



Southern Pines Welcomes Mosser Back For Another Win

by Kat Netzler

After a long break from competition, she and Merloch are wearing blue again.

Followers of upper-level eventing most likely noticed that Bonnie Mosser's mount Merloch seemed to magically disappear without a trace from competition results over the past 11 months. But when Mosser made her spring debut at the Southern Pines II Horse Trials, held March 20-22 in Raeford, N.C., the aptly named Merloch was back to looking like a true equine wizard, winning advanced test A, division 1.

"I came into the weekend feeling like it could be successful," Mosser said. "His dressage has been improving, but I would say I definitely gave some points away. It was the first event of the season, so I was a little rusty and he wasn't as attentive as possible. But it scored better than I anticipated."

The pair placed second in the dressage with a 29.6, but dropped to third on Saturday when they accrued 16.8 time faults on John Williams' cross-country course.

"My plan was to go a bit quicker," she said. "When I finished I thought, 'Darn, I thought I was going faster.' So that needs to be improved. He jumped great and was really honest, and I don't think I missed a beat out there on any of the jumps. I just wasn't making him get across the ground fast enough. But I think I know where that can happen."



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"Murray" enjoys the jumping phases, but speed isn't necessarily his forté. Mosser has always known the 11-year-old gray gelding was bred in New Zealand, but she only recently learned that he has quite a bit of Percheron blood in him.

"He's station-bred, so it's not a huge surprise," Mosser said. "You can definitely tell. We think his dam was 3/4 Percheron."

Murray showed off his pony-like dexterity in the show jumping on Sunday, easily posting a double-clear round to finish with 46.4 points, while others fell victim to "bad juju."

"Becky Holder [in fourth, with Rejuvenate] went off course, then Buck [Davidson and Ballynoe Castle RM, in second place] had two rails, and that



that's what I did," she said. "I came here for his first event of the year last year, and he won [an intermediate division], so I told my friends and family that we had to come back. We planned all along to just do this event and then go on to The Fork [CIC*** in North Carolina] and then to Badminton [CCI**** (England)]."

Mosser has ridden at the Rolex Kentucky CCI**** three times but never competed at Badminton. Before flying to Europe, Murray is slated to perform the dressage test ride at Kentucky on the Thursday before.

"After that, the next time I'm in that ring I'll hopefully be on a team," Mosser said, referring to the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, which will be held at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington. Foreign entries for Rolex Kentucky are up significantly this year, as riders want to get a feel for the course before the WEG.

"It's going to be so competitive at Rolex this year, but it's still going to be just as competitive in England," Mosser said. "My little joke right now is that the economy's bad, but the prize money is good. Badminton's an interesting event, because they're covering almost all the costs. My owners, myself, my groom and my horse are all put up."

In an effort to keep their event fully subscribed, Badminton organizers also dropped entry fees last year and started offering cash bonuses for grooms. Mosser will only have to pay for her flight. But that's still pricey, so instead of just asking sponsors for more money, she's organized a fundraising raffle this spring. For \$20, riders can get a chance at winning a weeklong training session at Mosser's farm in Gordonsville, Va.

"Even the professional riders are buying tickets, and that means a lot. David O'Connor thought it would be a good week off," Mosser said, laughing. "I told him if he won, he wouldn't even have to see a horse. He asked if there was a golf course nearby."

For those who are interested in the riding opportunities

horse can jump as high as the standards," Mosser said, baffled. "And then Michael [Pollard, the overnight leader] fell off, and I was like, 'Wow. Okay, I guess that's just how it happens.'

"I was nervous, and I don't know why," she added. "But it's been awhile. My last show jumping round on him was at the Olympic mandatory outing last July. But my horse was magic."

Mosser and Murray were short-listed for the Olympic team but didn't go to Hong Kong. She said that after returning from England, where he was quarantined as an alternate last summer, Murray vetted clean and went back into work in the fall. She concentrated on flatwork and jumped about once a week but didn't compete again until Southern Pines.

"I wanted to improve his dressage, so

Southern Pines Tidbits

- The Southern Pines eventing community and fans from across the country celebrated the retirement of Will Faudree's longtime partner Antigua on Sunday morning. The 18-year-old Australian Thoroughbred gelding, fondly known as "Brad," represented both the United States and Australia in competitions throughout his career, and competed at the Pan American Games, the World Equestrian Games and the Rolex Kentucky, Adelaide (Australia), Badminton (England) and Burghley (England) CCI****s.
- As an off-the-track Thoroughbred, Brad was especially known for his speed on cross-country. A new perpetual trophy in his name, awarded to the advanced horse and rider who come closest to the optimum time at Southern Pines, was given to Ashley Adams. She placed second in advanced test A, division 2, with Vaunted after scoring just

of Mosser's offer, however, the session includes five lessons on one's own horse and one lesson on Murray.

Confidence And Competence Confirmed

Up until Southern Pines, Kelly Sult and Hollywood hadn't run cross-country since their double-clear round at the Fair Hill CCI*** (Md.) in October, but it wasn't for lack of trying.

"We went intermediate at Pine Top (Ga.), which got turned into a combined test [due to weather], and I was also planning to go to the CIC*** at Red Hills (Fla.), then it was canceled," Sult said. "That only left me two events before Kentucky, so of course I was thinking, 'Oh gosh, if we don't do well here, and things don't go smoothly, what's going to happen?'" "

But things couldn't have gone much better for Sult, 22, and her 17-year-old, off-the-track Thoroughbred (Mighty Adversary—True Knight). With a win in advanced test A, division 2, the Erie, Pa., rider is right on track for her second four-star.

"I feel much more confident since he went through this weekend so easily and so comfortably," she said of "Reggie," her partner of eight years. "We schooled [cross-country] a little bit this spring, but we hadn't done half the stuff out there since last year. But he just went around like it was his fifth event of the year. He was just tremendous."

Sult spent last winter in Ocala, Fla., but the economy made her rethink an expensive stint in Florida this year. Instead she and Reggie moved to North Carolina in February to work with Bobby Costello, and she credited the trainer with her improvement on the flat. At Southern Pines she and Reggie placed eighth on Friday with a 37.9.

"He's getting a lot calmer in the whole dressage phase. I mean, he's 17, so it's about time," Sult said, laughing. "But Bobby has helped me so much on keeping him relaxed and supple and engaged throughout his whole body in everything from the half passes to the lead changes. He doesn't exactly have the best canter naturally, but we've really been working on improving the quality.

"Working with Bobby has also made everything so much easier for me," she added. "He's broken things down into pieces so I understand things so much better. Overall he's just an awesome trainer. I met him last winter, and every time I'd see him at an event, he'd come out of his way to say hi to me, and I just fell in love with him right then and there."

Sult has been helping out around Costello's barn and taking several lessons with him each week, and the polish she's gained this spring was also evident in the jumping phases at Southern Pines. She and Reggie cruised easily around the cross-country for just 3.6 time faults to move into second place. And on Sunday morning, overnight leaders Ashley Adams and Vaunted lowered two poles, giving Sult a rail in hand. She was disappointed when she used it, but she still won on a score of 45.5.

"That was all my fault," Sult said. "He would have had a clear round. He tries his hardest not to touch those rails. But his favorite part of the whole event is the victory gallop. He gets way more excited for that than anything else all weekend. He really knows when he gets to lead it that he's won."

With the help of her father and several good training manuals, Sult trained Reggie up to the advanced level herself. In 2007 they had a breakout performance at the Fair Hill CCI***, placing eighth, and they finished 14th with a double-clear cross-country round at their first Rolex Kentucky last spring. This year they hope to trump that finish with an even better score.

Bobby Beats Them All Again

Since the beginning of 2009, My Boy Bobby has managed to exceed almost all of Buck Davidson's expectations. The Ocala, Fla., rider hadn't planned on the 13-year-old Irish Sport Horse being ready to attempt Rolex Kentucky this spring, but after he scored an impressive victory at Rocking Horse Advanced (Fla.) in February, Davidson said there was a 50/50 chance he'd enter "Bobby" in the four-star.

Now, after posting a second advanced win in the test C division at Southern Pines—this time with an even better dressage score—the gelding's odds of heading to Kentucky have undoubtedly increased.

2.8 time faults.

- Another retirement was also honored on Sunday, as the Carolina Horse Park's new dressage complex was named in honor of Lefreda Williams. After helping to establish the park a decade ago and organizing three American Eventing Championships and countless other competitions, Williams will retire from her duties this year.

"I'd say they're about 53/47 now," joked Davidson. "No, barring something going really wrong at The Fork, he'll hopefully go to Kentucky. He was the best he's ever been this weekend."

Bobby placed third in the dressage on a mark of 32.7, scoring best on his trot work, which Davidson thinks is definitely four-star quality. But the rider is still aiming for a more expressive canter, and he was a bit disappointed with his own performance at Southern Pines. Because his three other horses competed in the test A divisions, Davidson didn't realize until Friday that he'd been practicing the wrong test with Bobby.

"I'm quite embarrassed," he said. "The canter work seems to go on forever in [test C], so I think I was thinking about the test more than riding the horse in that part. His canter is very good, but it can be even better than it was that day. I'll take the blame for that. But it worked out perfectly because he sometimes anticipates things, and he certainly couldn't this time, because we hadn't practiced it."

On Saturday, Davidson held on to third place even after adding 9.6 cross-country time faults to his score.

"He was fantastic, and it was a fantastic course, and the ground was good," he said. "But the footing got a little heavy just going down the last hill, and I probably lost 5 or 6 seconds. Since he's not a clean-bred horse, fitness is always an issue for him, so I've got to build. He's not the fastest horse in the world, but I think he'll like the relatively flat ground in Kentucky."

Dressage leaders Allison Springer and Arthur had a fluke stop at the second fence on cross-country, and Will Coleman didn't show jump Twizzel, despite being in second place heading into Sunday. Becky Holder and Courageous Comet led the field the final day but couldn't answer to Bobby's double-clear round. They dropped to second place after lowering three rails.

"He's so willing and so easy, really," Davidson said of Bobby, who finished on a score of 42.3. "But you never know if you have a four-star horse until you do it. We hope he's one."

In addition to his win with Bobby, Davidson also placed second in advanced test A, division 1, aboard Ballynoe Castle RM, and sixth in division 2 with May I Tell Ya. All three horses are owned by Carl and Cassandra Segal, who were in attendance to celebrate.

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