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Alliston Triumphs Again At Galway Downs International Three-Day Event

Temecula, Calif., Nov. 4, 2012 – Start calling James Alliston “Mr. Galway Downs.”

The Galway Downs International Three-Day Event has offered a CCI3* for the last three years. Alliston finished third in 2010, finished first and seventh in 2011, and this year he finished first, second and sixth.

Alliston, of Castro Valley, Calif., rode Tivoli to first place (53.4) Jumbo’s Jake, the horse he won with in 2011 and finished third with in 2010, to second place (56.6). And he also rode Parker to sixth place, one position higher than he finished in 2010 or in 2011.

Michael Pollard, of Dalton, Ga., rode Schoensgreen Hanni to third place (57.2).

“I like this place. I seem to do well here, and I’ve been on a bit of a roll,” said Alliston, 27, with understatement. Alliston collected \$12,250 of the \$21,000 prize money in the CCI3*.

“I’m actually happier for Jake than the other two horses,” said Alliston. “I wasn’t sure what to expect, because his confidence has been a little bit shaky for the last few months, so I wasn’t sure whether to do the three-star or not. But he likes this venue for sure — he always goes well here.”

Tivoli's victory also represents careful work on Alliston's part. He purchased the Dutch Warmblood gelding three years ago, after he'd completed a CCI2* in Europe. But when Alliston took him to a preliminary event for the first time, "I thought it would be a walk in the park, but he was *frighteningly* strong. I had to either slow him down or learn how to ride him. I didn't show him again for a year and a half."

Both Tivoli and Jumbo's Jake lowered one rail on the show jumping course, but their competitors had given them breathing room with similar minor errors. Pollard and Schoensgreen Hanni also lowered one rail.

But for Pollard, it was a more than satisfactory round, to end a heart-breaking year for him, one that included a devastating trailer accident. In June, a truck struck his trailer, killing three of the horses in the trailer. The only horse to survive the crash was Schoensgreen Hanni.

"She's got a lot of heart. She's a pretty special mare," said Pollard with emotion.

"This is huge," continued Pollard. "Coming into this event, she was tied for [the U.S. Eventing Association's] mare of the year award, and I think this should put her on top. OK, it's stupid point chasing, but it means a lot to me – this year. It's a good way to end what's been a really tough year for me."

Winning the CCI2* at the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event was a perfect way for Lauren Byllis to end the year too. Although she lives in Visalia, Calif., Byllis represents Puerto Rico, because her grandmother was born there.

Even though Byllis lowered one rail on Ballingowan Ginger, her score of 54.8 was enough to better Zachary Brandt on Cavallino

Cocktail (57.5) and Bea di Grazia on Lad's Night Out (60.5). Byllis won \$2,000 for placing first.

"This was really important for me, because it's Puerto Rico's first FEI eventing win that I know of," said Byllis, 24, who represented Puerto Rico at the 2011 Pan Am Games but fell on the cross-country course and was eliminated. "Being so close last year and being able to come here and win was so sweet," she said.

Byllis is a senior at Fresno State College, majoring in chemistry and wine making, but she plans to be a professional rider. She trains with di Grazia and her husband, Derek.

Her next goals include riding in the 2015 Pan Am Games and, she hopes, the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. "This means a lot, because I get to represent Puerto Rico and because I hope it shows that I'm a rider worth supporting to go there. I hope it means that we're already moving in that direction," she said.

Julie Flettner, of Petaluma, Calif., emphatically climaxed a memorable year by winning the CCI1* on her mare Ping Pong (42.5), over Maya Black, of Clinton, Wash., on Doesn't Play Fair (43.1) and Frankie Thieriot, of Occidental, Calif., on Uphoria (44.4).

In November 2011, Flettner and Ping Pong won the Training Level Three-Day Event at Galway Downs and then moved up to preliminary level. In May, they won the Preliminary Rider Challenge at the Woodside Horse Trials, and in October they won the CIC1* at the Woodside International Horse Trials.

"I still don't believe this year," Flettner, 37, an optometrist at a veterans' hospital in Santa Rosa, Calif. "I still think preliminary looks big, even after this weekend. The training three-day was great, because it was bridge from training to preliminary, especially since it had been 20 years since I'd done preliminary."

Flettner purchased Ping Pong, a 12-year-old Hanoverian mare, three years ago, and she credits trainer Matt Brown with guiding the horse's development. "She's a very sensitive horse, so it's a lot more asking her than telling her," said Flettner.

Flettner said that Ian Stark's cross-country course "was great and galloping and asked all the questions. I was actually surprised that she looked at some of those jumps – she doesn't usually. The stuff I worried about was fine, and the stuff I didn't worry about I had to ride."

Black, 24, began riding Doesn't Play Fair in the spring of 2011 for owner/breeder Dawn Dofelmier. "I put him in training with the idea he'd be her novice horse, and I'm going to keep riding him and see where he goes," said Black of the Holsteiner gelding, now 7.

She agreed with Flettner's evaluation of Stark's cross-country course. "I thought it was a blast and the next step for him. It was a very educational round, and he's better for it," she said.

"His name comes from being a complete monster with the other horses at home," she said. "He has a lot of nicknames, because he's so bad. But he's a blast to ride."

Thieriot, 26, is part of the public-relations team at Galway Downs – doing the numerous video interviews with riders throughout the competition. She was especially pleased to win the best-conditioned award for the CCI1*, and she credited intermediate rider Maddy Hogan for helping to get Uphoria fit.

Tylia Schoenewald, of Camarillo, Calif., won the best-conditioned award with Arame in the Training Level Three-Day Event, while, like Thieriot, finishing third (32.9). Madison Kaufman, of Fort McDowell, Ariz., added nothing to the dressage score she earned on Sky Captain to win the lion's share of the prizes, including a Voltaire jumping saddle.

Kaufman's score (31.8) on the Oldenburg gelding Sky Captain just nipped Canadian Olympian Hawley Bennett-Awad's score on the Arabian mare Sienna (32.2).

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For more information on the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event, including complete results, visit www.galwaydowns.com. To learn more about eventing, visit the U.S. Eventing Association's website (www.useventing.com).