

A Tale of Two Riders:



Tiana Coudray and King Street look sharp and poised as they jog in the first horse inspection at their Rolex Kentucky debut.

Arriving: On Your Mark

When you and your horse arrive at the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event, presented by Farnam, the first item on your agenda is a preliminary horse inspection. Veterinarians check your horse's passport, make sure all vaccines are up to date, and run their hands over the horse. This gives the vets a baseline from which to evaluate the horse throughout the weekend. Then, as at any event, you unpack, set up, and probably go for a ride to settle in.

Unlike most events, at Rolex you get prizes just for showing up. A competitor who starts dressage gets a monogrammed Triple Crown wool dress sheet, a saddle pad with the Hagyard logo, a Cosequin bucket filled with Cowboy Magic products, a grooming tote filled with Farnam products, plus a tote for the

The Best of Shows, the Worst of Shows

Rolex 2007
with Kristin Bachman
and Tiana Coudray

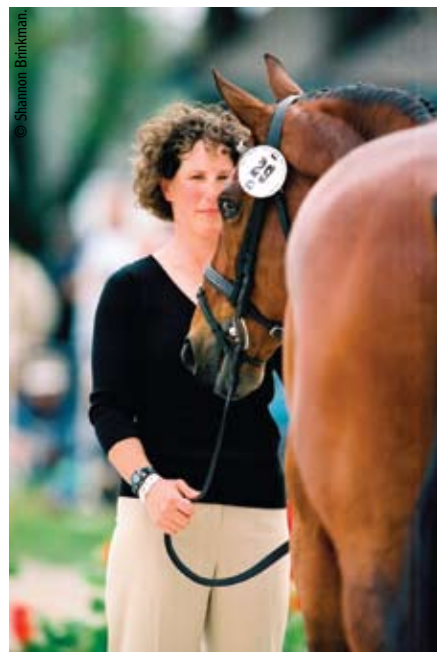
By Katherine Walcott

What does it feel like to ride at the Rolex Kentucky CCI4*? Since most of us will never find out firsthand, *Eventing USA* followed two up-and-coming riders throughout the weekend. Unfortunately, for very different reasons, neither completed, but both walked away better for the experience.

This is their story.

groom. Starting cross-country earns you \$500 toward expenses, more than the cost of the entry. Upon completing the event, the awards folks hand you a stall plaque and a glass engraved with the year and the logo of the competition organizers, Equestrian Events, Inc. Bruce Davidson must have enough of these glasses to host a dinner party by now.

The first of our competitors, Tiana Coudray, 18, of Carmel Valley, California, flew in with her horse King Street, a 12-year-old, 16.2-hand, bay Irish Sport Horse gelding owned by Jatial, Inc. and



Kristin Bachman presents her handsome Thoroughbred gelding Gryffindor in the first horse inspection. The pair returns for their second attempt at the prestigious four-star course.

Coudray. The available flight brought them into Lexington the Wednesday before the event. They spent the intervening time at a local barn with Heath Ryan and Wendy Schaeffer from Australia. Coudray's mother, Ellen, said the other riders took Coudray in and treated her as one of them. Mom thinks this helped Tiana relax while waiting to start her first four-star.

The day before the event started Kristin Bachman, 35, drove from The Plains, Virginia, with Gryffindor, her 13-year-old, 16.3-hand, bay Thoroughbred gelding. Bachman arrived focused and determined to correct some "rookie mistakes" that put her in 27th place last year. Gryffindor recognized where he was as he got off the trailer. Bachman's goal for Tuesday's ride was to stretch. What she got was a horse on his toes.

Wednesday: Let the Show Begin

Wednesday is all about the fashion show that is the formal First Inspection of Horses. The horses are all braided and beautiful. Riders dress themselves to the nines and beyond. Yes, she *can* run in those spike heels. Scotsman Ian Stark proved that men can look terrific in skirts. A female competitor with a flyaway skirt got a few raised eyebrows from the women in the audience and approval from the men. Both Coudray and Bachman dressed in sensible slacks topped with coordinating shirts.

After the jog the site of dressage and show jumping, the Sheila C. Johnson Arena, was open for schooling. Riders chose the programs best suited to their horses. Bachman schooled dressage in the arena until she was sure Gryffindor was nice and bouncy—that “he had his tennis shoes on.” Coudray hacked in the arena in jumping tack and then went out for a brief gallop.



ABOVE: Coudray and King Street battle the elements during their dressage test on Thursday. Despite the downpour, the pair earned a score of 49.3, enough to bump them to fourth place after the first day. **LEFT:** Coudray is thrilled with her gelding's performance at their first four-star event.

Wednesday finished off with an Active Riders' meeting to discuss logistics and international events. Bachman attended. Coudray sent a representative while she got her first look at the course.

Thursday: Come Rain or Shine

Packing for Kentucky in April is a challenge. You might need a T-shirt and sunblock or rain gear and long underwear. You might need both in the same weekend. Or on the same day.

Coudray, as the girl from sunny California, got the rain. The warm-up ring at most events swarms with horses and riders at every gait in every direction. Rolex is different. Two dressage rings are set up side by side in the schooling area. One is reserved for the next to go. The other ring is for the two following. Since Coudray wanted more warm-up than three to go, she started on the grass across the road, in a light rain. As soon as she trotted into the main arena to perform her test, the heavens opened. Perhaps the rain brought good luck. The two riders caught in downpours, Phillip Dutton on Connaught and Coudray, finished the day third and fourth. When

Coudray was done, a friend on the sidelines asked her how she could see where she was going. "I couldn't," she yelled back. Even if you didn't know anything about dressage, you could tell from Coudray's huge smile that she was pleased with her horse and with her score of 49.3.

Bachman lived in Redmond, Washington until a year ago, so, naturally, the sun shone on her test. Bachman's mom, Jo Ann, explained that Kristin uprooted her life and moved east to, "Go for the dream." The risk was paying off when a score of 48.2 put Bachman and Gryffindor in second place on day one of dressage. With one more ride to go, she could finish the day no worse than third. That also meant that Bachman was scooped up by a press officer to hustle her up to the media tent for a press conference with the top three



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ABOVE: Coudray plants a well-deserved kiss on King Street's nose. LEFT: Gryffindor's stellar performance in dressage earned the pair the third place position after the first day. CENTER: Bachman chats with the media about her dressage test. BELOW: Coudray and Michael Etherington-Smith discuss the cross-country course during Thursday's press conference.

Etherington-Smith came to the tent to answer questions. The press officers asked Coudray to stay. So, instead of sitting as one rider among four, she got to sit next to the renowned designer to give a rider's perspective on the course. Coudray is used to publicity though, having competed to the international level in Irish step dancing before taking up eventing.

Thursday closed with a cocktail party for exhibitors and sponsors at nearby Spindletop Farm. Afterward everyone trooped back across the road in their heels and finery for one last check on the horses.



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that followed each day as soon as possible after the last ride. Bachman had arrived on the grounds expecting this article's author to stick a notebook and camera in her face. In addition she got the entire press corps. Most riders would rather face *The Head of the Lake* than a room full of media.

Coudray thought she lucked out and missed the spotlight until, as a Young Rider in fourth place, she was requested to attend the press conference. However, the shuttle sent down to the stable office arrived late. By the time she got up to the media tent, the other riders had left. Usually a press tour of the course followed Thursday's press conference, but the rain washed it out. Instead designer Michael



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Friday: Where Does the Time Go?

One of the shocking parts about attending Rolex is how fast you run out of time. A journalist whose only job was to watch six rides in five days found herself with no time to walk the full course. Both Coudray and Bachman found their days filling up as well. Part of the issue is the scale of the Kentucky Horse Park. Schooling rings are near the barn, but the walk to warm-up or to Wednesday's schooling in the arena takes five minutes. Then there is the four-mile course. Each course walk can take close to two hours. And you will want to walk it. Bachman says she normally walks a course once, perhaps taking a second look at combinations. She walked the Rolex course four times. Coudray walked it six.

One of Coudray's course walks was on behalf of the U.S. Pony Club for pony clubbers. Coudray is an "H-A" with Santa Rosa Valley PC. She plans to try for her "A" this summer. A herd of several dozen kids and parents joined Coudray at the start box. Although she had never given a public course walk, Coudray did a better job than many bigger names. She spoke at length at each fence, including the audience in her thoughts as well as mentioning other approaches being discussed back at the barn. One mother commented that Coudray was, "Very good, very gracious." The youthful audience was thrilled with Coudray. Not only was she an advanced-level rider, she was an active pony-clubber at her first four-star with the horse she had been



ABOVE: Coudray leads an eager group of Pony Clubbers on a course walk on Friday. An "H-A" Pony Clubber with the Santa Rosa Valley Pony Club, Coudray plans to try for her "A" rating this summer. CENTER: Coudray takes a good look at the 3'10" rail from the Normandy Bank complex. BELOW: The Young Rider explains the importance of walking the cross-country course several times. She walked the entire course six times before competition day.



riding since novice. You could see the kids in the audience thinking, "I have a horse going novice...."

After the second day of dressage, other rides had moved Bachman and Coudray into sixth and ninth places respectively.

Saturday: People Everywhere

Each year seems to set a new attendance record at Rolex. This year saw 96,478 people over four days. A large chunk of that number showed up on Saturday. It is quite a shock the first time you gallop around a corner and come face-to-face with a sea of people. In 2006 the unanticipated crowds stood in the way of Bachman's sight line at a combination. In the few seconds she spent searching for it, she was carried a hair past her line. She got the first element, but when she tried to correct for the second, Gryffindor sensibly said "No thanks," and ran past. "I could have fixed it at a three-star, but not at a four-star."

This year, as the swarms of public and over 1,000 volunteers found their places Saturday morning, Bachman went for a short ride, just until Gryffindor settled down, took a deep breath, and relaxed in his neck. Coudray walked the course one more time.

Before the start, both riders sent helpers to the vet box to set out equipment. Each team staked out a territory well-supplied with coolers for the horses, ice buckets, drinks for the riders, and so on.

Coudray never saw the vet box at the





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As someone who can sulk for days over a bit of bad luck, it was humbling to talk with Coudray on Saturday evening. She was relieved that her horse was unscathed and proud of what they had accomplished. At a time when a cranky person would still be biting the head off of anyone who approached, Coudray was at the Sponsors Village for an autograph signing on behalf of her sponsor, English Riding Supply. Here she discovered another aspect to the crowds at Rolex. Not only are they huge, but they are full of people who recognize you. All the kids

LEFT: Coudray and King Street look fit and ready for action as they head out on cross-country on Saturday. BELOW: True to his Harry Potter namesake, Gryffindor exhibited his bravery over the four-mile long Rolex course.

finish. Afterward, her coach, Derek di Grazia, told her that she had been going well. Even the announcer was complimentary about her ride. Coudray disagreed. Later she said that the accuracy jumps went very well, but King Street felt ever-so-slightly stuck off the ground at the big fly fences. He was clearing them well enough, but when a problem came, she was not entirely surprised. They met Fence 24, the *Creek Oxer*, on a weak stride and failed to clear the 6'6" spread. During a few heart-stopping moments for the fence judges and onlookers, Coudray rolled off, over, and got to her feet while King Street landed on, then wiggled off the poles until he was standing in the ditch under the fence. Three men from the ground crew untied the enormous far pole and lifted it enough for King Street to duck his head and walk out.

After a lot of time looking at photos and talking it over, Coudray thinks that King Street tried to bounce between the rails when he realized he lacked the power to make the spread. "It's unfortunate that they had not tabled the oxer as he would have easily been able to bank onto and off of it without any trouble."

The pair could have walked back, but it was decided that since the trailer was close by, shipping would be faster. Unfortunately an accident with a shuttle had jammed Nina Bonnie Boulevard into immobility. Coudray stood in the back of the trailer worried about her tired and sweaty horse. Finally, her groom was able to run back to open the windows.



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ABOVE: With his long-striding gallop, Gryffindor shows why he has no problem making the time on cross-country. BELOW: Gryffindor cools down in the vet box after a fantastic performance on cross-country left him and Bachman in first place heading into the final phase of the competition. CENTER: On Saturday the media tent was packed with photographers and journalists.

from the course walk stopped by to ask after her horse.

Over to Bachman. What can you say about a foot-perfect cross-country ride that leaves you in first place at Rolex? Even the *Oxford English Dictionary* would run out of superlatives. Of the 40 riders who started cross-country, 33 finished. Bachman's ride was one of only eight double clear. By the time she crossed the line, she had moved up to fifth. As the afternoon wore on, Bachman looked after her horse and listened as riders placed ahead of her racked up time faults, had stops, and retired.

Success has a price. For Bachman on Saturday the price of first place was an NBC interview and another press



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conference. Bachman looked more at ease the second time around. Perhaps because she had not just finished her ride. Perhaps, as she said, because, "It's easier to talk about cross-country." Or perhaps because she was not the center of attention. Although Bachman stood in first place, most people wanted to hear from Karen O'Connor about her ride on the wonder pony, Theodore O'Connor.

Bachman stayed at the barn until 10:30 that night.

Sunday: Imagine the Pressure

Imagine waking up Sunday morning to see your picture on the front of the sports section in the local paper.

Bachman arrived at the barn at 5:30 a.m. Gryffindor had come through Saturday in good shape; however, it had been a big effort and Bachman wanted to do everything she could to see that he passed the jog and would be in the best possible shape for show jumping. For the Third Inspection of Horses, she rode almost up until her number was called, to make sure Gryffindor stayed relaxed and supple.



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ABOVE: Unfortunately, overnight leader Bachman jumped the wrong obstacle on course on Sunday afternoon and was eliminated from the competition, only a few jumps from the finish. RIGHT: A good sport, Bachman left the arena shaking her head in disbelief. No doubt she will be back at the head of the pack at Rolex Kentucky in the future, and most likely she'll never make the same costly mistake again!

After the stress of the final jog, Bachman tried to take a few minutes to go shopping. She found herself repeatedly stopped by people who wanted to offer a word of support. Shopping had to be abandoned in order to arrive at the course inspection in full dress.

Imagine being in a warm-up ring filled with red coats and international riders. Imagine riders filing down to the ring one by one, eventually leaving you alone in warm-up. Imagine jumping for first place and \$65,000.

The sold-out crowd near 20,000 was silent as Bachman and Gryffindor powered over the first seven fences. At Fence 8 they knocked a plank off the top of the white gate. No problem. They still had 1.8 penalty points in hand. Then, Bachman turned left. She should have turned right. As her coach stood at the in-gate chanting "Oh no, oh no," horse and rider executed a smooth turn and hopped neatly over Fences 10 and 11. A whistle blew. Bachman was eliminated.

When she could have been excused for collapsing in a heap or knocking her head into the nearest hard object, Bachman kept her cool. She covered her face with her hand briefly, then gave a rueful smile. The crowd applauded. After a few words from her coach Jan Byyny and Captain Mark



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Phillips, Bachman walked back to the barn to take care of her horse.

At the final press conference, another journalist asked the top finishers what they would say to Bachman. Karen O'Connor answered, "There are an infinite number of ways to get eliminated in eventing. If you stay around long enough, most of them will happen to you. She'll never have this mistake again. It's behind her. Kristin is a very talented rider on an extraordinary horse. She will be in that position again—soon." 🐾

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