



Pletcher And Dominick Dominate At Pin Oak II

The cream rises to the top of the 41-horse hunter derby field.

Anne Lang

VERSATILITY IS ONE of the most prized qualities that riders seek in a horse. And to hear Texas trainer Peter Pletcher tell it, a certain Belgian Warmblood named Dominick possesses versatility in spades.

On April 1, Dominick and Pletcher won the \$15,000 USHJA International Hunter Derby at the Pin Oak II Charity Horse Show in Katy, Texas. Less than a day later, the 11-year-old gelding switched gears and took his young owner, Andrea Ramirez of Houston, to respectable ribbons in the small junior hunter, 15 and under, division. Last year at Pin Oak, the pair won the championship in the children's hunters, while Pletcher rode Dominick to fifth place in the derby.

"Dominick is a super-brave horse, super easy to ride, and just a good goer," said Pletcher. "He just marched around. He's very adaptable."

Three-time World Champion Hunter Rider Pletcher of Magnolia, Texas, piloted nine mounts in the derby, five of which ended up in the top 12. Finishing second overall was 17-year-old Olivia Esse of Los Angeles, Calif., aboard her own horse Gun N' Roses, while Courtney Calcagni of Pilot Point, Texas, claimed third on Taylor Reid's Day Dream.

Pletcher's affiliation with Dominick dates back to 2009, when he acquired the horse from Sydney Keith of Colorado. Pletcher subsequently sold Dominick to Ramirez, who trains in

Houston with Erin Jarvis. But even though he's well acquainted with the horse, Pletcher admitted that this year's derby course, designed by Alan Lohman, required extra alertness on every trip.

"The first round was really tough," Pletcher stated. "The four option jumps were 4'3" or bigger. And they were very 'careful' jumps: For instance, the stone wall was very loose, so if you just barely touched it, it fell down. Then there was a log at the top of the 4'3" hay-bale jump, just balanced there so it would roll off at the slightest touch.

"The oxers were all huge and came up after tight turns," Pletcher continued. "I'm not sure, but I think Dominick was the only horse who did all four of the high options in both rounds. I don't think you could build a jump that Dominick wouldn't try, even with him being so little [at 15.2 hands]."

As for the handy round, Pletcher said, there weren't a ton of options to be had.

"As a rider, you want a chance to sort of try the impossible. But everyone ended up taking pretty much the same track [in the handy], except for Dominick," he said.

Pletcher did a right-hand rollback to the first jump, which was the 4'3" hay bale with the log on top. The first three jumps included three of the four bigger options, but most people waited until the third to take the higher side. Pletcher and Dominick, however, jumped every option.

"I think that gave me a little bit of a get-ahead," he said.

Dominick placed third in the classic round (right behind Caden, owned and ridden by Pletcher-trained high school student Carson Gibson). But Pletcher won the class aboard Primero, another

Peter Pletcher's risky options in the handy round of the \$15,000 USHJA International Hunter Derby at Pin Oak II aboard Dominick paid off with a win.



(Shawn McMillen Photography Photo)



Olivia Esse's trip from California to Texas for Pin Oak II was worth it when she won multiple championships and placed second in the \$15,000 USHJA International Hunter Derby aboard Guns N' Roses.



(Shawn McMillen Photography Photo)

attractively versatile horse, owned by Sleepy P Ranch LLC.

"He'd been a junior jumper," Pletcher said. "But I started him in the hunters in Florida [at the FTI Winter Equestrian Festival] this year, at about Week 3. Suzanne Porter at Sleepy P had asked me to work with Primero to see if he might work as a hunter and maybe do the derbies. So at WEF, we started him in the 3' hunters, then moved on to the 3'3" hunters, then the junior hunters. He got better every week."

"As a rider, you want a chance to sort of try the impossible."

—Peter Pletcher

At Pin Oak I, Pletcher entered him in the 3'6" performance hunters and the USHJA National Hunter Classic, in which he placed third.

"I think it's an amazing addition," he said of the new series. "It's such a great steppingstone for pre-green horses and younger ones that are just starting out. [Primero is] a perfect example of a horse that benefited from having that steppingstone," said Pletcher.

West Coast Invasion

A talented contingent from southern California breezed into Katy for Pin Oak II and made a decisive impact in numerous divisions. The group was mostly headlined by horses owned and managed by Chris Iwasaki and Liz Reilly of Makoto Farm in Calabasas, Calif. While the Iwasaki and Reilly horses' names all begin with the word "Small," there was nothing small about their accomplishments in Texas.

At the beginning of the week, West Coast trainer John French, who frequently campaigns Iwasaki and Reilly's horses and is part of the Makoto Farm enterprise, rode Small Affair to the con-

formation hunter championship and helped the horse earn the show's high-point hunter and grand champion hunter awards. French also won champion on Small Collection in the 3'6"-3'9" performance hunter division and reserve champion in the first year green division on Small Kiss.

Esse, 17, trains with French and Marla Amormino, who works for Makoto Farm. Aboard her horse Guns N' Roses, Esse finished in second place overall in the hunter derby. Reilly was impressed by Pletcher's treatment of young Esse,

who also competed in the derby on three of her other horses: Fernway Park, Clooney and Illusion.

"Peter was particularly nice to Olivia after her first couple of horses went in the derby," Reilly said. "She didn't have her best performances with them, but Peter was really kind to her. Then she rallied and came back to finish second on Axel."

"Olivia had a brilliant, bold ride on Axel in the second round," Reilly observed. "Every jump was the same, out of the same forward rhythm. She does

\$15,000 USHJA INTERNATIONAL HUNTER DERBY Katy, Texas—Apr. 1

Judges: Panel 1: Sue Ashe, Leslie Brown; Panel 2: John Roper, Lynn Forgione

HORSE/RIDER	1ST ROUND		2ND ROUND		TOTAL
	PANEL 1 Score/ Height Option	PANEL 2 Score/ Height Option	PANEL 1 Score/Bonus/ Height Option	PANEL 2 Score/Bonus/ Height Option	
1. Dominick/Peter Pletcher	85/4	77.5/4	82/4/9	80.5/4/9	359
2. Guns N' Roses/Olivia Esse	83/0	82.5/0	85/3/7	81/3/4	348.5
3. Day Dream/Courtney Calcagnini	81.75/0	84/0	80/2/3	84.5/2/8	345.25
4. Valobra/Peter Pletcher	80/1	77/1	84/0/6	83/0/8	340
5. Primero/Peter Pletcher	84/0	89/0	75/2/4	75/2/7	338
6. Mouse/Sean Steffee	79/0	78/0	83/0/8	82/0/3	333
7. Small Kiss/Samantha Sommers	82/0	80/0	71/0/0	80.25/0/2	314.25
8. Camira/Peter Pletcher	83.5/0	82/0	63/2/3	67/2/8	310.5
9. Cellino/Jessica Law	76/0	79/0	60/0/0	65/0/6	286
10. Argentum/Peter Pletcher	85/0	84.5/0	45/2/5	45/2/9	277.5
11. Carson/Courtney Calcagnini	81.5/1	86/1	41/3/4	41/3/4	265.5
12. Caden/Carson Gibson	86/0	85/0	35/0/2	38.5/0/3	249.5

41 horses competed.



Fenney Delivers The Goods In Pin Oak II Grand Prix

Always wildly popular with Pin Oak spectators, Tracy Fenney of Flower Mound, Texas, didn't disappoint when she blazed to victory in the \$30,000 Pin Oak II Land Rover Grand Prix aboard MTM Centano, whom she owns with husband Mike McCormick.

From a field of 20 entries, seven pairs went clear in the first round, including Fenney on "Sly" and on MTM Timon. McCormick was also a member of that group aboard MTM Remington.

Not much fazes Fenney, but she admitted that the first fence in the preliminary round caught her attention during the course walk.

"The first jump was hard," Fenney remarked, "because it was a vertical that was kind of going up into the corner. Your horse was headed toward the wall of the stands and all the people sitting there. But it was a nice course, actually. And [Brazilian course designer] Guilherme Jorge did a great job for the jump-off. It was a real crowd-pleaser."

Fenney got to play to that crowd to the hilt: For the jump-off, she came back in the first slot with Timon, scoring a double-clear round that she described as deliberately "medium-fast" that set the stage for five riders to follow.

By the time she reappeared on Sly to lay down the final trip of the evening, two others had gone double-clear: Meagan Nusz on Banana D'Ive Z and defending champion Wilhelm Genn on Happy Z. Each had clocked times that were faster than Timon's. But Fenney wasn't worried.

"Sly has such a big step [at 17.1 hands] that I knew I'd hopefully make up the time by the last jump," she explained. "Because it was a really long gallop to the last jump."

Her hopes came true when the 11-year-old Holsteiner gelding stopped the clock at 40.86. Nusz was a close second in 41.33, followed by Genn in 41.57 for third. Fenney picked up the fourth-placed check for Timon's jump-off time of 41.89. McCormick clocked the fastest four-fault jump-off round at 43.80, settling for fifth.

"It makes it so much more fun for the crowd when there are more than just a few in the jump-off," Fenney stated. "And the Pin Oak crowds always really get into it. This was a really exciting jump-off."

Sly won the \$25,000 grand prix at the Great Southwest (Texas) Winter Series I in February and the \$25,000 SmartPak Grand Prix at the Ocala (Fla.) Tournament in March.

Tracey Fenney and MTM Centano riled up the Texas crowd with their win in the \$30,000 Pin Oak Charity II Grand Prix.

\$30,000

PIN OAK CHARITY II GRAND PRIX

Katy, Texas—Apr. 2

HORSE/RIDER	FAULTS	TIME	PURSE
1. MTM Centano/Tracy Fenney	0-0	40.86	\$9,000
2. Banana D'Ive Z/Meagan Nusz	0-0	41.33	6,600
3. Happy Z/Wilhelm Genn	0-0	41.57	3,900
4. MTM Timon/Tracy Fenney	0-0	41.89	2,400
5. MTM Remington/Michael McCormick	0-4	43.80	1,800
6. River Of Dreams/Christian Heineking	0-4	50.28	1,500
7. South Bound/Martien Van Der Hoeven	0-8	42.53	1,200

20 horses completed.

At their MTM Farm, Fenney and McCormick make sure their horses get plenty of turnout time between shows.

"That's my favorite thing to do with our horses," Fenney revealed. "In Ocala we have a huge paddock, which is really nice for turnout." And although their barn was scheduled to compete at the Spring Gathering show in Katy, which started just two days after the close of Pin Oak II, the couple felt it was worth the 580-mile round trip required to take their horses home for a few precious days of respite in between.

"This morning I got up at 6:00 a.m. and turned them out in the arena so they could roll and stretch, and kick up their feet a little," Fenney said the Monday following the grand prix. "You know, to have a nice morning instead of sitting in a show stall and going for a hand-walk. They're ready for some green grass."



(Shawn McMillen Photography Photo)



(Shawn McMillen Photography Photo)

Courtney Calcagnini piloted Day Dream to third place in the \$15,000 USHJA International Hunter Derby at Pin Oak II.

Hunter Classic Spectacular at WEF aboard Small Affair, and she built on that momentum at Pin Oak II, winning all five classes in the large junior hunter, 16-17, division. That clinched the championship, the high-point junior hunter rider award and the best child rider on a horse title.

After all that, Esse nabbed championship honors in the small junior hunter, 16-17, division with her horse Illusion, whom French also rode to the reserve championship in the conformation hunter division.

Another young Pin Oak II standout who trains with Amormino and French is Samantha Sommers, 16, of Malibu, Calif. Between the two of them, Esse and Sommers managed to sweep the top spots in all four junior hunter divisions.

Sommers won four of five classes in the small junior hunter, 15 and under, division on Small Collection to easily claim the championship. On Small Kiss, Sommers was champion in the large junior hunter, 15 and under, division and finished seventh in the hunter derby.

"Sam works very hard and has an

an excellent job of riding with pace."

Amormino, who has been one of Esse's trainers for 10 years, was equally pleased with her student's Derby performance on Axel. "Olivia got on and pretty much just went in and nailed it," she said. "She'd already ridden her three other horses in there, so she knew where she was going and she knew all the strides."

With Axel, Esse and her team chose to skip the higher options in the classic round, where the pair finished seventh. In the handy, they opted for the higher options all around, earning a second-placed finish in that class and helping to land the overall red.

Axel, an accomplished equitation mount, has a few hunter derbies on his résumé, but they've been sporadically spread out over the past few years.

"He's so reliable and brave; he'll jump anything," said Esse, who's owned the 14-year-old Holsteiner for four years. "I knew that with all those natural jumps, Axel would be one I could definitely get around on. I knew he wouldn't get spooky or anything."

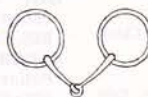
"He's just a pro," added Esse, a high school junior who also squeezes in time to play volleyball for her school team. "We took him to Spruce Meadows [Alta.]

and he did the jumpers there. He just does anything."

► Building On Experience

In February, Esse won the WCHR Junior/Amateur-Owner Palm Beach

TIDBITS



- Claire McKean of The Woodlands, Texas, racked up the medium pony hunter championship on her own Honorable, the small/medium green pony hunter championship on Kimberly Rathman's Inaway Theodorable and the reserve championship in the same division on Cool Hand Luke, owned by McKean's trainer, Erin Jarvis. For her accomplishments, McKean was named best child rider on a pony.
- Isabel Coleman of Kiln, Miss., made her mark in the pony equitation realm, guiding her own Keep A Secret to wins in the WIHS Pony Medal and the small/medium Equisport/USEF Pony Medal classes. The pair also won the pony hunter classic and were reserve champions in the medium pony hunter division. Coleman is trained by Sean Steffee.
- Michaela De Leyer of Tomball, Texas, won the \$20,000 children's/adult jumper classic, out of 32 entries, on Figaro, owned by her father and trainer, John De Leyer. Michaela, 17, has a friendly sibling rivalry with brother Andreas, 16, who won the children's/adult jumper stakes on Skylark, a full brother to Figaro (Saluut II—Lorelei).



HORSE SHOWS —

excellent feel and eye," Reilly said. "The horses just love her."

Amormino said the California group—none of whom had shown in Texas prior to Pin Oak II—plans to return next year, preferably for both weeks of the Pin Oak shows.

"We loved it!" she exclaimed.

KATY, TX—MAR. 30-APR. 3.

- 1.25M JUMPER CH:** Cassandra, El Milagro Retreat LLC.
RES Tie: Constant Gardener, Deborah Sutton, Sheishof's Gloria, Ashton Galo Paley & Sangria, Jessica Law.
- 1.35M JUMPER CH:** Whoopy Doo, Bjorn Ikast.
RES: On Target, October Hill Sales Limited.
- 1.40M JUMPER CH:** Winchester, Bridlebourne Stables LLC.
RES Tie: Seagull, El Milagro Retreat LLC & Uranda, Highridge Farm.
- LOW JR. JUMPER CH:** Maximus, El Milagro Retreat LLC.
RES: MTM Corsair, Grace Mitchell.
- PONY JUMPER CH:** Sir Lance-A-Lot, Claire Salopek.
RES: Black Pearl, Avery Silar.
- HIGH ADULT AMATEUR JUMPER CH:** CR Prada, CD Show Horses LLC.
RES: Clarissa Z, Diane Binswanger.
- HIGH CHILDREN'S JUMPER CH:** Macondo, Step By Step Farm LLC.
RES: Bridgette, Steve Hummel.
- LOW ADULT AMATEUR JUMPER CH:** Serendipity, Whitney Brown.
RES: Benelli, Erin Ann Oakes.
- LOW AMATEUR-OWNER JUMPER CH:** Albarez, Guy Hodgson.
RES: I'm Lovin' It, Heather Howland.
- HIGH AMATEUR-OWNER JUMPER CH:** Gabriella Z, Lazy Creek Ranch Holdings LLC.
RES Tie: Jolly Mon, Wilhelm Genn & Mr. Nobody, Five-H Partners.
- LOW CHILDREN'S JUMPER CH:** Banderas, Bizi Ferguson.
RES Tie: Jaspis, Mary Antonini & The Gentleman, Annie Laurie Gibson.
- HIGH JR. JUMPER CH:** Cantera, Wolf Trot Farms.
RES: Olympia, Alyssa Heim.
- HIGH PERFORMANCE HUNTER CH:** Carson, Kristen Blomstrom.
RES: Timber Ridge, Shane George.
- CONFORMATION HUNTER CH:** Small Affair, Iwasaki & Reilly.
RES: Illusion, Oscany Inc.
- 1ST YR. GREEN HUNTER CH:** Valobra, Eva Bisso.
RES: Small Kiss, Iwasaki & Reilly.
- 2ND YR. GREEN HUNTER CH:** Choco Mousse, Claire Thomas.
RES: Alezzio, Jennifer McNamara.
- AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER, 18-35 CH:** Gatsby, Kyle Owens.
RES: Bluegrass, Ruth Hawk.
- AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER, 36 & OVER CH:** Ocean Park, Lynn Walsh.
RES: To The Nines, Mr. & Mrs. Ken MacKenzie.
- LARGE JR. HUNTER, 15 & UNDER CH:** Small Kiss, Iwasaki & Reilly.
RES: MTM Braggin Rights, Taylor Sutton.
- LARGE JR. HUNTER, 16-17 CH:** Small Affair, Iwasaki & Reilly.
RES: Caden, Shadyside Farm.
- SMALL JR. HUNTER, 15 & UNDER CH:** Small Collection, Iwasaki & Reilly.
RES: Day Dream, Taylor Reid.
- SMALL JR. HUNTER, 16-17 CH:** Illusion, Oscany Inc.
RES: Holiday, Shadyside Farm.
- PRE-GREEN HUNTER CH:** Celebrate, Denise Clolery.
RES: Gandalf The Grey, Charna Watts.
- 3'3" PRE-GREEN HUNTER CH:** Luck, Johnnie Martin-Carey.
RES: Outta The Park, Lynn Walsh.
- LARGE PONY HUNTER CH:** Siddhartha, Maggie Di Vecchia.
RES: Jerry Jeff Walker, Kelly Ronden.
- MEDIUM PONY HUNTER CH:** Honorable, Claire McKean.
RES: Keep A Secret, Isabel Coleman.