive competitive grass in the bank world, with every natural obstacle in the International Ring used.

Talk about earning your money, and what remuneration it is. The generous share for claiming the \$75,000 derby is \$58,000.

Riley, the horse on whom she posted one clear round during Saturday's Queen Elizabeth II Cup — was hurt last year at this time and so she had to rely on Opus Sept to overtake her in the course. The 14-year-old Belgian warmblood didn't disappoint her and she'll turn to him again today. He had a pretty good run though at the Shell Cup derby at the June National, finishing sixth.

"I think it's a combination of the physical difficulty, the length and the demandingness of going up-and-down, which is physically harder on the horses, and mentally to be able to focus for that long, because you're doing it for so much longer, both for you and the horse," explained Riley, who was also the 2003 North American champion with Illan, as she described what she believes it takes to win such a unique event.

"The horse has to be very fit. You can't just pull one out of the stable. They have to be here and they have to listen to the rider, which is maybe a different combination than you would need for today (the Queen Elizabeth II Cup). To me that's exciting. It isn't something we practice every day."

The competition will be stiff, what with an all-star cast of riders and horses at this year's tournament. The lion's share of attention is bound to go to Olympic champion Rodrigo Pessoa of Brazil, who will look to cop the Spruce Meadows derby double as he was the victor in the 2003 Shell Cup.

American Richard Spooner won the 2003 Classic with Robinson, a horse he also has here this year. Previous winners include Switzerland's Markus Fuchs in 2002 and Calgarian John Anderson in 2001.

"I've always wanted to jump a clear round in a derby," chuckled Riley, 35. "Maybe we'll do it again."

So that first visit into the International Ring had to wait until earlier this week.

"It's been a week of fits, actually," he said, beaming.

"I've had Kimber two years now, and he's been so wonderful for me. An amazing horse. A lot of other horses helped me take the initial steps, but he's the one who's piggybacked me up the next few. The people who own all the horses I ride have been so supportive in allowing me to go to this level of competition."

"To be out on that course, competing in this field, in that quality of class, is the fulfillment of a dream."

Finkelman and Kimber advanced to the QE II's Tony in by incurring only a single time fault during the first round.

In the second, unfortunately, things didn't go so well, suffering six faults to finish with seven, good for that ninth-place positioning and a \$2,200 cheque.

Not that the money is what he'll remember years from now.

Darren Finkelman may not have come, but considering from where he came, he wasn't out of line in claiming victory.

"When you get out on a course, especially one as famous as this one, the competitive juices always start flowing," he laughed. "Did I think about finishing the fairy tale story?"

"That would've been an incredible story, wouldn't it? A happy ending. Sorry I can't deliver that story for you."

Don't give it a second thought. The year's plenty good enough. The year's plenty good enough as it is.

He'll want to compete that next week, but was advised against it given the health issues.



Judy Carafalo, of Dover Plains, N.Y., competes with Oliver III in the Queen Elizabeth II Cup on Saturday.

Special week doesn't pan out for Henselwood, Special Ed

LAUREN MACGILLIVRAY
CALGARY HERALD

Ill Henselwood isn't having the week she expected.

The 47-year-old from Oxford Mills, Ont., who's made a steady climb in world rankings, had suddenly set out to defend her North American champion title at Spruce Meadows.

She has the horsepower to do it, but, after solid performances in the previous three tournaments at the Meadows, she and Special Ed are struggling.

"I gave him lots of rest. I upped his grain and gave him lots of vitamins for this week," she explained, "because I thought, based on what he's been doing, I'd be using him Wednesday, Thursday, three rounds on Saturday and the derby on Sunday."

"Today, he came up and the parade went going on, and there were a million things happening and the noise level, and he was like dancing on his toes back there."

"He never quite settled. He's not really a nervous horse, but I see him up this week to be like a rambone that can't wait to go."

"As it turns out, he was a little like a kid who's had too much sugar."

Four classes count toward the North American championship: Wednesday's Evertek Cup, Thursday's Drenth Energy, Saturday's ATCO Power Open Elizabeth II Cup and today's Chrysler Classic.

Heading into the Chrysler Classic, Henselwood has a change of plans for Special Ed. "He doesn't get vitamins tonight and tomorrow. He's going to have a little more exercise in the morning to try and get him into his settles."

British show jumpers Michael Whitaker and Nick Skelton have made the million-dollar club at Spruce Meadows.

Through their success at the summer tournament series, they've joined just nine other athletes who've surpassed the \$1-million mark in career earnings, over the 39-year tournament history of the Meadows.

"It's very good, but I don't know where it's all gone," chuckled Whitaker, a 49-year-old from Nottinghamshire, of the money.

Whitaker passed the mark earlier in the year, after strong performances at the National and Continental.



Veteran Ian Millar, of Perth, Ont., aboard in Style on Saturday, is Spruce Meadows' all-time earnings leader with more than \$2 million.

Station reached the club after winning the BRC Financial Group World Cup and Esso Challenge during the Canada One tournament.

Ian Millar of Perth, Ont., leads the all-time earnings with more than \$2 million.

Riders' Cup battle looms

The winner of the Calgary Herald Riders' Cup will be decided today.

Introduced in 1999, the Riders' Cup plus three teams against each other in match play over nine international events.

Team captains choose the matchups and no horse/rider combination can be used in more than three matches. For each match, riders receive points (three points for the winner, two for second and one for third).

The team with the most points will be awarded a trophy.

Team Gem Twist, captained by



Calgarian Sheila Archer and Shayler Riley ride Opus Sept to victory in the '04 Chrysler Classic.

FROM THE JOHNSON: Finkelman is Rocky Balboa in riding breeches

As he's conducting a rare interview just outside the clock tower, Ian Millar scrolls by and slips Finkelman on the shoulder in congratulations.

It's impossible not to root for the guy. Finkelman is Rocky Balboa in riding breeches. The ultimate underdog.

His dream afternoon dropped straight out of the blue. There was certainly no indication of what was on the horizon. On Thursday, actually, Kimber, Finkelman's 12-year-old chestnut crossbred, set him for a scorable tumble ("He insisted on doing one thing. I asked him for another. Have to admit, he was right").

Finkelman doesn't like to refer to himself as a chronic worrier. "I'd rather," he says, self-deprecatingly, "be called 'innocent'" — so innocent, though, that a year ago here, so keyed up by the prospect of competing in the hallowed ground of the Meadows international ring, he suffered a heart attack.

"I rode Friday and Saturday (at the Canada One)," he recalls. "I guess I was ... stressed out a little bit. On Sunday, I went to the hospital. I didn't want to go because I was scheduled to compete in the International Ring the next week, and that had always been a dream of my mine. But friends of mine insisted."

"Turns out, doctors told me I had suffered a heart attack 48 hours earlier. The good thing was that the first 48 hours are the most important in terms of recovery. I was a little in shock, to tell you the truth. Had a stem put in, a little tube, because one artery was 70 to 80 per cent blocked."

He still wanted to compete that next week, but was advised against it given the health issues.

GOODNEWS@THEHERALD.CANADIAN.COM

MACGILLIVRAY@THEHERALD.CANADIAN.COM