

World-class Color

Two talented Paint reiners prepare to compete against the world's best at the World Equestrian Games.

By JEANNIE BLANCQ PUTNEY

The FEI World Equestrian Games (WEG) plays host to the best horses, riders and spectators from around the globe every four years, and this year, two Paints are among the elite athletes vying for international accolades. Starting September 25 and running through October 10 at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games™ marks the first time the U.S. has hosted the event. Colonels Nite Special and Bonnies Smart Chic will compete in the reining competition, which starts on September 25 and runs through September 30.



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Colonels Nite Special: Team USA

Each country determines its own criteria and qualification process for selecting a WEG team. The U.S. team was finalized on July 10 at the 2010 Battle in the Saddle, held in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. When the dust settled, the 2004 sorrel solid stallion Colonels Nite Special—who shows under the name Gunners Special Nite—finished in the top four, earning himself a spot on the team. WEG veteran and NRHA Million Dollar Rider Tom McCutcheon of Aubrey, Texas, was in the saddle for the competition.

“‘Bailey’ is one of the most complete horses that I’ve ever ridden—he can do every maneuver big,” said McCutcheon. “He just doesn’t have a hole. It’s so hard to find that in a reining horse.”

Sired by Colonels Smokingun and out of Mifs Doll AQHA, Bailey has lifetime earnings of more than \$213,000. The stallion is a new mount for McCutcheon, and the qualifier was their first competition together. Owner Sarah Willemann of Gloucester, Massachusetts, bought Bailey in late April for McCutcheon to aim at the WEG.

Willemann also owns the 2002 sorrel solid mare Darlins Not Painted that McCutcheon rode at the Kentucky Cup—the reining test event for the WEG—in July 2009. The duo impressively won the test event,

besting talented horse-and-rider combinations from three countries. ‘Darlin’ was McCutcheon’s second mount at Battle in the Saddle, but they finished eighth overall after an unfortunate stumble in the first go-round.

Darlin’s unlucky go put even more pressure for Bailey in the second round.

“I knew what I had to do,” said McCutcheon. “I knew he had to be good. We ran quite a bit harder than in the first go-round and won the second round.”

The pair’s final score of 220.5 was good enough to guarantee them a spot on the team.

“My goal was to get both horses in the top five, which out of that group of horses would be pretty hard to do,” said McCutcheon. “I was just thrilled to be where I was in the end.”

McCutcheon knew he had a good chance on both of these talented Paint Horses, but there was definitely a newness to the relationship with Bailey, which left things open for a little uncertainty.

“Bailey is pretty confident in himself, just like a lot of the great ones are,” he said.

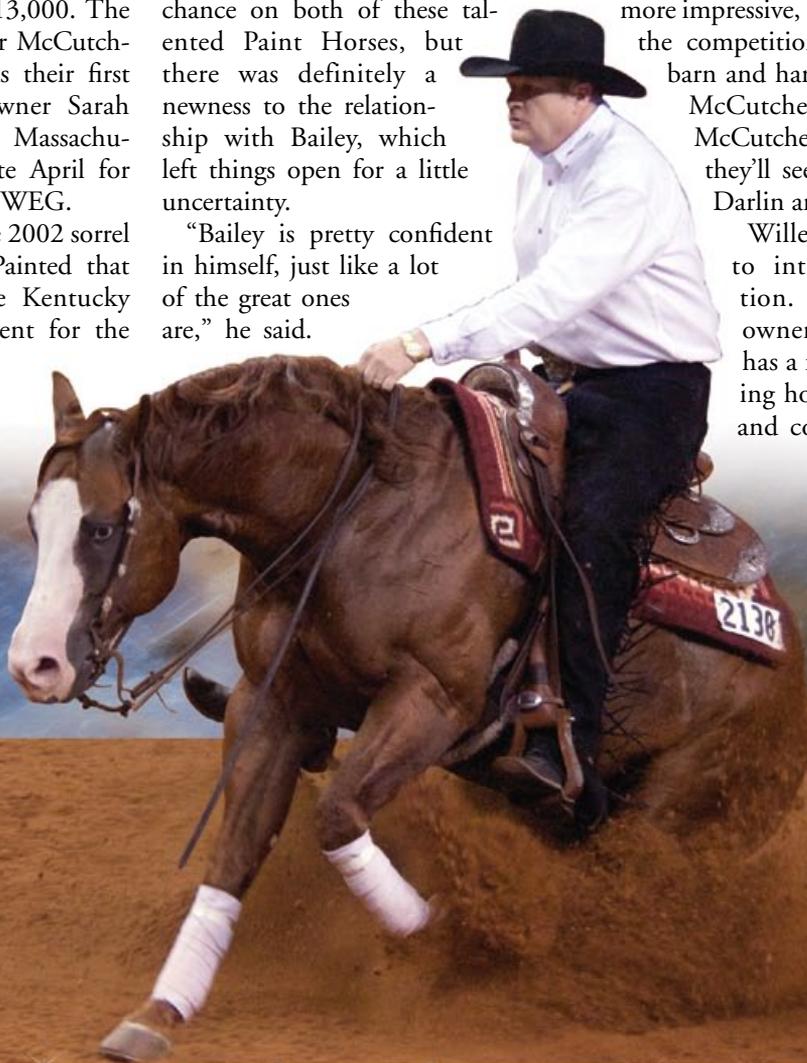


“Bailey” and Tom McCutcheon

“He’s all business when you walk in the show pen; he’s all about going in and getting it done. That’s his personality all the time.”

Making their WEG qualification even more impressive, Bailey went straight to the competition from the breeding barn and handled it perfectly, says McCutcheon. Willemann and McCutcheon note that next year they’ll see the first foal out of Darlin and sired by Bailey.

Willemann is no stranger to international competition. A longtime jumper owner and exhibitor, she has a fondness for the reining horses that she’s owned and competed for the past



COURTESY TOM MCCUTCHEON

five years. She owned the alternate horse that McCutcheon took to the 2006 WEG and is excited to see one of her horses return to the WEG stage this year.

“Obviously it’s great for a horse you’re standing at stud to compete at the international level,” she said.

The 2002 WEG in Spain was the last time McCutcheon competed at a World Games, and it was the first where reining was included as a recognized FEI discipline. There, McCutcheon earned a team gold and individual silver medal. In Kentucky, the U.S. team will be defending their team gold, as well as individual silver and bronze medals. McCutcheon says he is eight years older and wiser since his last WEG and is approaching the event differently this time around.

“Spain was so new to all of us,” he said. “We were all very excited going to Spain, but none of us knew what to expect. This team—we’ve all been down that road before. We all know how hard it is to get on this team. For me personally, there will be more appreciation for what it is. I’ll take my time a little bit more and enjoy the whole process.”

“I know what an honor it is now and how hard it is, and for me it’s special because last year I seriously considered walking away from the horse training business. I had a chronic bad hip and got it replaced in December, and it’s been

amazing this year how good I feel and how rejuvenated I am. I am fortunate to be on the team and happy to go to the barn every day. I have a whole new perspective.”

Bonnies Smart Chic: **Team Spain**

Spain’s reining team at the 2010 World Equestrian Games will also feature a talented Paint Horse, this one ridden by owner Guillermo Recio of Petaluma, California. The 2000 sorrel overo stallion *Bonnies Smart Chic* has lifetime earnings of more than \$24,000 and will take Recio to his first WEG. Recio has owned “Charro” since he was a 4-year-old.

Recio will be one of two riders for Spain, allowing them to compete as individuals only. (A team requires three riders.) Recio is one of the two founders of the Spanish Reining Horse Association and decided in 2008 to point Charro for the 2010 WEG.

“I started talking to the Spanish Federation, in 2007–2008 with the goal of trying to qualify for the World Equestrian Games,” Recio said.

“Reining is a sport that was totally unknown in Spain back then.”



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“Charro” and Guillermo Recio

Because the FEI does not yet consider reining a developed sport in Spain, the country did not have an official qualifying event. Instead, Recio had to compete at a CRI (internationally recognized reining event) and receive a minimum of two 68s to apply for a “wild card.”

In a remarkable twist, Charro has only recently returned to reining after sustaining an injury at the end of 2008, just as Recio was gearing up to make his bid for the 2010 Games. A torn tendon in the stallion’s hind leg required eight months of stall rest, but thanks to veterinarian Dr. Grant Miller—who Recio says was key in the stallion’s



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rehabilitation—Charro and Recio resumed riding in December 2009 and qualified for the WEG in February 2010.

“We scored way above the 68 that we needed to,” said Recio. “We really didn’t have any training on him. Everything had really been recovery, with nothing hard because we were still caring for the tendon. That makes this horse even more remarkable.”

In addition to his talents as an international-level reining horse, Charro is also an accomplished cow horse. Sired by Smart Chic Olena AQHA and out of Bonnie Smoke, Charro was a 2003 Open finalist at the National Snaffle Bit Futurity and was a finalist at the 2005 National Reined Cow Horse Association (NRCHA) Stakes and NRCHA Derby.

“When we took him out of cow horse training, I wanted him to get a little more of the reining ‘finesse,’” said Recio. “Cow horse is all about control and power, and reining is all about finesse and smoothness. We put him in training with a reining trainer and gave him six months. At the beginning, the trainer said, ‘Oh, he’s a cow horse; he’ll never be able to make it as a reiner.’ After a week, the trainer called me and said, ‘He’s phenomenal!’ Two months later, we took Charro to Reining by the Bay. In his first appearance at a reining show, he marked a 221—pretty high.

“He’s probably one of the few horses who has been able to do really well at reining and cow horse. Down the fence in cow horse, he’s marked 76s; in reining, he’s marked 75s and 76s.”

Recio says that he started to ride horses because of his wife, Haley. Having ridden less than 10 years, Recio knows his accomplishments are not the norm.

“The fact that Charro’s been able to not only take care of a relatively inexperienced rider to this level, but compete and win against people who have been riding all of their lives, says a lot of things about him,” said Recio.

As Charro’s primary rider, Recio is quick to credit the assistance he’s received from throughout the reining and cow horse industries.

“I try to learn from everyone that I can,” he said. “Shawn Church and Todd Martin taught me a lot about reining. They really polished me up a lot and truly allowed me to take advantage of the horse that I have.”

In addition to his wife and Miller, Recio says he could have never gotten this far without NRCHA Hall of Fame rider Les Vogt, who is helping by sponsoring Recio’s WEG endeavor. Of course, he is also grateful to his sturdy mount, a horse Recio says is one in a million.

“He is a tremendously gifted athlete,” said Recio. “His athleticism is beyond comparison. I think the cow horse training makes him very athletic and very quick, especially in the rollbacks. At the same time, he’s extremely good minded. He’s a rock star. He likes to perform, and he really enjoys his job.” **PHU**

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The world is coming

The 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games will bring nearly 1,000 athletes from 62 countries to Lexington, Kentucky, in September and October. This will be the largest sporting event in the U.S. since the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City and the largest equestrian event held on U.S. soil to date.

The 2010 WEG includes eight world championships: dressage, eventing, jumping, driving, endurance, para-dressage, reining and vaulting. This, the sixth WEG, features many firsts, including being the first held outside of Europe, the first to include para-dressage (an event for equestrians with physical disabilities) as the eighth official FEI discipline, the first held entirely on one site and the first to incorporate a title sponsor—Alltech.

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