

United States Reining Team Announced for 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games

WEG veteran Shawn Flarida came out on top of the competition at Oklahoma's Battle in the Saddle.

USEF Press Release

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Shawn Flarida rides Smart Spook at the reining WEG test event in 2009. Photo: Leslie Potter
The 2010 Adequan/USEF Open Reining Championships, which also served as the USEF Selection Trial for the Adequan US Reining Team for the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, featured fierce competition with a national title and a ticket to the World Equestrian Games on the line.

The Oklahoma State Fairgrounds main coliseum was rocking on Saturday night and when the dust settled Shawn Flarida held on to his lead and had the best two round total to take top honors.

Flarida (Springfield, OH) rode Buffalo Ranch's RC Fancy Step to a score of 223.5 in the second round, half a point better than his winning round on Thursday. His combined score 446.5 gave him a two point win over Tom McCutcheon who had the best score of the night with a 225.

Flarida rode confidently and his slides and flying changes were rock solid. Flarida improved on his runner-up finish in the 2009 Adequan/USEF National Open Reining Championships by storming to the individual honors – sweeter still this year because it secured a spot on the Adequan US Reining Team.

"He's consistent," said Flarida about RC Fancy Step being on the team. "Experience is our strength – everyone has been here before."

McCutcheon thrived in his first competition on Gunners Special Nite improving dramatically as he got to know the horse. Purchased by Turnabout Farm with the World Equestrian Games as the goal – the sorrel stallion delivered in dramatic style.

"This was my maiden voyage," said McCutcheon. "It went very successfully, I just had to learn some buttons. The only concern is what he would be like under fire, but he was everything I could hope for."

It was also good enough for Gunners Special Nite to be crowned Reserve National Open Reining Champion on his first try.

"My horse is very special," said McCutcheon. "I was very lucky to have the owners to get a horse like that. I've always loved him, and he makes me look like I know what I'm doing."

The top four riders are deep on experience and are poised to pose a serious threat to the teams invading the US from around the world.

Craig Schmersal (Overbrook, OK) rounded out the top three on Boom Shernic (owned by the Boom Shernic Syndicate). He last competed at the NRHA Derby two weeks previously and kept Boom Schernic in light work between the two competitions.

Schmersal's plan worked, Boom Shernic was fresh and delivered a great result on a score of 444.

"We have some serious horses... we have four horses that are major players," said Schmersal.

Tim McQuay rounded out the top four for the US Team on Hollywoodstinseltown, half a point shy of Schmersal's score. Owned by David J Silva and ridden by the Team Gold and Individual Silver medalist from the 2006 FEI World Equestrian Games, Hollywoodstinseltown couldn't have a more experienced pilot for his World Games.

"It was a lot of pressure coming in here," said McQuay. "I'm a little older than these guys and I may not be able to go to another deal like this."

This is the first FEI World Equestrian Games held outside of Europe, creating a huge opportunity for the sport of reining.

“Being the only homegrown sport for the US, I expect that place to be rocking,” said Chef d’Equipe Jeff Petska. “Our guys are ready but the other countries are coming with their guns loaded. The leap in the level of competition and the depth of riders since the first Games (in 2002) is impressive.”

Flarida compared the pressure of riding on a team – when Reiners ride as individuals on a regular basis as a change in mindset.

“You don’t throw an interception,” said Flarida about team pressure. Based only two and a half hours from the Kentucky Horse Park, Flarida is looking forward to riding in his own backyard.

The top 15 riders (of 28 starters) took the ring as the featured evening performance on the final day of the Battle in the Saddle, they put on an impressive showcase of Reining.

The Don Burt Award was bestowed to Matthew Palmer, honoring the Long-Listed Unrestricted rider with the highest score. Named for the Legend Don Burt, it recognizes the success of up-and coming riders.