

Para-equestrian Poole brings home the hardware

By Jeff Doner



Para-equestrian rider Lynne Poole of Schomberg just keeps adding to her accomplishments, most recently garnering high scores at competitions in California and Florida.

At the Adequan Global Dressage Festival in Wellington, Florida, Poole finished in first place in the grade four team test, riding her 11-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding Vasco E and also and also placed fifth riding her 21-year-old Welsh gelding, Frisbee. In the individual championship test, Poole and Vasco E placed third and then fifth with Frisbee. In grade four freestyle, Poole placed third and fourth.

With these most recent wins, it has been a busy time for Poole and her steady horses.

"I went to Del Mar, California, which is a major international event, and I won all three classes – the team and individual. I was leading rider of the show and I think that was probably the highlight to that year," said Poole. "I also just got back from Florida and won the team test and had was on the Canadian team again and this time we beat the Americans in America."

Poole, 62, is classified as a grade four para-equestrian, which is defined as someone who has some sort of impairment in one or two limbs or some degree of visual impairment.

Prior to a horse-related accident in 1999 that led to complications with her back and a broken femur, Poole was an able-bodied competitor in the sport.

With the seriousness of her injuries, Poole said the para-rider distinction was what kept her from quitting the sport altogether.

"Now I compete able-bodied as well, but the assistance from being classified tends to even the playing field out. So instead of me saying, 'because of my injury and the rod in my leg I'm not competitive able-bodied anymore' now I still can be, I can still ride and compete and don't have to quote 'hang up my spurs.'," she said. "I knew that unless I did that, I wouldn't get back to riding."

Having been riding since she was four, Poole said she was grateful to not have to give it up.

"I've been doing this all my life. It was nice to not have to give that up because of my accident."

Poole explained the benefits and presence of therapeutic riding programs that can be monumentally beneficial to those with mobility problems or physical injuries.

"In a therapeutic sense, they found that riding a horse was the most natural movement to walking, so often times, children especially with MS or MD or with any sort of spinal problems or issues it would help them with their limbs to get them on the back of a horse."

Poole said the sport has been growing in Canada and the team has been gathering some favourable results.

"We do have quite a few athletes in Canada," she said, noting, however, that funding has recently taken a hit. "We medaled in Hong Kong recently, we did not medal in London, but we've been doing a good job. Competition will make us better and we need funding."

She is also worried about young athletes from all sports in Canada where funding has been hard to come by.

"They're getting forced to make a decision between a career in business or their sports and that's damaging for our sports program," she said.

But even with the drop in funding, Poole said her sport has taken great strides in recent years and para-equestrian riding offers many opportunities.

?I think allowing people with disabilities to actively engage in competitive sport is a wonderful liberation. To have a sport, that's purely a life time sport, that you can do forever ? how wonderful.?