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July 2019 - A Lovely Day Of Dressage



Arroyo Del Mar's Musical Freestyle Exhibition & Open House

by Sydney Callaway

Nestled in the Rancho Santa Fe hills of San Diego, the Arroyo Del Mar facilities provide a zen-esque atmosphere to its elite dressage trainers and boarders. The masterminds behind the facilities are familiar figures to the dressage world and podiums. In 2005, Shannon Peters convinced her husband, Steffen Peters, to open their own training and boarding facilities. What felt like a risky endeavor at the time now exemplifies the Peters' style: orderly, successful, and classy.

On June 15, Arroyo Del Mar opened its doors to the public for a day of dressage, food, and tours, with help from new barn manager Grace Walker. The intention was to show their beloved barn off to potential boarders and entertain the crowds with performances from their top-notch riders, including Steffen. It humanized dressage and highlighted Arroyo's playful atmosphere while equally impressing the crowds with pas de deux and a Grand Prix freestyle. Steffen showed off his WEG partner and 2020 Olympic hopeful, Suppenkasper, affectionally known as "Mopsie."




Steffen & Suppenkasper. Photo: Kim F. Miller

Tents were pitched in the field arena to host and feed crowds of riders, pony clubbers, and owners from around the San Diego area. Barn tours were given, hamburgers were cooked, and beers were opened all in celebration of this unique event.

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Event organizer Grace Walker leads a barn tour. Photo: Kim F. Miller

The barn itself boasts 68 wood stalls with high beam ceilings and pristine (rubber-matted, but it looks like cobble stone) floors. The facilities are all built with an auburn-colored wood, which adds to the rustic and homey feel of Arroyo. Amenities including a horse-sized scale, Vitafloors, and a Solarium are found within the barn. Arroyo's most alluring feature is the miles of picturesque trails surrounding the barn. Every Wednesday, the Peters trail ride their horses with the intention of preserving their mental health and fighting spirits.



Grace Walker & Linda Moeller, on Frantz EDI & Aventis. Photo: Kim F. Miller

Arroyo Del Mar possesses a human-like tranquility that permeates from the horses, riders, and workers. It is this tranquility that calmed even the anxious newcomers that Saturday afternoon. I watched as strangers soon melded into the pockets of Arroyo riders, factions became one great sea of breeches and sun visors. The original curators of this tranquility were the Peters, who were found strolling and chatting after Steffen rode. I imagine the day's events were run as the Peters run every day. Nothing felt extreme, nothing felt rushed; there was a natural flow that moved people from one activity to the next.



Grace Walker, Mette Rosencrantz & Ramona Vincente Pony Club. Photo: Kim F. Miller

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Arroyo's alluring qualities have already recruited new boarders. I especially enjoyed meeting Shayna Simon's superstar Paralympic rider, Beatrice de Lavalette.

Both women expressed their love of Arroyo, while Beatrice spoke of Arroyo's community and support, which has helped her through the ups and downs of surgery and recovery. A victim of the 2016 bombing at the International Airport in Brussels, Beatrice found purpose and meaning through dressage, and chose Arroyo as her training base in her pursuit of the 2020 Paralympics under the U.S. flag.



Matt Cunningham & Illustre. Photo: Kim F. Miller

She's in good company. Steffen has enjoyed four appearances on the USA Olympic team, and is a top candidate for another in 2020. When asked if it would be his last, he mused but declined to say where the future will bring him. Always a man with ambitious goals, he does not seem the type to limit himself, and with a track record such as his, why should he?



Mette Rosencrantz & Ram. Photo: Anna Blomdahl

Steffen's horsemanship was on display in and out of the tack. You would imagine him to be over-protective of his current star partner, Mopsie. Instead, Steffen is playful with the 18.2 Warmblood. After his freestyle, he dismounted and brought Mopsie to the side to show off a few of the gelding's tricks. After a quick untacking, a naked Mopsie used his lips to open the nearby treat bin while the crowd delighted in his obedient, dog-like qualities. Steffen provided the crowd with many impressive moments, yet remained delightfully approachable as the blue-shirted Ramona Vincente Pony Clubbers, and their mothers, timidly asked for autographs throughout the afternoon.



Shayna Simon & DQ. Photo: Kim F. Miller

I found Steffen towards the end of the event, signing another autograph as he made his way towards the covered tents. Taking a seat on the pavilion in the middle of the tents and dwindling crowds, his kind nature was fully evident. As most riders are, Steffen is a self-proclaimed animal lover. "I love the shy ones; ones you can bring out of their shells and gain their trust." Steffen spoke of the time he likes to take with horses, whether it be trail riding, grazing, or treat-seeking, he believes the bond is the most important element to a successful career in riding.



TerriSue Wensinger & Val with Dawn White-O'Connor & Bailarino. Photo: Kim F. Miller

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