

## George H. Morris Excellence in Equitation to be Judged by Entire USA Olympic Show Jumping Team

**The unique equitation challenge will be held March 13 at the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center**

March 12, 2009

Beezie Madden, shown here on her 2008 Olympic mount Authentic, will be one of the judges for the George Morris Excellence in Equitation. Photo: Ken Braddick/FEI The USA 2008 Olympic gold medal-winning show jumping team will be the judging panel for the George H. Morris Excellence in Equitation at the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center on Friday, Mar. 13.

In only its second year as an invitational exhibition for U.S. Equestrian Federation junior riders, the event was created to honor the legendary George Morris who has led Team USA to the medals podium at the 2008 Olympics, the 2006 FEI World Equestrian Games and the Super League.

Riders from across North America are qualifying for the competition over two rounds plus a Final Four rideoff.

The FTI Winter Equestrian Festival event will be held in PBIEC's International Arena starting at 4 p.m. Friday, Mar. 13. Admission to the event is free.

All the Olympic team members accepted George Morris's invitation to judge the performances of the juniors.

The judging panel will be made up of George H. Morris, Chef d'Equipe of the U.S. team, and 2008 Olympic team gold members Beezie Madden, McLain Ward, Laura Kraut, Will Simpson and Anne Kursinski. Madden and Ward were also members of the 2004 Olympic gold medal team.

"The gold medal team riders display the skills and horsemanship that are the finest examples in the world for the juniors to aspire to," Morris said.

"These gold medal riders came up through the levels to acquire the horsemanship and riding skills that are vital to their success. They understand as well as anyone the hard work, abilities and goals required to be the best in the world and set an example for junior riders everywhere.

"I cannot imagine any group more worthy than the members of Team USA to judge the juniors who one day may represent our nation at the highest levels of the sport."

Invitations to participate in the exhibition are extended to winners of any 2009 WEF USEF Hunt Seat Medal, ASPCA Maclay, USEF Talent Search or WIHS Overall, Hunter Phase and Jumper Phase classes held prior to Mar. 13.

During the event, riders are solely responsible for the management, warm up and schooling of their own horses, and make the course walk on their own.

Jessica Springsteen of Rumson, N.J., winner of the 2008 ASPCA Maclay and who has qualified for the Excellence in Equitation said it "shows how much you've learned during these weeks at WEF. It gives you a lot of confidence to know that you can school on your own and do all of the prep work yourself.

"It's just a lot of fun being out there with all of your friends."

Zazou Hoffman of Santa Monica, Calif., also qualified, said: "This class is totally different than other equitation classics because you walk the course and plan and warm up without the assistance of your trainer. The class really gets the junior riders thinking and strategizing for themselves. That independence is what carries these riders into successful careers in the sport."

The event is divided into three rounds, with the number of riders being whittled down to the Final Four.

Awards will be presented to the top 10 riders, along with special awards for family and trainers. An award will also be presented for Best Equitation Horse selected by the judges.

Winning the George H. Morris Excellence in Equitation is different than any other equitation event, according to Zazou Hoffman.

"it is a true test of your riding ability as well as your independence. It would be even more special because the class has been made to honor George Morris' demand for excellent riding especially in the equitation ring," she said.