

Once in



a Lifetime

The charm of the European Paint Horse Championships keeps exhibitors coming back year after year.

Article and photography by IRENE STAMATELAKYS

Driving past the lush pastures and dark, thick forests lining the small country road leading to Kreuth, Germany—home of the 2010 European Paint Horse Championships—Fort Worth, Texas, seems a million miles away. Yet for Paint Horse fans throughout Europe, this is their World Show. One minute you're driving through Bavaria, the next you're watching a beautiful Paint lope down the rail. And you get this tingly, excited feeling like you are about to watch history being made.

Whether you were spectator or exhibitor, official or show crew, this year's "EuroPaint"—as it's often called—was unforgettable. It was a collection of unique moments—families working together to show their beloved horse, friends winning medals side by side, folks achieving goals they believed beyond their reach—that will remain forever in our memories, and in some cases, in APHA's performance records.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

And that's exactly what it was for 22-year-old Therese Andersson from Helsingborg, Sweden. The last thing she expected was to find herself at the European Championships, which took place August 30–September 4. But she made it there with a little help from her family and friends.

First, Andersson had to find the right horse. Four years ago, with her grandfather's help and friend Mia Bråve's guidance, she purchased Whata Smoke. While Andersson was relatively inexperienced, the





Ella Bråve of Sweden and What A Dirty Daisy were named the 2010 EuroPaint All-Around Youth award winners.

1997 sorrel overo stallion had already seen the world. Bred in Germany, trained in Sweden and shown by the Bråves—winning a European Championship in hunter hack as a 4-year-old—“Smoke” headed to new owners in the United Kingdom. The following year, the stallion represented the Brits in reining at the 2002 World Equestrian Games in Jerez, Spain. Since then, he has also competed in Western riding, trail, dressage and jumping.

Andersson had a lot of learning to do to catch up with her more experienced equine partner, whom she acquired in 2007. Working with Bob Mayhew in reining and Western riding, Lars Bråve in trail and hunter hack, and Jonna Gullberg in horsemanship and hunt-seat equitation, Andersson honed her skills and steadily progressed. But there was one major problem: While Whata Smoke seemed to thrive in the spotlight, Andersson was the exact opposite.

“I hate competing,” she said. “I’m so nervous, I throw up. I needed to compete a lot this year to learn to control my nerves.”

And then there was the financial cost. The expenses, including the two-day trip from Sweden, were simply out of her reach.

“She had to get sponsors,” Mia explained. “Her parents, siblings and grandparents—everyone gave 50 euros so she could come.”

Although her mother and father made the trip to Kreuth to see their daughter compete, Andersson couldn’t stay with them—they too made her nervous. Friends and family who stayed behind were also following their investment very carefully.

“The whole family is sitting by the computer watching online and texting each other when my class starts,” Andersson said.

Andersson’s efforts paid off beyond her wildest dreams. The duo won gold in Amateur Western Riding, gold in Senior Western Riding, and third place in Novice Amateur Hunt-Seat Equitation.

“It was a super first show,” Andersson said. “I said it was going to be a

once-in-a-lifetime experience, but now I don't know. I want to come back."

The Andersson family wasn't the only one celebrating. Paint Horse Club Germany welcomed 266 horses from 10 different countries, awarding 89 European Championship titles and 220 total medals. With nearly 800 entries—about the same level as last year—the European Championship still tops the list of APHA-approved shows outside the United States and Canada. But statistics don't tell the entire story.

APHA's Executive Director Lex Smurthwaite was on hand this year to witness the event.

"Since the last time I attended, it was clear that our European members continue to make great strides in terms of quality of horses and riding," he said. "I spoke to many members at the event, and their enthusiasm and dedication to the Paint Horse is readily apparent. And I believe the European Championships still has tremendous potential for growth."

Driving that growth is the Youth division, where entries jumped 35 percent over last year and classes were among the show's largest. It's quite common for these young exhibitors to do most of the training themselves, and several are extremely competitive, finishing strong in Open classes as well.

One of Europe's young talents is 14-year-old Freja Aase Olsen, who showed Coup Matoska, a 2005 blue roan tovero gelding bred by her parents, in both Youth and Open classes. Although it was her third time competing at EuroPaint, Freja had never before medaled. After a rough start in the Nations Cup, she returned the next day determined to do better. And that she did, garnering golds in Youth Hunter Under Saddle, Junior Hunter Under Saddle and Youth Hunter Hack; silvers in Open Hunter Hack and Youth Geldings; and a bronze medal in Open Working Hunter—a total of six medals in just one day.

September 3 was unforgettable for the Scandinavians. Competitors from Denmark, Norway and Sweden won 21 medals that day alone—a remarkable

feat considering they traveled 1,000 miles or more to the competition.

Over the years, the Swedish national anthem has played more than once for Ella Bråve. But this year's music was particularly sweet for the 17-year-old from Billesholm, Sweden, and her talented 6-year-old sorrel overo mare What A Dirty Daisy.

"This was to be my last European



Championship with her," Ella said, "so I was hoping to do good."

But what she achieved was beyond her wildest dreams, especially considering where they started.

"No one else likes to ride her," said Ella's mother, Mia, about the mare. "Ella's done all the riding herself. The trainer said to sell her. I used to say, 'Get off her'—she was rearing and bucking, but Ella believed in her."

The duo entered their first class as a warm up.

"I was nervous in the Senior Hunter Under Saddle, but we said it was training for the PHCG Maturity," Ella explained. "I had no idea I was going that good."

Claiming gold, that ride set the tone for the rest of the week. Ella and "Daisy" went on to win four more gold

Top: Exhibitors in Youth Western Horsemanship await their placings.

Above: The 2010 EuroPaint judges included Karen Banister, Bonnie Miller, Kendra Weis, Lisa Moden and Sandy Jirkovsky.

Below: Wynning Chex and Noemi Pichler tackle the bridge in Youth Trail.



By the numbers

- Number of entries: 798
- Halter entries: 198
- Western entries: 386
- English entries: 137
- In-hand performance entries: 77
- Largest classes: Senior Trail and Youth Showmanship, 20
- Number of horses: 266
- Number of countries represented: 10

medals and a silver in Youth classes, plus the PHCG Breeders Maturity in trail and hunter under saddle, as well as the All-Around Youth title.

"I wanted to go out on top, but she's going so good, I don't know anymore," Ella said.

Over the past three years, Ella and Daisy have earned 23 medals, just two short of the record-holder, Joys Skip N Bars, a 1999 bay tobiano gelding owned by Manfred Beschorner of Renningen, Germany, and exhibited by his daughter Nicole Karcher. Nicole began showing the gelding as a Youth and later moved up to the Amateur division, where they continue their winning ways. This year, the pair won gold in Amateur Senior Western Pleasure and silver in Senior Western Pleasure.

Whether you're a first-timer or return year after year, the number of solid Paint-breds at the show is astonishing. The European Championships have long been the largest gathering of solid Paints worldwide. In fact, this

year nearly 20 percent of the horses were SPBs. For every Regular Registry class held, the equivalent SPB class was also offered.

"It was an amazing example of what is possible," Smurthwaite said, "when show management creates opportunities for solid Paint-breds and owners seize that chance and commit to training and showing those horses."

Laura Schultz and her father, Jorn, made the trip from Ulfborg, Denmark, for the third time.

"There are 11 Danish horses here," Laura said. "We are all stalled in the same barn. This is like a holiday for all the Danes—we all know each other and all are friends."

But beyond the camaraderie, the Schultz family came with their homebred 2004 sorrel solid Paint-bred mare Whata Queen for the competition.

"I think there's a lot of really nice solid horses," she said. "They are nice and well-trained. I think there are a lot of horses in all the SPB classes—much more competition here. It's a great place and a lot of fun."

Laura, who started Whata Queen herself and has worked only occasionally with a trainer, had a very successful show, earning gold medals in five SPB classes plus a Gist buckle sponsored by the France Paint Horse Association for her win in Amateur SPB Showmanship. She says that competing at the European Championships is absolutely

essential to reaching her goals because there are so many horses and five judges.

"I think I got the last points I needed in Amateur trail for the APHA SPB Amateur Championship," said Laura. "She already earned her Open APHA SPB Championship. It has been my goal to get both of those. And here I got the last points I needed for her Superior in Open halter."

Linda Vance, then president of the APHA, was impressed with what she saw.

"They've got some great quality solid Paint-breds here," Vance said. "I'm very impressed with the folks here in Europe because they are putting the time and effort into their solid Paint-breds and it shows. And as a result, they've got good numbers in their classes."

The Nations Cup offers everyone a break from traditional classes in the form of some friendly team competition. This year, teams from Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden competed in the event. In a mix of national pride, comic relief and a bit of competitive spirit, they competed in five events: trail, Western pleasure, Western horsemanship, hunter under saddle and reining.

Following a festive parade of teams and warm welcome from Vance, APHA Director of European Affairs Markus Rensing and PHCG President Monika Hagen, one exhibitor from each team was sent to tackle the trail course. The Netherlands quickly set the pace, with Saskia Moeskops and Sherwins Little Bandit taking first place. The Dutch also won the last event, reining, turning the run for the Cup into a three-way tie between the Austrians, the Dutch and the Germans.

In anticipation for the awards ceremony, the teams returned to the arena. While waiting for the results to be calculated, Rensing presented plaques on behalf of the European clubs to Smurthwaite and Butch Carse, APHA show steward and judges liaison, recognizing the significant contributions they made resulting in the tremendous growth of the breed in Europe.



The EuroPaint judges and show crew made the competition a success.

All-around winners

Youth

What A Dirty Daisy—Owned by Mia Bråve, Billesholm, Sweden; exhibited by Ella Bråve

Novice Amateur

Sheiks Artist—Owned and exhibited by Vanna Bortolato, Olmo Di Martellago (Ve), Italy

Amateur

Sheiks Artist—Owned and exhibited by Vanna Bortolato, Olmo Di Martellago (Ve), Italy

Open

Docs J Famous Delta—Owned by Daniel Jura, Schortens, Germany

Youth Solid Paint-Bred

SQ Shegothestyle—Owned and exhibited by Verena Hagen, Haldenwang, Germany

Amateur Solid Paint-Bred

Whata Queen—Owned by Jorn Schultz, Ulfborg, Denmark; exhibited by Laura Schultz

Open Solid Paint-Bred

Magic Technique—Owned by Angelika Gallitzendorfer, Memmingen, Germany

Gelding Plus award winners

Open (\$1,000)

Resemblance—Owned by Felix Lejour/Sandra Dahl, Conflans Ste Honorine, France

Amateur (\$1,000)

Sheiks Artist—Owned and exhibited by Vanna Bortolato, Olmo Di Martellago (Ve), Italy

Youth (\$1,000)

Hesa Nigel Paycheck—Owned by Markus Pfeifer, Weitnau, Germany; exhibited by Laura Pfeifer

2010 Medal Count					
Country	Horses	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Germany	139	28	22	31	81
Italy	24	15	13	8	36
Austria	25	13	9	4	26
Sweden	16	11	7	4	22
France	20	6	7	7	20
Denmark	11	8	3	5	16
The Netherlands	11	5	2	1	8
Switzerland	12	3	4	1	8
Norway	4	0	1	1	2
Czech Republic	4	0	1	0	1
Totals	226	89	69	62	220

Following in the footsteps of their Youth team at the APHA Summer World Show this summer, the Dutch Paint Horse Club came out victorious in the Nations Cup competition.

“Going into the Cup, we were hoping to place in the top three,” said Paul deJong, DPHC co-president. “I know we had some good riders, but two were competing for the first time. It was difficult to find the right classes for the right horse.”

The silver medal went to team Germany and the bronze to team Austria. Fourth place went to France, Italy finished fifth, Sweden was sixth, and Denmark seventh.

“We heard that there was a three-way tie, and the tie-breaker judge had a decision to make,” said Martin Laleese, DPHC co-president. “When Austria was third, Karl-Heinz Schmidt, the German coach, came to us and made a bet—the winner buys a drink for the losing team coach. We said, ‘OK.’ And I said to Paul, ‘I love to win.’ We had a lucky year this year.”

It was the Rix family’s first time at the European Championships. Florence and Pascal made the trip from Cellieu, France, with their three children—Aurelie, Amandine and Benjamin—and their 2002 black tobiano mare Floride Fair Bar. While Pascal showed ‘Floride’ in the Novice Amateur classes, Aurelie showed her in the Youth division and Benjamin rode her in lead line. Between events, they soaked up

the atmosphere and spent time cheering and celebrating with friends.

Pascal was not entirely sure what to expect beforehand, so he wanted to reassure potential exhibitors who are still on the fence about coming.

“It still is a family experience,” he said. “There are a large number of entries in the classes—20 in the Youth Showmanship and 12 in one of the Solid Paint-Bred classes. It was a very wonderful experience for Aurelie.”

And even though the children missed the first few days of school, Florence thought it was worth it.

“It’s within your reach,” Florence said. “The Novice Amateur classes are a great place to start. And it gives you a chance to compare yourself with others. You have to come at least once in your life to see it.”

If you’ve never attended the European Paint Horse Championships before, it isn’t too early to start planning for next year. Lodging and dining are surprisingly affordable, the countryside is simply gorgeous, and the horses—well, they’re Europe’s finest. Make that once-in-a-lifetime trip you’ve been dreaming about. Come to Kreuth, Germany, September 5–11, 2011. Go to international.apha.com for a complete list of European Champions and medal winners. **PHC**

To comment on this article, e-mail feedback@apha.com.