

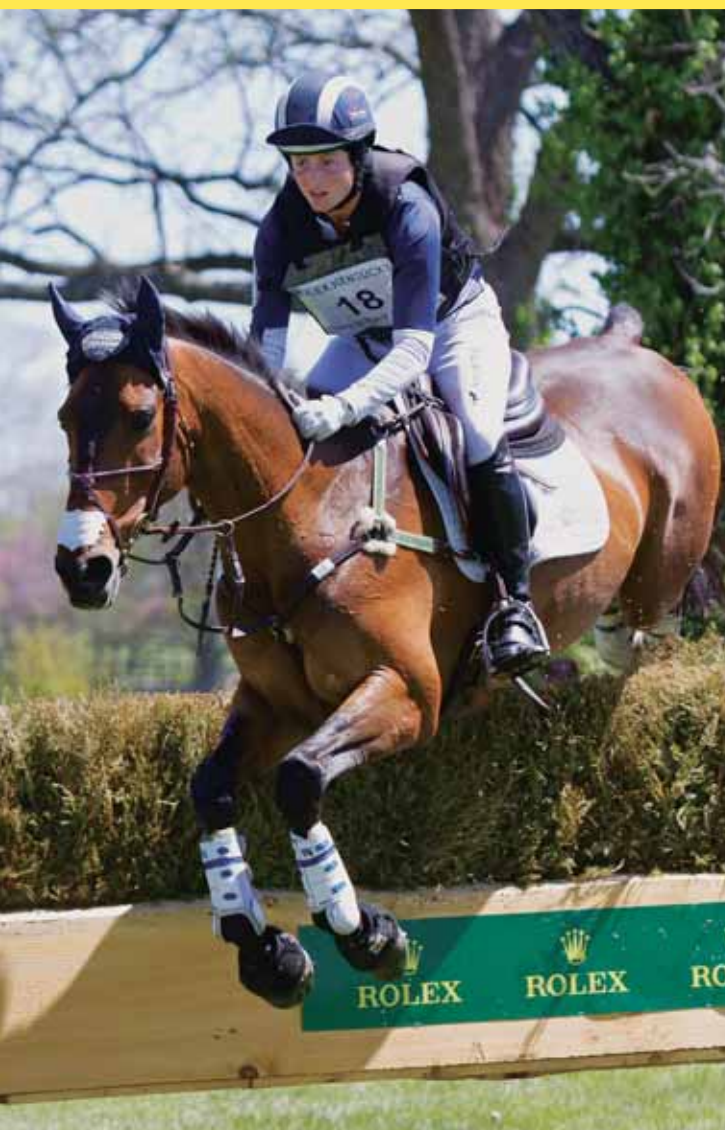


THE STORIES

R O L E X 2 0 1 4

Words and photographs
by Evalyn Bemis

PREVIOUS PAGES:
JAN BYVNY ON
INMIDAIR GAVE A
RIDING LESSON IN
HOW TO ATTACK
THE COURSE.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
RUY FONSECA OF BRAZIL ON TOM BOMBADILL II WAS THE PICTURE OF POISE IN HIS TOP HAT AND TAILS, ENTERING AT A WHILE THE RING CREW STOOD AT THE READY.
KEVIN KEANE, 59, IS A FULL-TIME PRACTICING VETERINARIAN BUT HE MADE HIS FIRST ROLEX ON FERNHILL FLUTTER LOOK EASY, HERE JUMPING ONE OF THE SIGNATURE DUCKS AT THE HEAD OF THE LAKE.
BUCK DAVIDSON AND PARK TRADER AT FENCE 8.
FERNHILL FEARLESS AND KIM SEVERSON, A THREE-TIME ROLEX CHAMPION, HOPED TO SHOW THIS PARTNERSHIP IS READY TO REPRESENT THE US AT THE UPCOMING WORLD EQUESTRIAN GAMES.
THE ANGLED BRUSHES AT FENCE 16A/B REQUIRED SERIOUS CONCENTRATION FROM JENNIE BRANNIGAN AND CAMBALDA

It is the Indy 500, Super Bowl, and Big Kahuna all in one. It is the CCI**** event that every ambitious rider hopes to qualify for some day. It has been associated so long with the title sponsor that it has come to be known simply as Rolex, and to wear the winner's Gold Oyster watch is the ultimate equestrian bling.
This year's **Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event** served as one of the US team selection trials for the 2014 World Equestrian Games in France in August. Riders planned their competition schedules months or even years ahead to culminate at Rolex.

The weather was near perfect, mostly sunny, with enough rain during Friday's midday dressage tests to make a few riders miserable but all the riders happy for the footing on cross-country. Sunday's breezy

but clear skies made for a grand finale, with a mere two rails separating the top ten riders going into stadium.

For every beautifully executed dressage test, thrilling cross-country ride, and nail-biting stadium round, there were hundreds of women and girls (and a few brave men and boys) watching and wondering if Old Buck at home could be as obedient, athletic and talented. If not, they could at least buy Buck some fancy gear at the trade fair to look the part. They could also meet and get autographs from their favorites riders, who probably started on an Old Buck themselves.

Here are some of the stories behind the class of Rolex 2014.

Youngest competitor **Libby Head**, 22, found her little 15.1-hand horse **Sir Rockstar** on his way to the killers, so neglected and malnourished that he was anemic and had a heart murmur. She gave him a second chance at life. Her belief in her horse took them all the way to the Four-Star level, and they finished in the top twenty, an amazing achievement.

Kim Severson, former three-time champion with **Winsome Adante**, was competing at Rolex again after a dry spell, this time with **Fernhill Fearless**. Kim was hoping to show she was back in the game and her 11th place finish showed she is.

Laine Ashker was entered on **Anthony Patch**, an ex-racehorse and with whom she won the American Eventing Championships in 2013. Laine had to withdraw her horse before the start of competition due to a hoof abscess, but stayed to cheer on her long-time coach, Buck Davidson.

Several newcomers had successful completions to earn a coveted Rolex cooler, including veterinarian **Kevin Keane**, the oldest first-timer (59), on **Fernhill Flutter**, 28th; **Julie Norman** on the 14-year-old Oldenburg gelding **Consensus**, 30th; and **Jennifer McFall** from California on her handsome Holsteiner **High Times**, 36th.

Ellen Doughty can lay claim to having both bitter and sweet Rolex experiences. A heel grab on **Sir Oberon** from a previous horse show was bothersome enough



to prevent him from competing. “Obie” spent the weekend hand grazing around the stable area. Ellen still went out on the cross-country course but instead of riding she got married there on Friday.

Doug Payne rode a great dressage test on Thursday on **Crown Talisman**, knowing from the outset he would withdraw the horse before cross-country. Doug had received a Land Rover grant to compete at Saumur *** at the end of May and was using Rolex to give his horse practice in a big, exciting atmosphere. When asked what he thought of the cross-country course designed by **Derek di Grazia**, Doug joked that while it looked very big and testing, since they weren’t actually going to have to ride it, he was sure he and Crown Talisman would have been perfect!

Jennie Brannigan and **Cambalda** were fit and ready to run at last year’s Rolex, so much so that Cambalda was full of high jinxs on the longe line before dressage and got away from his groom. He slipped on pavement and was a bit bruised and skinned up so Jennie withdrew him. This year they were loaded for bear and had a good dressage score going into cross-country. They stormed around the course, with bold, forward riding, only to learn after finishing that they had jumped the wrong side of the flags at fence 12b, the Whiskey Corners, and thus were eliminated for technically not jumping the obstacle.

This was an example of the genius of the course design by Derek di Grazia. If ridden correctly, it was possible to go clear and inside the optimum time, which 19 out of the 55 starters accomplished. 29 pairs made it around with no jump penalties, only time faults. Those that couldn’t hold a line to one of the many skinnies, corners, and angle fences on the technical course picked up 20 penalties for a run-out or refusal, but then used a softer but time-wasting option to go on.

Allison Springer was one of those who had a slight but very costly bobble on the course with her Irish Sport Horse **Arthur**. They started the course at the top of the leader board, having had the test of their lives in dressage to be the only ones

on a score under 40. They were having a brilliant round up to fence 21 but came in too quietly to fence 21c, the brush corner after the Normandy Bank, and Arthur declined to jump. Allison then piloted Arthur through the black-flag options and jumped the remaining 10 fences on course cleanly. Their one mistake dropped them all the way down to 26th, her dream of riding at the 2014 Normandy WEG likely over.

Rolex veteran **Jan Byyny** produced one of the best cross-country rides of the day. Jan made an incredible comeback to the sport after a fall two years ago caused serious injuries. She rode **Inmidair** with superb skill but gave much of the credit to her horse. She said, “We had a scary moment out there. I tell my students if you’re not sure, push them up. I let him get behind my leg; thank god he stayed on his feet and stayed up. He was awesome, he was really on it, he’s so brave. I just love him.” Jan had just one rail in stadium the next day to finish in 7th, a fantastic result for her.

Also demonstrating the value of experience was **Phillip Dutton**, who had three horses entered. One of them was **Trading Aces**, a horse usually ridden by **Boyd Martin**. Boyd was sitting out due to a badly-broken leg which needed more time to heal and he had asked his friend, mentor, and fellow former Aussie Phillip to take “Oscar” for him. With only a few rides to get to know the horse, Phillip had a cracking round to stop the clock exactly on optimum time, thus winning the keys to a new Land Rover Evoque for two years.

Phillip and Oscar also had an excellent show jumping round with just one rail down to finish in 8th place. As Phillip exited the arena, he apologized for the rail to Boyd, who responded cheerfully, “No worries, mate”.

Marilyn Little was one of the riders to compete with two horses, a challenging test of fitness and focus. She excelled with both, taking 5th overall on **RF Smoke on the Water** and 6th with **RF Demeter**, a strong result no doubt noted by team selectors. In a cruel twist of fate, after returning home to Raylyn Farm in Maryland, Marilyn lost

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

ROOKIE LILLIAN HEARD RODE A TERRIFIC CROSS-COUNTRY ROUND ON HER OWN SHARE OPTION AND AFTERWARD SAID SHE HAD SO MUCH FUN SHE WAS HOOKED FOR LIFE.

VERONICA AND LAUREN KIEFFER SHOWED PLENTY OF STAMINA, NEATLY CLEARING ALL THE FENCES ON DEREK DI GRAZIA’S CHALLENGING CROSS-COUNTRY COURSE TO MOVE UP TO 2ND.

BUCK DAVIDSON GAVE “REGGIE” A PAT OF APPRECIATION FOR THEIR CLEAR ROUND WHICH PUT THEM IN 3RD, BREAKING A TIE WITH ANDREW NICHOLSON AND SINEAD HALPIN.

MEGHAN O’DONOGHUE SAILED THROUGH THE LAND ROVER HOLLOW ON PIRATE, STARTING WITH THE KEYHOLE, DOWN 3 STRIDES TO A BRUSH CORNER AND 4 STRIDES UP TO AN OXER OUT.

“Smoke” when he got cast in his stall while rolling in the fresh bedding and suffered severe spinal damage.

Many eyes were on **Sinead Halpin** and Selle Francais gelding **Manoir de Carneville** throughout the show. Sinead and “Tate” were on a mission to be named to the WEG team, having been denied a spot for the 2012 London Olympics. They won The Fork *** three weeks earlier, breaking a tie with Marilyn Little on RF Demeter by being exactly on the optimum time on cross-country.

A relaxed and expressive dressage score started them off on 51.7 at Rolex and they added nothing to their score in the cross-country and stadium phases. They were actually tied with Buck Davidson but because in this instance Buck was closer to the optimum time, Sinead and Tate took 4th. In addition to all the other skills required for success in eventing, being able to sneak peeks at your watch while going at 570 mpm is a big one!

Buck Davidson overcame what had begun to seem like a habit of two rails down in stadium by working very hard on technique over the past year. His dedication was rewarded with a clear round on the final day to finish 3rd on the lovely Irish Sport Horse gelding **Ballynoe Castle RM** (“Reggie”). He made a lot of people happy, including David O’Conner, the US Chef d’Equipe, and Reggie’s owners Carl and Cassie Segal.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
 ONLY AFTER THE FINAL FENCE WAS CLEARED DID WILLIAM FOX-PITT ALLOW HIMSELF TO BELIEVE HE HAD WON ON BAY MY HERO.
 LAUREN KIEFFER HANDLED THE PRESSURE AND KEPT ALL THE RAILS UP WITH VERONICA TO RETAIN 2ND AND THE NATIONAL SPRING EVENTING CHAMPIONSHIP.
 WILLIAM FOX-PITT AND BAY MY HERO WERE THE PICTURE OF REFINEMENT AT THE 2ND HORSE INSPECTION ON SUNDAY.

Lauren Kieffer, 26, became acquainted with **Veronica** when she was asked to train the newly imported Dutch Warmblood mare for resale. When Lauren broke her arm she asked her trainer Karen O'Connor to ride the mare. Karen liked her so much she bought her. Then Karen was injured in a fall that effectively ended her competition career and she passed the reins back to Lauren. In his Rolex preview in the *Chronicle of the Horse*, Jimmy Wofford said, "Lauren is reeking with talent and will give this horse the ride she needs." And indeed she did, upsetting many of the more experienced pairs to take 2nd and the national spring eventing championship.

Saving perhaps the best story for last, this one is about an unlikely champion.

He's only 11 years old but already showing super powers. He can leap tall obstacles in a single bound and carry a 6'6" man at a gallop over four miles in under 11:12 minutes, barely breathing hard at the

finish. He can score a dressage test of 44 on the first day and keep all the rails in their cups on the final day, in front of a packed stadium. He has done only one other CCI****, the top level in Eventing, and Jimmy Wofford, who handicaps the field every year, doesn't think the horse's record warrants including him in his top-ten picks. In fact, even his rider doesn't come with high expectations.

He is **Bay My Hero**, an Irish Sport Horse (Cult Hero x Bing Power) owned by Catherine Witt, and he has given rider **William Fox-Pitt** a third gold watch from Kentucky by winning on his dressage score.

He has been with leading British rider Fox-Pitt for the past five years and is considered a member of the family. At Saturday's press conference following cross-country, William said with affection, "My chubby horse may look more like an event horse by the end of the day Sunday". William said that he normally likes his horses to carry a little extra weight before traveling overseas because they tend to lose some during the shipping. This turned out not to be the case with Bay My Hero, who apparently thought the automated feeding system at Chicago during three days in quarantine was an all-you-can-eat buffet.

William brought two horses, as he has been doing for the past several years. He won the event in 2010 with Cool Mountain and in 2012 with Parklane Hawk. Jimmy Wofford described William as one of the two or three best riders in the sport today, and one of the best ten of all time – high praise from a former Olympian and long-time coach and commentator.

This year William was again one of the favored riders, with **Seacookie TSF**, on whom he finished 2nd last year behind archrival **Andrew Nicholson** (NZ). He brought Bay My Hero for the horse to gain experience. Speaking after cross-country, William said, "I knew that for my two horses it was a decent track and a big test. I was thrilled with both my horses but particularly Bay My Hero, who is much less experienced. He was a little bit surprised by the Head of the Lake but it didn't seem to matter. I know that with him, when he can



WILLIAM FOX-PITT OF ENGLAND HAD A LOT OF REASONS TO CELEBRATE, INCLUDING RECEIVING THE WINNER'S PRIZE MONEY OF \$80000 AND A GOLD ROLEX. NEXT YEAR HE MIGHT STAY SOMEWHERE A BIT FANCIER THAN THE GEORGETOWN HOLIDAY INN.

see where he has to go, he will go there – he is as clever as a cat and super genuine and I was delighted with him and he carried his tubby little body around in the time as well so that was a bonus!”

Bay My Hero almost didn't make it into the Rolex Stadium when it was his turn to show-jump as the last to go in reverse order of standing. The every-seat-filled crowd were giving **Lauren Kieffer's** clear round on **Veronica** an enthusiastic response as Bay My Hero was coming down the ramp. He thought it might be a better idea to turn around and head back to the barn. William prevailed upon him to enter and you could hear a pin drop as they tackled the testing course by Richard Jeffrey, who utilized many of the jumps from the 2010 World Equestrian Games.

The pair came at just the right pace and distance to meet each fence with apparent ease but not until they had cleared the final fence did William allow himself a smile and an arm thrust into the air to acknowledge the cheers. They made a quick exit to gather the winner's cooler and ribbons, and then returned for the awards presentations for the top twenty.

Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear presented the crystal horse-head trophy to William and said jokingly, "I hope you can find room on your mantle for this trophy and room on your arm for another Rolex." William responded, "I will make room."

Bay My Hero's favorite moment was when he thought he was being presented a bouquet of flowers to eat. He also seemed to enjoy his two victory laps and looked as though he could do several more. It was all in a day's work for a super hero.

A photo album from Rolex can be viewed at www.evalynbemisphotography.com



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