

Kentucky State Fair Reins in Adult Equitation

To The Editor:

After hearing the news that the adult equitation class would be canceled for the 2007 World's Championships after 24 years, I wrote to the adult equitation participants of 2006. Following is a sampling of letters that were returned to me from my peers. The letters, as well as numerous phone calls from all over the country, are impressive. The support for this class runs from our current national and world champion, to an owner-trainer-rider in Ohio, who came out of three weeks of quarantine where she is developing a vaccine for the bird flu virus, to write a letter.

It is my belief that more education about this division was necessary before canceling this very important class. It is a real division that keeps many of our adult exhibitors able to compete.

1. 95 participants made up 285 entries in adult equitation, in the calendar year of 2006, three-gaited pony had 31 participants and five-gaited ponies accounted for 27 participants in 2006. Who is to say what makes up a REAL DIVISION.
2. Since the inception of this class in the early '80s, the class has always had between 12 and 21 participants.
3. adult equitation is a REAL enough division to have four finals — USAE Medal Finals, UPHA Adult Finals, the Olympics, and the Eastern National Adult Finals. These finals are exclusively held for adults.
4. This group of riders has undoubtedly won more world, national and international titles than any other single class at the World's Championships. The adult equitation riders also comprise more than 70 percent of our gold medal Three- and Five-Gaited USA World Cup teams.

I believe that the individuals I spoke to did not seem to understand all the facts and the importance of this class. The adult class at Louisville feeds and sustains the interest of many adult riders who eventually try out for the World Cup team.

As an adult equitation rider who has participated in this class since 1982, I believe I speak for all that have written to say we do this for the love of the sport of equitation. None of us make a living at this. Many have purchased horses and have spent not only an extreme amount of money, but more importantly, time shooting for this goal. The class was terminated without giving any of us ample warning. I feel if we don't save this class now, the class will never be added back and eventually the division may die. I am also extremely cognizant that the World's Championship Horse Show is long and that in fact classes may need to be re-examined. We are just extremely puzzled as to why a class that has ALWAYS had ample participation was the one to be cut. We, the participants, believe, as well as the USAE and UPHA, that it is in fact a REAL division, and thus we would like to have a yearly World Champion.

We all understand that in the scheme of life a class here or there probably doesn't change the course of history. But a 20 minute class does seem to keep a wonderfully invested group of lawyers, doctors, businesswomen, scientists, and students involved in the Saddlebred industry. I think inclusion is the key to make sure this breed survives.

Thank You,
Dr. Morgan Wolin

Dear Equitation Committee Members:

I am writing to you as a participant in the adult equitation classes throughout the South and Southeast.

As a little background, I started equitation as a little girl in a neighboring barn and then for several years I rode in equitation with Helen Crabtree. In fact, I remember Mrs. Crabtree talking about the future of equitation and what a great division this adult equitation could become. (I think in her heart of hearts, she thought she invented it).

As I went off to college and medical school, the riding was pushed into the background.

Now, however, after having graduated from Duke Medical School several years ago, I am in practice as a cardiologist and am back full speed into the riding — with equitation as my true love.

For my birthday this October my husband bought me a beautiful 16 hand bay equitation horse so that I could continue to compete on a national level. And now I find out that we will no longer have that adult class at Louisville... no warning... no nothing.

I am shocked and appalled that in spite of the number of entries, the horse show management has totally destroyed a viable division — it's certainly not for lack of participation — that class has always been full. It was a wonderful class full of outstanding riders. Now I own a beautiful expensive, Louisville quality equitation horse with no Louisville to go to. I am devastated.

Sincerely,
Kathy Adams Lang, MD

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter regarding the cancellation of the adult equitation class at the World's Championship Horse Show. Upon hearing this news I was extremely disappointed, because although I have only competed as an amateur for one season, I was looking forward to competing in this division for years to come. It has been said that the division lacks the quality of competition that the other divisions at the show offer and there are not enough entries to fill the class. On both counts I beg to differ and I find those comments offensive to the competitors of the past and present.

The adult equitation world champion title is no easier a blue ribbon to take home than is a juvenile world champion title. It may be even more difficult to win such a class because the riders have matured and have numerous championship titles to their names that help politically. Louisville is a show where the top competitors come to prove themselves and there is no reason to eliminate a division with some of the best equitation riders in the country, despite their age.

In 2006 alone, the top four finishers of the adult equitation class were members of the US Saddle Seat World Cup Team. The team went on to win the gold medal in both three- and five-gaited divisions in the World Cup competition in Parys, South Africa in December 2006. The winner of the class, Sarah Taylor, has won several world's championships in the juvenile division, proving her a top equitation rider. I was the 2006 reserve champion and hold both a world and national title in the equitation division. Brooke Jacobs, who was third, has been a three-time member of the US World Cup team and has national titles in adult equitation, and not for lack of competition. Every

top rider in the adult equitation division has been a top rider in the juvenile division and continues to be competitive today. Even the nicest horses in the division are top competitors in other divisions. The world champion three-gaited horse, The Super Nova, competed in the 2006 adult equitation class. The list of top, incredibly competitive riders and horses is far too long to eliminate the class for lack of quality.

As far as numbers go, the adult equitation class had approximately 12 entries in 2006, more than enough horses to fill the ring. If the show is looking to eliminate classes with small numbers they should consider classes that consistently have five or less entries.

I hope that you consider reinstating the adult equitation class into the World's Championship Horse Show schedule because without a class at Louisville I fear the division will begin to falter. Equitation riders work so hard to achieve goals that they set for themselves and the ultimate goal is a world championship. No equitation rider should be punished because he or she is too old to compete in the juvenile ranks but has not lost a love for the sport. Anyone who has shown in equitation at the top level will understand that you cannot just give up the years of hard work because you turn 18. Equitation is in our blood, its years and years of work and the adults deserve the 15 minutes one class at Louisville takes. An equitation world's championship is a dream for a 40-year-old just as much as it is for a nine-year-old walk and trotter.

Please consider not only the facts of the situation — quality and numbers remain in competition — but also the drive of these riders and their hearts. Adult equitation is a credible division full of riders with more passion for the sport than many other divisions in our industry. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Ashley Alden

Dear Committee:

I have been competing in equitation classes for many years. I was deeply saddened by the news that the adult equitation class has been eliminated from the 2007 prize list at the World's Championship Horse Show in Louisville. While I have not always had an equitation horse to ride, I was looking forward to competing in that class this coming year and in future years.

As you know, equitation riders, including adults, work extremely hard and spend countless hours training to be successful. The competition continues to grow each year as more and more adults continue their interest in this division.

I would encourage the committee to lobby the World's Championship Horse Show to reinstate the adult equitation class for the 2007 show and thereafter. Thank you very much.

Respectfully,
Lindsey Bade

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter as an urgent request of a fellow adult equitation rider. Upon receiving notice that the adult equitation class at Louisville has been taken away, I immediately wanted to share what I felt. I have been showing equitation since eight years of age and am now 20. I have moved up the ranks from walk-trot, 11-13, 14-17 and am now in adult equitation. I just couldn't stop showing in a class that gives such rewards and also many hardships. Every once in a while I will show in a pleasure class or two but I always come back to equitation. I am even in college now and I come home every break and summer in order to show my pleasure equitation horse around the Midwest. Recently I have been hearing discussions about how there are too little adult equitation classes and how we should start expanding into adult pleasure equitation classes as well. To now

hear that Louisville, our World's Championship Horse Show, the center of the American Saddlebred industry that is supposed to represent all that our breed and exhibitors can do is taking away a class that has been in existence since 1982, makes me confused and hurt!

Also, how unfair is it that every division within the Saddlebred industry can be represented at Louisville at any age except equitation? Children and adults can show in any type of division except equitation riders. The riders who probably put more work into themselves and their horses can only do it until the age of 17. That is ridiculous. Equitation is a way of life. Having been a part of the Equitation division for 12 years I know how hard riders have to work in order to be competitive. The horses must not only be pretty and flashy and ready to burst in the class but then must become calm and complacent in order to do intricate workouts. Riders must work on and off the horse to keep their bodies in shape in order to make their horses perform to the best of their ability, do workouts and also to be able to do no stirrups when called for. What other division in the Saddlebred industry has to have that much work put into it? And now, all of those who have made equitation their life get to see it leave our World's Championship Horse Show?

Now that I am an adult I have had my eyes set on the adult equitation class at Louisville and to hear that it has been taken away for no good reason hurts. I am very disappointed in not only the World's Championship Horse Show but also the American Saddlebred industry. As soon as I heard of what was going on I had to share my opinion. I love equitation and would fight strongly to keep it around for all ages at every show, especially at the World's Championship Horse Show. I apologize if this letter comes off as negative, but I wanted my thoughts to be known in the hopes that this decision to get rid of a division in which many people still participate in will be changed and that adult equitation will keep its place in the World's Championship Horse Show.

Sincerely,
Kristen Jurkynas

To Whom It May Concern:

It has been brought to my attention that the horse show committee for the World's Championship Horse Show has decided to remove the adult equitation class for its 2007 show. It has been my experience that nothing in equitation is easy, let alone winning.

As juveniles in the division, we are told that spending countless hours in the saddle, practicing patterns and having weekly no stirrup lessons, are the only ways to truly be competitive. This division is taken very seriously by competitors, trainers, parents and spectators around the country. This dedication to competition does not end in the juvenile division. True competitors in equitation feel the same drive and desire of those in the juvenile arena. It is because of this that the adult equitation division is growing in popularity. I know that I personally put in just as much time, if not more, practicing in preparation of showing adult equitation as I did as a junior exhibitor. I participated in a class in this past show season that had eight excellent adult equitation riders, and the National Pleasure Adult Equitation Olympic Finals had a showing of five highly talented riders competing for the honor of the gold medal. This is as many exhibitors, if not more, than the World's Championship has in some of its divisions every year. As the division continues to grow in both popularity and stature, one could only assume that it would become a goal of more and more adult equitation riders to be able to show their ability on the most prestigious stage that the American Saddlebred has to

offer, the World's Championship.

By removing the class from your show, you are taking away the chance for so many to compete at the highest level. I know it is a dream of mine to one day compete at Louisville, and I know of others that share my dream. To take away the class now, as it is gaining in popularity, makes no sense. We adult equitation riders work very hard to compete and to do well in our classes, just like anyone else who comes to a horse show. We deserve to be given the chance to show what we can do and to show that just because you are over the age of 18 does not mean that you have to stop competing in a division you have been a part of for your entire show career.

I urge the committee to reconsider its decision to remove the adult equitation class from the World's Championship. It is a division that deserves to be represented for the world to see.

Sincerely,
Shannon Koffler

To Whom It May Concern:

I am disappointed to learn that the World's Championship Horse Show has canceled the adult equitation division class in Louisville this year. I appreciate that you have taken the initiative to organize a response to this disappointment.

I started showing in the 13 and under division for pleasure and equitation. I consider myself to be a genuine and committed showing enthusiast. I am now showing in the adult division show pleasure, equitation, park, hunt seat, and western. I was looking forward to competing in this particular adult equitation division class this year in Louisville.

I feel that it is important for the decision makers to understand that it takes years of effort and planning to prepare to compete at this level. Also they need to understand that indiscriminate cancellation of such a vital class takes the heart out of someone like me. It is important that they recognize canceling such a high profile competition dilutes years of effort, commitment, and enthusiasm.

Please pass this correspondence on to the appropriate parties.

Best Regards,
Megan Mahoney

Dear Morgan,

It was with shock and disbelief that I read your letter informing all of us that the adult equitation class at Louisville has been terminated. There are many of us who are completing the part of our lives where we sought a career and/or raised a family. There are many, like myself, who after many years of watching my daughter ride, took the opportunity to follow the passion myself. I cannot tell you the number of cards and calls that I received from other adult riders after the Pleasure Olympic Finals. Many were from doctors and lawyers like you and me who said that I gave them hope that their dream of riding (again) could still be pursued.

I have watched the small "pony" classes at Louisville along with the inexplicable "8 and under W/T" and "7 and under W/T" for years. I have kept track of the number of small children that continue to compete in these classes and have found that, as a rule, they do not go on to continue showing. I cannot imagine why these classes would not be considered for termination before the always crowded, competitive adult equitation class.

I have dreamt for years that I would be able to ride in the ring at Louisville and now it appears that it may still never happen. The "people in charge" in the Saddlebred world must remember those of us that make up the adult population at the horse shows. They must give us another alternative. Why not give us a chance to compete at the highest level where our riding, not just

our horses, will be judged.

A great disservice is being shown to all of us adult equitation riders whether we are 21 or 50 years old. Believe me, I know now how absolutely hard it is for these juvenile equitation riders as I practice on school horses, memorize patterns and keep my suit "show ready".

Thank you for bringing this dilemma to my attention. I only hope that your effort is taken as seriously as it needs to be. Please count on me for any assistance or support with this matter. I join you in hoping that the adult equitation class will be reinstated.

Very truly yours,
Ana C. Marcyan, P.C.

To Whom It May Concern,

I have competed in equitation for 14 years. It has taught me a great deal about hard work, determination, and perseverance. I have just been informed that the adult equitation class at Louisville will be canceled. I am heartbroken that the show manager made this decision. Not only does this class have more participants than several other classes at the show, this class represents years of dedication to the sport. I do not believe that this class is an easy blue. I have shown in the juvenile division for years, and I have only recently begun competing as an adult. Anyone who has competed will tell you the hours of hard work it requires to compete in any equitation class. These adult participants have been supporting the industry for years, and they deserve the chance to compete at the World's Championship Horse Show.

I believe that equitation represents so much more than simply good form. I have made it a lifetime goal to perfect my own skills. Equitation riders work to do something that so many riders forget all about. They work to achieve the total presentation while maintaining grace and elegance. These riders not only look stunning on horses, they bring to the horse shows the true beauty of our sport. Our breed needs to capture the attention of the public. At Louisville, we have some of the largest crowds at any show. It is important that we show off our equitation riders, and try not to cut these important classes. An elegant rider showcases our breed, and they are too important to run out of our industry.

Sincerely,
Caitlin Pumpelly

To Whom It May Concern:

It has come to my attention that the adult equitation class at the World's Championship Horse Show in Louisville has been eliminated. Why? This class has been long standing at the show and has always had at least 10 or more riders in the class, which indicates a strong interest.

I have heard that the younger age groups will eventually be combined in some way. This is acceptable because they are not eliminating, but combining classes. These riders still have the opportunity to compete. However, the adult riders don't have the same chance. To eliminate this class would be degrading to the adult riders. What is your reasoning? If equitation is important for young riders, why isn't it important for older ones? It is an enjoyment to watch an equitation team of any age.

Equitation is the backbone of riding in which riders show the true fundamentals of horsemanship. There are over 90 adult equitation riders showing across the country. This class is the only chance for these riders to show at the World's Championships.

Look at the United States World Cup Team. These riders represent our country. Four of these women competed in the adult class at Louisville last August and then took our teams to

South Africa to win gold medals in both the three- and five-gaited divisions. What better venue is there to see and compete with riders of this caliber?

I hope this letter conveys our strong feelings about the importance of this class and that the management will take this into consideration before drawing up the schedule for the 2007 World's Championship Horse Show.

Sincerely,
Linda Quinn

P.S. I have tried to contact the show management but they have not returned my calls.

Dear Committee Members:

I cannot believe that the equitation committee members have allowed our World's Championship Horse Show to eliminate adult equitation. I have done everything I could to support those classes and I had planned that 2007 was my year to show at Louisville.

Please do something; if Louisville has to drop some classes, there surely must be a better alternative!

Very truly yours,
Jane Smithson

Dear Equitation Committee:

It is my understanding that the adult equitation division will not take place at Louisville in 2007. I personally have never shown in Louisville, but believed 2007 to be the year, as I have obtained a horse I feel competitive with.

I have been in the adult equitation division for 15 years and have always found it personally rewarding, as it is to be based on individual performance, not just the horse you have. I feel that canceling the adult equitation division will only decrease the sizes of your other performance classes this upcoming year and for years to come. I believe it is the financial support of your exhibitors that helps maintain this horse show. I have always had both performance horses and an equitation horse, if I go to show in equitation then I will also bring my performance horses. This is also the same for many of my equitation competitors.

I sincerely feel that canceling the adult equitation division at the Louisville horse show will only have the other horse shows we all support cancel the division as well. This in turn will diminish the amount of participation in our local shows and the support of the American Saddlebred. I feel that if there is no adult division for equitation enthusiasts to continue in after their 18th birthday then they will be less likely to participate in the juvenile division. I have two small children extremely interested in the American Saddlebred and I hope that you all equably decide to continue to show your support for all the divisions that the American Saddlebred and its enthusiasts choose to participate in.

Sincerely,
Dorian Stulberg-Anderson

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in regards to the removal of the adult equitation class at the World's Championship Horse Show. I feel that it's an unfair decision and that it should be reviewed again before being finalized. The adult equitation division is fairly new, but growing quickly. It has been a class at Louisville since 1982 and in the past few years, it has had a significant number of entries.

I have been showing in the equitation division competitively for 11 years, two of them being adult equitation. When someone works for something their whole life, it is one of the most rewarding experiences when you are finally able to achieve what you were working for. I have won both adult equitation finals

and I also won the inaugural adult equitation class at Louisville in August 2006. It is not fair to take the opportunity away from everyone else that has been working at it his or her entire life. Equitation riders work just as hard, if not harder, than all of the other amateur riders that show. It would never even be a question to remove one of the amateur classes from Louisville.

That class consisted of some of the top riders in the country. Everyone who got a ribbon in that class was a very accomplished rider. The top four riders were all members of the United States World Cup Team. At least six of the top eight riders in the class are riders that have won a World Championship in either equitation or performance. I do not consider that an "easy blue."

I feel like equitation does not get the respect that it deserves. Equitation riders are some of the most dedicated riders in the sport and I hope that we will still be able to have the chance to prove that at the World's Championship Horse Show. This class always has a large amount of entries and will continue to have entries as long as it is still in the show. Equitation needs to be promoted not demoted. I hope that you will review your numbers and reconsider the decision to remove this class from our World's Championship Horse Show. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Sarah Taylor

The Response

I understand that the people who are interested in adult equitation are upset that it has been deleted from the schedule of the Kentucky State Fair Horse Show, there are many reasons that I decided that it should no longer be held here. As you know the UPHA Adult Finals are no longer held at this show. It was requested that the adult class be held for one more year, 2006; I honored their request. The following are the criteria that I used in making my decision.

1. The 2006 USEF Adult Medal had three entries and there were six entries in the UPHA Adult Finals, which showed that the adult classes were only supported by a few. In fact people were solicited to ride in the USEF Adult Medal class in order to fill it.
2. A criticism of the World's Championship Horse Show is that it is too long and needs to be shortened. It is hard to cancel classes because someone or a group will be upset, but that isn't the reason for canceling this class.
3. There were 22 entries in the class, but as I reviewed them there was a pattern.
 - A. Many of the individuals had not ridden in adult equitation classes at other shows during the 2006 season.
 - B. A large number of the entries had not ridden equitation for years.
 - C. This was the only class that many of them had entered which made it inexpensive to show at Louisville.
 - D. This was the only class these entries were eligible to show in.

The 22 entries in this class had to have stalls, but there were only 15 entries that did not scratch from the class; the horses that cancelled did not return the stalls to be resold. Therefore, it potentially became a legitimate way to have school horses on the grounds.

I try to be fair, understanding, and helpful to all concerned, but decisions have to be made that are best for the show and many times they are not popular.

Scarlett W. Mattson
Manager, Kentucky State Fair
World's Championship Horse Show