

# ROLEX KENTUCKY 3-DAY

## THE BEST WEEKEND EVER

Story and Photos by Evalyn Bemis



DORNIN ANNE NORTH AND LION  
DISPLAY TROT UP TO THE JUDGES IN THE  
HORSE INSPECTION DURING THE 2008  
ROLEX 3-DAY EVENT.



The Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event has long been the pinnacle competition of Eventing in the U.S. It has mythic status among riders, young and old alike.

West Coast rider Gina Miles tells a story of watching Rolex for the first time. She had such a strong conviction she wanted to ride there she talked the friends attending the competition with her into buying a young Irish horse. That horse was McKinlaigh and Gina not only rode him many times at Rolex, they capped their career together with a silver medal for the US at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Kevin Keane, 60, is possibly the oldest amateur ever to successfully complete the Rolex CCI4\*. Last year he debuted at the Four Star level on Fernhill Flutter after many years training with Phillip Dutton, while maintaining a veterinary practice serving some of the top names in the sport.

Kevin relayed to Eventing Nation how he found out he would be competing at Rolex. "One of the things about



MIKE HUBER AND QUARTERMASTER TACKLE FENCE NUMBER 4, THE BROKEN BRIDGE, DURING THE 1990 ROLEX 3-DAY.

Phillip is that he has a very planned and methodical program for you. I think what happened, even months ago, was that he started introducing new dressage movements in our lessons, and I think he knew that he was pointing us for Rolex even then. I actually called his secretary the day Rolex entries closed and asked

if Phillip had mentioned anything about me competing, and she responded by letting me know that she had already sent off our entry!"

I went to my first event in New Mexico in 1985 as a fence judge, not as a rider. I got so excited watching the colorfully clad riders flying over the cross-country

obstacles on keen-eyed horses I vowed to take up the sport. A year later Jazz, my little homebred paint horse, and I were competing at novice level.

In 1987 I traveled to Indianapolis to watch Mike Huber of Texas ride for the U.S. team at the Pan American Games. He and Quartermaster won the individual and team gold medals. Mike often visited New Mexico to give clinics so it was thrilling to see someone I took lessons with do so well in an international competition. Meanwhile, I kept hearing about something called Rolex as another place to see top sport.

The 1988 CCI3\* edition of Rolex Kentucky served as the selection trial for that summer's Seoul Olympics. Additionally, Rolex offered a CCI2\* and Tom Angle of Goose Downs Farm entered his great gelding, Uncle Felton. Several of Tom's friends went to support him, including me, and I remember walking the cross-country course with everybody and goofing around at the Giant's Picnic Table, marveling at its size. As big as it was, I could imagine one day jumping over something like it with my horse.

Less inviting was the intimidating fence 4 on course called The Broken Bridge. There was hardly enough time out of the start box to get up the steam to tackle it. You had to gallop across the bridge and take off at a very precise point to clear the palisade on the backside and not fall into the gap.

One rider, Kerry Milliken, did end up in the ditch. At that point in the competition she was the leading rider on her second entry, Pirate, and desperately wanted to keep going in order to be selected for the Olympic team. However, once she had pulled off her boot she couldn't get it back on and it was no good trying to convince the fence judge that she was okay to continue. In those days, a fall did not automatically eliminate you but a broken leg pretty much did. I came



DURING THE 2008 ROLEX 3-DAY, KAREN O'CONNOR AND SUPER PONY TEDDY DAZZLED THE CROWD WITH AN IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE. HERE THE PAIR APPEARS TO BE WALKING ON WATER AT THE HEAD OF THE LAKE OBSTACLE.



KIM SEVERSON AND WINSOME ADANTE WIN THE FIRST OF THREE ROLEX CHAMPIONSHIP WATCHES AT THE 2002 EVENT. THE PAIR WOULD GO ON TO WIN TWO MORE ROLEX 3-DAY CHAMPIONSHIPS IN 2004 AND 2005. SEVERSON IS THE ONLY RIDER TO WIN THE EVENT THREE TIMES.



THIS MULTIPLE EXPOSURE IMAGE CAPTURES LYNN SYMANSKY AND NO IT TISSANT NEGOTIATING THE WATER, A HILL AND A JUMP IN A SEAMLESS TRANSITION.

away with the impression it must take an amazing amount of passion and guts to ride for the team.

The rules of the sport have changed quite a bit over the years, mostly for the good, with safety of horse and rider paramount. One rule difference in 1988 was that the stables were not off-limits to spectators and it was possible to hangout with Tom Angle to observe the care of the horses. A certain amount of watching big-name riders like Bruce Davidson, Karen O'Connor, and Karen Stives also took place.

Rolex became the first CCI4\* in the U.S. in 1998 and its' prestige went up another notch. It simultaneously ran a 3\* for two more years until that became a logistical problem. Another big change occurred when the so-called long format of the three-day evolved with the elimination of roads and tracks, including the steeplechase. Spectators no longer had the thrill of horses thundering over steeplechase hurdles but the horses tended to be sound at the finish of cross-country.



KIM SEVERSON SIGNS A CAP FOR A LUCKY FAN. THE EVENT GIVES THE FANS THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET THEIR FAVORITE RIDERS UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL.

2002 was the year that Kim Severson won the Rolex CCI4\* for the first of three times, aboard Plain Dealing Farms' Winsome Adante. Kim and "Dan" enjoyed much international success after that, riding for the U.S. at two World Equestrian Games and at the 2004 Olympics.

Dan was retired from competition in 2007 and by 2008 Kim returned to "test drive" a new ride, her own Tipperary Liadhan. Rolex is where you go to find out just how talented a horse you have, because only the best of the best can run a Four-Star.

Kim, always popular with young fans, graciously signed hats after her dressage test on "Paddy".

In 2008 Phillip Dutton enjoyed taking home the winner's Rolex watch, after being a bridesmaid for many years. He piloted Connaught to the win but another horse, or rather, a pony, stole their thunder.

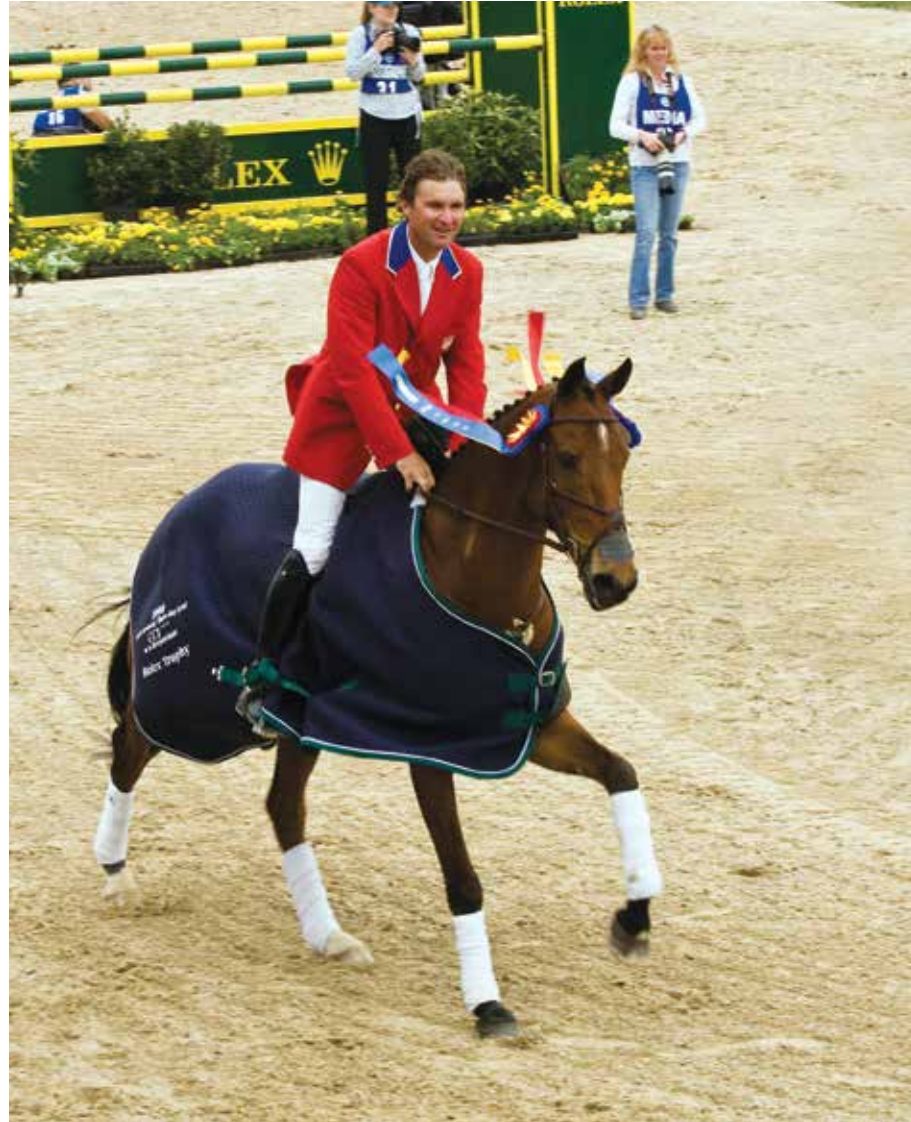
Theodore O'Connor, better known as Teddy, was the first pony to ever compete in the CCI4\*. Karen O'Connor took Teddy around in 2007 to finish 3rd, with just 4.4 time faults cross-country. He then qualified for the Pan American



MISSY RANSEHOUSE AND CRITICAL DECISION DURING THE DRESSAGE TEST OF THE 2008 3-DAY EVENT.

WILLIAM FOX PITT AND BAY MY HERO CELEBRATE A CHAMPIONSHIP AT THE 2014 ROLEX 3-DAY. THE WIN TIED FOX PITT WITH KIM SEVERSON FOR MOST WINS WITH THREE, HOWEVER FOX PITT DID IT ON THREE DIFFERENT HORSES WHILE SEVERSON WON ALL THREE WITH WINSOME ADANTE.





PHILLIP DUTTON AND CONNAUGHT TAKE A VICTORY LAP.

Games as part of the US Eventing Team, where he won the team gold and beat out several more experienced horses to also win the individual gold. By 2008 he had a huge fan club and when he returned to Rolex with Karen for another thrilling performance, they were cheered at every fence on cross-country.

2008 also happened to be the last year that a U.S. rider has taken the victory lap. The word has gotten out on the great competition that is held annually at the Kentucky Horse Park, especially with all the improvements that were made for the 2010 World Equestrian Games. The prize money isn't shabby either. This year the

winner will take home \$100,000, plus that coveted watch.

So if you want to be inspired by seeing the greatest in the sport, and you are not opposed to doing a little shopping at one of the biggest equestrian trade fairs in the world, or you'd just like to walk around on some of that famous Kentucky bluegrass in late April and soak up the atmosphere, buy your tickets online at [www.rk3de.org](http://www.rk3de.org) and get yourself to Lexington for one of the best weekends ever.



VETERAN EVENTER LAINE ASHKER, CHEERS ON HER COACH, BUCK DAVIDSON IN THE SHOWJUMPING PHASE OF THE 2014 ROLEX 3-DAY EVENT.

To see more of Evalyn Bemis' photographs of past Rolex events, visit her website, [evalynbemisphotography.com](http://evalynbemisphotography.com), or check out her Instagram @evalynb1

KEVIN KEANE AND FERNHILL FLUTTER CLEAR THE DUCK FENCE, ONE OF MANY POPULAR FENCES THAT MAKE UP THE CROSS-COUNTRY COURSE AT THE KENTUCKY HORSE PARK.

