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Pollard Takes Early Lead At Galway Downs International Three-Day Event

Temecula, Calif., Nov. 2, 2012 – Michael Pollard, of Dalton, Ga., rode Schoensgreen Hanni to a narrow lead in the dressage phase of the CCI3* at the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event. Scoring 46.4 penalties, Pollard just eclipsed Phillip Dutton on Atlas (47.0). Hawley Bennett-Awad stands a close third on Five O’Clock Somewhere (48.2) and McKenna Shea is fourth on Landioso (48.4).

“I was happy. It was probably the best dressage test we’ve done at a CCI. [We] just had a little bobble in the first [flying] change. I’ve been working on that change, and I probably over-thought it,” said Pollard of his ride on the gray German-bred mare owned by his wife, Nathalie.

“The judging was a bit tough today, because I thought I’d have a better score,” continued Pollard. “But I can’t complain if I’m in the lead!”

Pollard only has a 0.6-point lead from fellow East Coaster Dutton, on Thomas Tierney’s Atlas. “I was pleased,” said Dutton, of West Grove, Pa., about the bay Irish-bred gelding. “He’s a cool horse to have. He gets better all the time. Each week I can feel improvement in him.”

Dutton’s only been riding Atlas since February, and he believes he’s going to be a strong horse for the future. “We seem to get along

well on the flat. He's got a pretty good mind. He likes to work and likes to do things well. I enjoy working with him."

Although Pollard and Dutton were both pleased with their horses today, they know there is a lot of competition left to go, starting with Ian Stark's cross-country test tomorrow.

"There's plenty to do – but there isn't one fence you'd think is bogey," said Pollard.

"It's a nice big course, not one section that's too worrying, but you have to keep your horse's attention and rideability to the end," said Dutton. "I'm looking forward to it."

Scores are equally close in the CCI2*, with Barbara Crabo and Over Easy taking the lead on 47.5, over Jennifer McFall and High Times (48.0). Lauren Billys of Puerto Rico is looming in third (49.2) with her Pan Am Games mount Ballingowan Ginger.

Crabo, of Scottsdale, Ariz., was thrilled with her homebred mare's performance. "She was wonderful. She's starting to understand collection without getting tense," she said.

Crabo and Over Easy finished first the classic-format CCI* last year at Galway Downs International Three-Day Event, only to discover they were ineligible because the mare was only 5 years old. (FEI rules require all horses to be 6 years old, but neither Crabo nor event officials caught the discrepancy until after the event, so she was disqualified.) This year, she's ready to take home a blue ribbon for keeps.

"I always want to win, but I don't have any sort of vendetta," she said. "She kicked it last year, but we got it taken away from us through my mistake. It was good for her to do the classic format, and I think she can eat up the course like she did last year."

McFall, of Wilton, Calif., believes her good dressage score is a sign of her horse's improving maturity. "He's been really growing up in the dressage. He used to be kind of explosive," she said with a laugh. "He's relaxing, so now I can push him a little more. He was pretty showy but still stayed relaxed."

In the CCI* Erin Kellerhouse and Roxabelle (40.6) lead over Ping Pong and Julie Flettner (42.5). In the Training Three-Day Event Lindsey Weaver and Sintra (30.5) hold a narrow lead over Madison Kauffman and Sky Captain (31.8).

Kellerhouse has been riding Cheryl Reynolds' Thoroughbred/draft-cross mare for five years, and she's found the mare to be a consistent performer.

"She's a really solid, good girl," Kellerhouse said. "I was a little worried in warm-up; she felt lazy. But she got in there and stepped up and was great."

Cross-country day kicks off on Saturday at 8:00 a.m. with the speed-and-endurance phases of the Training Three-Day Event, and concludes with the CCI3*, with the last horse finishing around 4:30.

In addition to the equine action, there will be four oases set up on course for fans to enjoy food, drinks and live music by local performers. In the evening, performances by Gino Walker and then Rod Lincoln will bring the day's festivities to a close, from 6:00 to 9:15.

Equine Insurance of California, Land Rover, Professional's Choice and the Professional Riders Organization are the presenting sponsors of the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event. A portion of all tickets sales will benefit Operation Homefront, PRO's charitable partner.

The generous additional sponsors of the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event include: Advanced Protection

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General admission for the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event is only \$10 per day in advance, \$12 at the gate, on Thursday, Friday and Sunday, with children under 12 free when accompanied by a paying adult. General admission for Saturday's cross-country is \$12 in advance and \$15 at the door, but \$8 in advance using promo code DME on the ticket-purchase page. Children are free when accompanied by a paying adult.

Musical tickets range in price from \$21. Fans can also buy a VIP musical ticket, which includes seating for all the musical shows.

Patron's passes – which include seating in the ringside tent, lunch and a full selection of beverages – are also available for \$55 per day or \$150 for the weekend in advance. For advance reservations, go to www.galwaydowns.com.

For more information on the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event or the Wine and Music Festival, visit www.galwaydowns.com or call 951-303-0405. To learn more about eventing, visit the U.S. Eventing Association's website (www.useventing.com).