

## Local Riders Hit the Trail *At an International Dressage Show*

AVTA members Nicole Seipp, 16, and Christy Pellegrino, 13, competed at the Youth Dressage Festival, held in July in Saugerties NY. The show is an annual event that has hosted riders from ten countries on four continents. Alumni have gone on to represent their countries at the top levels of dressage. So why did the girls practice by tossing balls to each other while mounted and bending down from the saddle to grab carrots from the top of hay bales?

The Youth Dressage Festival is a unique event. Day one is an optional schooling show. Riders ride a dressage test of choice in front of a judge, but they are then required to summarize their scores themselves. They are supervised and provided with adding machines. Likely, this procedure was put in place to teach the competitors to appreciate some of the work provided by organizers. At 6 PM, parents enjoy a wine and cheese reception while the riders take a test. Yes, a written test. Each age group has assigned reading to study prior to the show. This is not to be taken lightly as the written score counts as one third of the overall score.

On day two, each competitor rides a standard dressage test. Additionally, they compete in a dressage seat equitation class. These two rides, combined with the written score are combined to determine the final placing. This format allows a rider with a less than fabulous mover the opportunity to do well.

Riders may show as individuals, or form a team. Nicole and Christy partnered with Carly Goldstein from south Jersey to form the Jersey Girls team. Christy and Carly had previously been on the Eastern States Dressage and Combined Training Association Youth Team together. The girls all had respectable scores, but they seemed to be most amused by a special award they received. Teams had the option of participating in a stall decorating contest. The Jersey Girls proudly displayed themes of famous New Jersey natives, Jersey fresh and the Jersey shore. The judging committee gave them special recognition for the best beach. Isn't ironic to think that hours of polishing boots, cleaning tack, studying dressage books and perfecting 20 rides were upstaged by a bikini tied to a stall front and a dollar store fishing rod?

So why did the girls practice with the balls and the carrots?

Day three offered a collection of optional classes, including Prix Caprilli and Dressage Trail. Prix Caprilli is a standard dressage test with three jumps set up in the arena. Jumps are taken as indicated at the trot and canter. The trail class is ridden and judged similarly to a standard dressage test. Horses receive scores in traditional areas such as accuracy and submission, but they must maintain their composure while doing unusual tasks like trotting over rails, circling with one hand on the reins, and tossing a ball, to the judge. Nicole and Christy did very well the specialty classes and had quite a lot of fun.

The Youth Dressage Festival has been on the road for some top dressage riders, including US Olympian Courtney King. It's also been a fun place for kids to enjoy friendship and their horses. The Festival puts into action the message that the girls have heard from trainer Carol Blackman, of Toy Box Farm. Carol has taught them competing is only one small component of life with horses. Showing can be good, but it's important not to get too carried away. The world of horses can be just plain fun and that's something that's too often forgotten.