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Flintridge Eventing Trials: A Personal Perspective

By Caroline Craven

After the downpour and eventual cancellation of the Twin Rivers eventing contest in Central California the week before, and with rain predicted for the weekend of March 6-7, suffice it to say that everyone was a bit edgy about the 2010 Horse Trials at the Flintridge Riding Club in La Cañada Flintridge.

I was attending the event with a dual agenda—in my capacity as a professional photographer and also out of curiosity, to see an old friend and her horses. For more than 20 years Lou Moore Jacobsen had been a major influence on my own equestrian adventures. Though I knew her from Paso Robles, I had run into her again only recently, coincidentally, at Flintridge. Now she was riding a couple of horses for my friend, Cindy Wilson, at the 2010 Trials.

Thursday came, and the first horses started to arrive. The sun was in full force with clouds spotting the sky. The hills that were ravaged so recently by the Station Fire looked peaceful as spots of tender young green could be seen amid swathes of charred chaparral.

Friday brought the remaining riders and more sunshine, but rain

was predicted for Saturday. The riders and event directors needed to be prepared. Shoes needed to be fitted with studs, courses needed to be walked with weather considerations in mind. Jumps in the once-friendly oval arena were creating monstrous reflections from the puddles already on the ground.

Saturday showcased eventing at its finest, testing the horse and rider in all considerations. At one moment the horse and rider were demonstrating their communication skills in a dressage test under a sunny sky with major construction going on next door at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

If you've been at all involved with eventing in Southern California over the years, you've not doubt come across Cindy, her husband, Don, or some of the Wilson horses. I was fortunate to exercise a few of them over the years. As for Lou, I've sought her advice about horses, mules, greenies, jumpers, eventers and other things horse-related over the years. Lou is always a pleasure to watch and usually has a talented project in the works. This weekend I took note of one horse in particular, We All Love Aleyna, or "Lenny," as he's known around the barn. In his dressage phase Lenny was calm, cool and

collected. Next up was stadium jumping in a downpour.

Eventing is pretty exciting for a photographer. You never quite know what you're going to see. This is the X Games for horses—real-life riding in a variety of disciplines. When Lenny's turn came around, someone said, "I remember betting on that horse!" a reference to his past life as a racer. The fact that he finished his stadium jumping round cleanly, if a bit muddy, was a testament to his retraining.

Lenny found his second calling by way of a rescue facility, Leigh Gray's Thoroughbred Rehab Center Inc. (TBRC), which has helped more than 200 racehorses find a new path.

Gray has over the past 15 years worked closely with Japanese horsewoman Mikki Tsuge to place



CAROLINE CRAVEN/WWW.CAROLINECRAVEN.COM

Lou Moore Jacobsen rides We All Love Aleyna, or "Lenny," in the dressage phase of the Horse Trials.

former racers into loving homes. Lenny is a prime example: A working, rideable horse ready for fun and a little competition.

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Flintridge's Main Eventers Black, Loria, Economu Make Mark at Southern California Horse Trials

By Caroline Craven

Maya Black riding Konyagi was the big winner in the Open Preliminary test at the Flintridge Riding Club's US Eventing Association Horse Trial, March 6-8 in La Canda-Flintridge. Equinox Equestrian Center's main trainer Gina Economu notched an impressive second place on Proof of Purchase, and also took fourth place on Pinot Noir. Kelly Loria, riding Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds, came in third.

Black trains with Wendy Wergeles, who runs her eventing program out of Flintridge. Wergeles also had two students in from Fresno: Cheryl Gentzler on Bar Mount Malone and John Marshall with Cutamo, who came in third and tenth,

respectively, in the Senior Open Novice contest.

Wergeles was co-running the event with Sarah Graham, whose horse Hockney won the Senior Open Training division, with Stewart Katzen riding. "I wish I could have ridden him myself, but I was much too busy!" Graham said, noting that if she had to have someone else in the saddle, she was glad it was Katzen, who she described as a real up-and-comer. "He's in his 20s, teaching at Flintridge under Charney Lewis and is about to get his accreditation at the national level." He also rode Gayleen Sharon's horse Beaufort West to 11th in the Open Novice class.

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Jacobsen puts former racer Lenny through his paces on the cross country field. The horse is owned by Cindy Wilson.



AMY MCCOOL/WWW.MCCOOLPHOTOS.COM

Above: Maya Black rode Konyagi to victory in the most hotly contested class of the trial, the Open Preliminary Division. Below: Stewart Katzen pilots Sarah Graham's Hockney to the win in Open Training.

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The trial format featured the same horse and rider combination competing in dressage, stadium jumping and cross country—which made great use of the Riding Club's approximately 5-6 acre field. "For an urban facility, it's magnificent," Graham noted. "We also use it as a training field, and people who ride hunter jumpers use it too. Because of

the size, we can use it for Beginner Novice through Preliminary events."

Graham said she strives to make the Flintridge event, which she's managed for the past few years, very welcoming for entry-level riders who want to explore eventing as well as for green horses. "We like to think of it as user-friendly," she said.



AMY MCCOOL/WWW.MCCOOLPHOTOS.COM



CAROLINE CRAVEN/WWW.CAROLINECRAVEN.COM

Trainer Wendy Wergeles's students, including Maya Black, pictured above, fared well at the event, which Wergeles helped organize and kept running!



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On Sunday, he would find it in the form of the cross-country event. The rain continued through the night. Sure, folks Back East have snow and rain and sleet, but they also have relatively predictable weather. Southern California riders might find themselves riding through four seasons worth of weather over the course of three events spread over two days.

On Sunday, rain, sleet and mud were added obstacles to an already tough course, but wonderful horsemanship and safety prevailed. Talk about footing, drainage and management. By the time spectators began arriving they found a beautiful cross-country course ready for action.

Under blue skies and a shining sun, adults and children attacked the course with grace and understanding necessary for the care of horse and rider after such weather. Only once did I see a horse slip to the ground, but it was a corner cut short and taken a bit unbalanced. Ultimately, both horse and rider rose unharmed and were able to finish the course as a schooling round.

Then came Lenny, for his first cross-country round. No one was sure what to expect. Then someone mentioned that on the track he had earned roughly \$450,000, and the word 'stakes' came up more than

once. My imagination ran a bit wild as he came out of the starting block. But then there he came, loping around the field, taking almost every obstacle in stride (he did refuse one particularly spooky jump in the corner of the field, next to the parking lot). Overall, it was a picture of a happy horse doing his job—just a different job these days.

The horses finished their cross-country courses. Lou took 8th place on Lenny and 3rd with Cynthia's Gift of Gab in Open Senior Novice.

One young girl went off course. "Next time I won't," she said with resolve. Eventing riders are tough.

The horse trials ended flawlessly, as far as I could tell. There were good rides and bad. Happy horses and sad. But overall it was beautiful display of well-managed horse fun.

Caroline Craven has recently returned to riding at the Flintridge Riding Club after a 15-year hiatus and a battle with multiple sclerosis. An accomplished photographer and marketer, you can find more information about her at www.carolinecraven.com. For information about the eventing trails, visit www.useventing.com. For more about the Thoroughbred Rehab Center, visit http://www.winnersranch.com/horse_rescue.htm.



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Sarah Graham has been an organizer of the Flintridge Riding Club Eventing Trials for the past few years. Her horse Hockney was a winner.