

Rain, High Wind, and Lower Than Expected Entries Can't Keep the California M&M Show Down!

By Kelly Davidson Chou

Although the economic downturn certainly had an impact on the number of entries in the Mountain and Moorland (M&M) show at the 2009 Pacific Coast Classic, it did not dampen the enthusiasm of the exhibitors who made the extra effort to attend the 12 September show. The Welsh Pony and Cob Association of California (WPCAC) once again provided a warm welcome to the M&M folks, who this year brought British Shetland, Connemara, Dales, Dartmoor, and Fell ponies to the popular Welsh show in Elk Grove, California.

Mrs Kerry Wainwright of Skellorn Stud in Adlington, Cheshire judged the eight M&M classes with great efficiency, even after a long day of judging the Welsh in-hand classes in unrelenting 100°F heat the previous day. The M&M classes began under a cloudy, rain-threatening sky with the two Working Hunter Pony (WHP) classes. As was the case last year, Connemaras and Dales battled for the first place blue ribbon in both the 2' and 2'6" classes. First place for the 2' course went to the Connemara gelding **Midsummer Knight**, owned by Grace Freeman, and his 13-year-old rider Emily Freeman, while the 2'6" class was won by Adrienne Grasso and Dales stallion **Colliery Alick**, owned by Kelly Davidson Chou of Davidson Dales & Dartmoor Ponies. All of the competitors agreed that they would like to see additional WHP classes offered at future shows, but with entries so greatly reduced from the 2008 show, it is unlikely that will happen in 2010.

The in-hand classes started with un-seasonal high winds and light rain with the M&M 3 and under class. Representatives from the British Shetland, Dales, Dartmoor, and Fell breeds participated. The blue ribbon went to **Tulipkings California Poppy**, a four-month-old Dartmoor filly (and the youngest pony at the show) handled by Adrienne Grasso and owned by Kelly Davidson Chou. The largest class of the day was the M&M 4 and over, with Connemaras, Dales, Dartmoors and Fells showing their very best for the judge. Mrs Wainwright was thorough and quite discriminating throughout, eventually choosing Connemara gelding **Midsummer Knight** as her top pony in the class. After the class was dismissed, all the entries were invited back into the ring for the "Best of Breed" class. Though not a traditional British M&M class, "Best of Breed" has been part of the Pacific Coast Classic M&M show since its inception in 2006. Mrs Wainwright awarded Championship sashes to the following entries: British Shetland – **Clan Graham Bonnie Dundee** owned by Ceci Graham-Widby; Dales – **Redprairie Rose** owned by Kelly Davidson Chou; Dartmoor – **Tulipkings California Poppy**; and Fell – **Braeberry Anne** owned by Rene Bender of Fell Legend Farm.

The NPS America Championship consisted of the top two ponies from the 3 and under and 4 and over classes, which included **Tulipkings California Poppy** and **Braeberry Whimsical Legend** (owned by Rene Bender) from the 3 and under class and **Midsummer Knight** and **Braeberry Anne** from the 4 and over class. Mrs Wainwright gave the top accolades and the NPS America Championship Rosette to **Midsummer Knight**, with the Reserve going to Fell mare **Braeberry Anne**.

The exhibitors then had a short break to tack up for the two ridden classes. Luckily, the rain and lightning dissipated as the exhibitors for Ridden M&M entered the

ring. Like the WHP classes, Ridden M&M was represented by only the Connemara and Dales breeds. Both the show organizers and the spectators agreed that the quality of the riding and showmanship in this class has increased dramatically since 2006. Even Mrs Wainwright admitted that she wished she could have handed out two blue ribbons, as the top two ponies gave such nice individual shows. But in the end she had to make the call and chose Connemara gelding **Stonybrook Belmont**, ridden by owner Lee Webster, as her choice for first place.

The final class of the day was Novice Ridden M&M, with Connemara, Dartmoor, and Fell entries. This class is designed to give newly trained ponies their first taste of the performance ring at the walk and trot only. Though she was barely 10 days under saddle and had quite a distraction with her four-month-old filly foal making a ruckus just outside the ring, the first place ribbon was awarded to the four-year-old Dartmoor mare **Windwood Buttercup**, ridden by Adrienne Grasso and owned by Kelly Davidson Chou. For those of us attending this show the past several years, it was very rewarding to see these young ponies finally making their debut in the performance arena!

After the show I had the privilege of discussing the classes with Mrs Wainwright, who was very encouraging regarding our American M&M efforts but also believed our exhibitors could do a few simple things to improve their showmanship in the ring. She very graciously offered her assistance from “across the pond”, and as Vice Chairman of NPS America I hope to take her up on the offer to help educate as well as encourage our M&M owners and breeders.

Though interest in the M&M breeds in the US has picked up momentum over the last several years, many obstacles still remain. Certainly the economic situation is hurting us, as is a dearth of qualified M&M judges – but those two things will change over time. When all is said and done, it is clear that the number one obstacle facing US M&M owners is geography. California is just one state out of 50, and it alone is roughly the size of Great Britain. Most of the Dales, Dartmoors, Highlands, and Fells reside on the East Coast, which is 3,000 miles from the Western states. Indeed, the Dartmoors competing at the 2009 Pacific Coast Classic may be the only two of their kind in all of California. It is more than wishful thinking that showing opportunities like the WPCAC M&M show at the Pacific Coast Classic will inspire other organizers to not only include M&M classes but to retain the qualified judges necessary to make such ventures successful. And then as we say in the States, we hope and pray that, “If you build it - they will come”.

A complete list of show results and additional photographs can be found at www.NPSAmerica.org.

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