

THE KEY TO THE HUNTER MARKET

Seasoned rider, judge and coach New Yorker **Darren Finkelman** gives an introduction to the exciting world of the US Hunter market

Photo courtesy of Kendall Bierer



Photo courtesy of Shawn McMillan Photography



The three major equestrian disciplines of show jumping, eventing and dressage have just been on the World stage at The Olympics. However, in addition to the Olympic disciplines there are others. The US Equestrian Federation sanctions 24 additional breed/ sporting disciplines. With a total membership of 83,000, the greatest percentage is by far the Hunter/Jumper segment, which includes the Hunter Seat Equitation division, with 45,000 members declaring this their primary affiliation.

This year, the US Equestrian Federation recognises over 2,000 Hunter/Jumper shows and there are also many non-recognised schooling shows around the country. While show jumping means the same thing around the world, America boasts some unique equestrian divisions.

While there are show hunters in a few other countries that share a fox hunting heritage, the Americans have developed nuanced criteria for their subjectively-judged show hunters. They also feature a Hunter Seat Equitation Division that judges the rider and their proper position and correct use of aids to produce a smooth effective round. The development of showing in America dates back to 1853 with the first competition on record being The Upperville Colt and Horse Show, Virginia.

PERFORMANCE

A typical show hunter division would include classes over fences as well as 'Hunter under Saddle' or 'Hack' classes, in which the horse is judged on its performance, manners and quality of movement without being required to jump. Hunters should have a long, flat-kneed trot, sometimes described as 'daisy cutter' action, a phrase suggesting that a good hunter could slice daisies in a field with its close-to-the-ground effortless stride.

The jumping classes in show hunter competition are judged on the jumping form of the horse, its manners, smoothness around the course, as well as the ability to maintain a good Hunter pace. A horse with good jumping form snaps its knees up, uses the hocks properly and jumps with a good bascule, with its body curving over and around the jump. A show hunter should also be able to canter or gallop with control while having a stride long enough to make the requisite number of strides over a given distance between fences. A show hunter is not only judged on the quality of its movement, but also on temperament, manners and soundness. Thus, the show hunter should always appear relaxed and calm, yet be attentive and responsive to the

rider. He should respond to invisible aids and look pleasant to ride.

Within this division, there are many sub-divisions that offer classes for ponies, juniors, green and working (for the more experienced horses), thus offering competitive opportunities for riders of all ages and levels of experience. The courses are generally straight-forward with the majority of classes requiring the horse and rider to jump 3'6" (1.10m) or less in height. However, there are some divisions that reach 4' (1.20m) and some special classes that offer option fences up to 4'3" (1.30m). The fences seen in these competitions are inspired by the hunting field with gates, walls, coops and roll tops all typically featured.

ABILITY

Another division that generates much interest in the United States is the Hunter Seat Equitation Division. The rider is judged on his or her riding ability and form, and though the performance of the horse is not specifically judged, it is nonetheless considered to be a reflection of the rider's performance.

Classes are offered for adults and juniors both on the flat

and over fences. The Junior Division is most competitive. It is a great accomplishment to qualify and considered most prestigious to win one of the year-end finals. These courses can go up to 3'9" (1.15m) and can have either a hunter or showjumper feel. While the horse required for this division does not have to possess all of the attributes of a top show hunter, it is necessary that he be well-schooled and responsive, to allow the riders to best showcase their skills, both on the flat and over fences.

The Equitation Division has been a proven training ground, and many riders who have come through this training have gone on to great renown in the world of showjumping. From stars of yesteryear such as William Steinkraus, George Morris, Bernie Traurig, Mary and Frank Chapot, Conrad Homfeld, Katie Monahan-Prudent, Leslie Burr-Howard and Buddy Brown to current stars McLain Ward, Kent Farrington, Brianne Goutal and Jessica Springsteen, all can be found listed among Equitation Finals winners. This list is by no means complete, and since these classes were first offered in the 1930s they have been an integral part of equestrian training in the United States and have been influential in the development of the sport.

IMPORTANT NOTICE ON EQUINE IDENTIFICATION

All those engaged in the equine sector have a legal requirement to have passports for horses, donkeys and ponies in compliance with European Communities (Equine) Regulations 2011, Statutory Instrument No. 357 of 2011.

Passports must accompany equines whenever they are moved. Equines must have a microchip and be issued with a passport by 31 December of the year of birth or within 6 months of birth whichever is the later date. Contact your local veterinary surgeon who is the only person authorised legally to identify equines and to insert a microchip.

Contact details for organisations approved by the Minister to issue identity documents for equines are available on the Department's website:
www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/horses

If you have any queries in relation to horse passports please contact:

Horse ID Section, National Beef Assurance Division,
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine,
Backweston Campus, Celbridge, Co. Kildare

Email: HorseID@agriculture.gov.ie
tel. 01 505 8881.

email: info@agriculture.gov.ie
www.agriculture.gov.ie



Darren Finkelman will give two demonstrations at the 2012 Discover Ireland Dublin Horse Show describing the type of horse required and the preparation necessary to produce horses for this lucrative market

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darren Finkelman grew up in New York where he competed as a junior in hunters, equitation, dressage and eventing. He then went on to train in Europe with some of the most esteemed trainers in jumping and dressage. Darren possesses a broad based equestrian background culminating in show jumping to Grand Prix level. He regularly conducts training clinics, scouts for horses in Europe and South America and is a licensed USEF judge for Hunters, Hunter Seat Equitation and Jumpers. To learn more about Darren see www.darrenfinkelman.com