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Texas Debut Reaps Rewards For Graham

The veteran Canadian captures the USHJA International Hunter Derby on Infinity 3E at the Fleur de lis Classic.

Anne Lang

IT WAS A WEEKEND of firsts for Canadian rider Hugh Graham and Infinity 3E: first show in Texas, first hunter derby for horse and rider, first-position draw for the class and first time outside the jumper realm for "Infinity."

But the pair overcame all those challenges on Oct. 31, when they chalked up the best first of all—conquering a field of 28 to win the \$15,000 USHJA International Hunter Derby at the Fleur de lis Classic in Bartonville, Texas.

Graham, of Caledon, Ont., came to the two-day specialty show with the sole intention of riding Infinity in the \$7,500

1.25-Meter Jumper Derby. However, after besting 35 challengers to win that class, Graham began contemplating the derby as another forum for the 6-year-old mare's energy and skills.

"I figured I was already here," Graham explained, "and they had a \$15,000 hunter derby. She jumps cute, and I felt she'd be competitive. At 3:00 on the afternoon of the jumper derby, I decided to enter her in the hunter derby. I'd never thought of her as a hunter before Texas. But the derby was easy for her."

The dark bay mare won both the classic and the handy rounds, earning a

score of 365—a 14-point lead on runner-up Tell All, ridden by Peter Pletcher and owned by Susan Baker. Reminisce, piloted by Colleen Acosta for owner Laurelglen Farms, placed third (349).

Owned and bred by KingRidge Stables in King, Ont., (where Graham is vice president of operations as well as head trainer and grand prix rider), Infinity is a Canadian Sport Horse (Polyfax—Eternity 3E, Class Action). The 3E designation represents KingRidge's parent company, Epstein Equestrian Enterprises Inc.

Graham competed in numerous grand prix classes on Polyfax, whom he



(David Mullinix Photo)

Hugh Graham guided KingRidge Stables' Infinity 3E to first place in the \$15,000 USHJA International Hunter Derby at the Fleur de lis Classic.



Dr. and Mrs. John Baker's Tell All, piloted by Peter Pletcher, claimed second place in the \$15,000 USHJA International Hunter Derby at the Fleur de lis Classic.

imported from Europe. Polyfax also sired Independence Day 3E, who finished third in the 1.20-meter 6-year-old division of the 2010 Jump Canada National Young Horse Series. Infinity finished seventh.

"Basically," Graham said, "that series is pretty much what she's done, although we did one 1.25-meter class in Ottawa and won. She's actually a small horse, only 15.3 hands. I didn't show her before this year; I had always thought she'd be too small for me. I usually prefer a bigger horse, 16.2 or 16.3. When you get on a small horse, it takes awhile to believe in them."

But Graham thinks this small horse has real talent. "She's got a great canter and gallop, and for a small horse, she really covers the ground," he said. "She also has a great mind. We've just been bringing her along. She's still green, but she's quite scopey and quite careful."

► Plenty Of Challenges

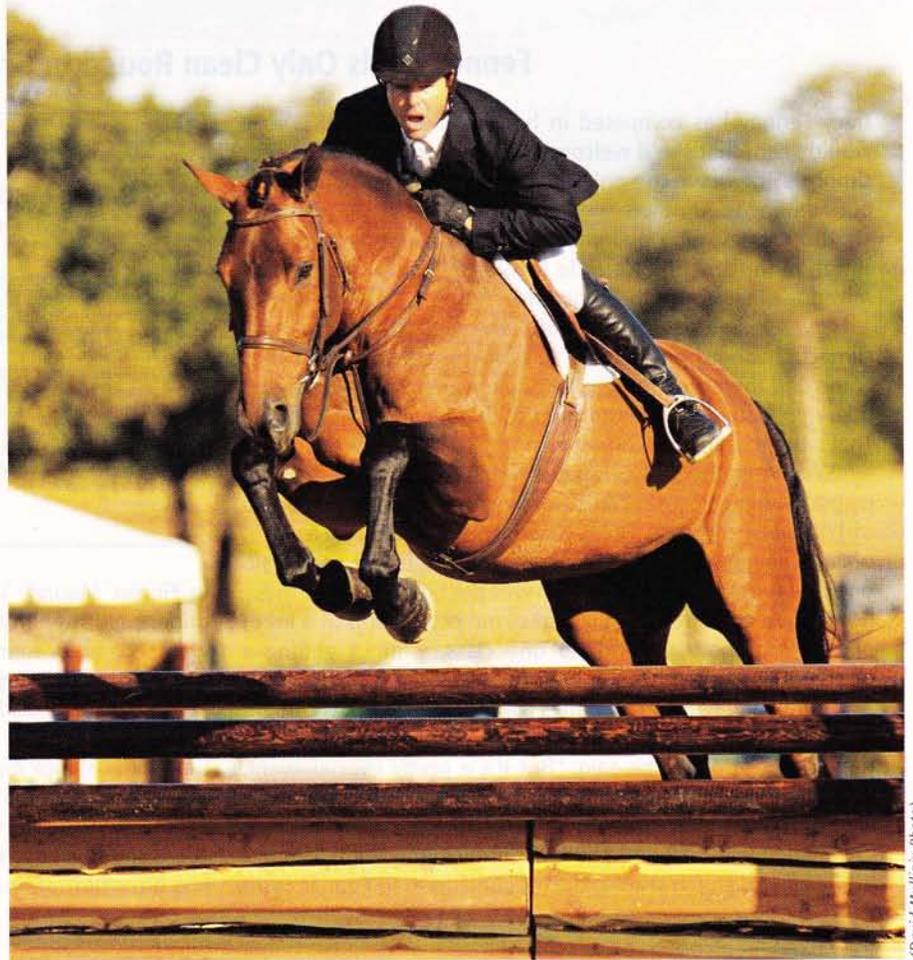
Despite his experience—he's a two-time Canadian Show Jumping Champion, two-time Equestrian of the Year, two-time Olympian, three-time Pan American Games competitor, and has ridden on 23 Nations Cup teams, in four World Cup Finals and one World Equestrian Games—Graham, 61, was a bit anxious after drawing the No. 1 start position for the derby.

"I thought, 'How can you win anything in the hunters going in as the first horse?'" he recalled. "But I walked the course and knew exactly where I wanted to go."

That included jumping all of the taller options in both rounds, although Graham acknowledged that course designer Patrick Rodes provided plenty of challenges.

"In the first round, for fences 8 to 9 you had to go between the trees, and you had to keep a steady flow to get a nice, even nine strides in there," Graham said. "If you pulled on the reins or if your horse was a little spooky, it could be tough."

After fence 9, the track required a sharp left turn to go up and over a small bank, where fence 10 waited at the top.



(David Mullinix Photo)

"It's always a little harder to figure out how to accurately jump a fence that's at the top of a hill," Graham observed. "And then there was the grob to navigate, between fences 11 and 12."

In the handy round, Graham continued, "you came down off the bank, which was pretty steep, then at the bot-

tom was a little trot jump. It was a very spooky little arched wall, and my horse looked at it a little bit—but she handled it well. Most of the other horses did, too. I don't think I'd ever trotted a jump on her before, so we practiced that in the warm-up ring."

Of the grass derby field and other

\$15,000

USHJA INTERNATIONAL HUNTER DERBY

Bartonville, Texas—Oct. 31

Judges: Mike Moran, Sandra Moran, Julie Winkel, Carl Hansen

HORSE/RIDER	1ST ROUND		2ND ROUND		TOTAL
	Score/ Height Option	Score/ Height Option	Score/Bonus/ Height Option	Score/Bonus/ Height Option	
1. Infinity 3E/Hugh Graham	84/4	82/4	83/9/4	82/9/4	365
2. Tell All/Peter Pletcher	86/0	85/0	79/7/3	81/7/3	351
3. Reminisce/Colleen Acosta	78/0	83/0	84/8/0	88/8/0	349
4. CR Haribo/Colleen Acosta	77.5/0	86/0	81/7/0	87/6/0	344.5
5. NLF Shakespeare's Rhythm/ Peter Pletcher	70/2	72/2	82/8/2	85/8/2	333
6. Usher/Michael Wallace	79/0	78/0	80/8/0	80/6/0	331
7. Neander/Audrey Watkins	74/0	73/0	76/6/2	78/7/2	318
8. Cavalli/Gary Young	75/0	74/0	74/8/2	73/8/2	316
9. Jaggermister/Britt McCormick	75.5/0	76/0	78/8/0	70/8/0	315.5
10. Weston/Alexandra Ansteth	77/0	81/0	72/3/0	74/1/0	308
11. Carson/Courtney Calcagnini	82/2	77/2	58/5/2	61/5/2	296
12. Dress Up/Jana Rodes	76/2	76/2	40/5/2	40/5/2	250

28 horses competed.



Fenney Finds Only Clean Round In Grand Prix

Tracy Fenney has competed in hundreds of jump-offs, so it would seem that she'd welcome a chance to win a class after simply laying down the only clear trip of the first round, without needing to jump-off.

But Fenney, who pulled off just such a feat aboard MTM Timon in the \$50,000 Fleur de lis Grand Prix on Oct. 31, had mixed feelings about the situation.

"Even I like to see a jump-off," she said. "It's kind of anticlimactic without one. It's no fun for the crowds when they come and there's no jump-off. People want to see horses and riders go faster, faster, faster and try harder with each round. That's the exciting part about it."

Seventeen horses competed on a flowing, 13-element course designed by Aki Yläne of Finland. "I've done a couple of [Yläne's] courses," Fenney said, "once at Ocala [Fla.] and once at Saugerties [N.Y.]. He's very, very tough. But maybe no one else went clean because this was the only class that these horses had come to do. Still, that's kind of how it is at a lot of places—you show up and do one class, without getting a bunch of practice classes in the same ring."

Show manager Patrick Rodes agreed. "Next year, we might consider doing a couple of things that would get horses in the ring ahead of time," he said. "But it's a pretty special event, and we don't want to clutter it up with a bunch of extra classes that we don't need."

Fenney and husband Mike McCormick imported "Timon," a 10-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding, to their Four M Farm

**\$50,000
FLEUR DE LIS GRAND PRIX
Bartonville, Texas—Oct. 31**

HORSE/RIDER	FAULTS	TIME	PURSE
1. MTM Timon/Tracy Fenney	0	89.51	\$15,000
2. Paradox/Theo Genn	4	84.05	11,000
3. MTM Centano/Tracy Fenney	4	85.53	6,500
4. River Of Dreams/Christian Heineking	8	83.68	4,000
5. Ariado/Theo Genn	8	86.48	3,000
6. MTM Remington/Mike McCormick	8	87.32	2,500

Also competed: 7. Airborne/H. Graham, 8; 8. Qarco VT Merelsnest/E. Bruheim, 8; 9. Santana H/W. Owens, 12; 10. S&L Walter Farley/M. Van Der Hoeven, 12; 11. Carmen/T. Font, 12; 12. TWU WUV/C. Kirsch, 20; 13. Lucio 18/F. Owens III, 24; 14. Peggi Sue/F. Owens III, 28; 15. Uno/M. Van Der Hoeven, 49; 16. Inside Out/C. Nelson, 50; NLF Trans Atlantic/E. Bruheim, E.

in Flower Mound, Texas, in 2008. This season, he's been a bridesmaid numerous times—particularly at Ocala, where he was second in four grand prix classes before winning the \$100,000 Deluca Toyota Tundra Grand Prix.

In the Fleur de lis Grand Prix, Fenney also finished third (behind runner-up Theo Genn on Paradox) with MTM Centano. Paradox and Centano each had 4 faults, while everyone else in the field had at least 8.

Fenney said Timon is full of personality at home. "You could spend all day watching him in the paddock, because he just turns himself inside out," she said. "You can't believe the antics he has—he looks like a little rodeo pony."

Fenney gave high marks to Fleur de lis Farm. "I think they're going to start attracting some really high-level horses and riders," she said. "It's like a boutique horse show, and they make a big presentation out of each class. It's just very special. And the timing is nice: You just have the one morning class and the one afternoon class each day. They go all-out on their parties and hospitality. Also it's only five minutes from our house, which is fabulous."

Fenney and McCormick will soon have more time to spend at that house while they take a break from showing until late January, when they'll head to the shows in Ocala, Fla.

"I'm sure we'll go to Europe once," Fenney said, "and probably take a sunny golf-and-scuba trip, too. It will be nice."

MTM Timon and Tracy Fenney produced the only clear round to win the \$50,000 Fleur de lis Grand Prix.



(David Mullinix Photo)



fixtures at Fleur de lis Farm, Graham said: "The footing was perfect. It was beautiful and very natural. They've done a great job. Both the jumper and the hunter courses were wonderful."

Graham also competed in the grand prix, riding Airborne to seventh. A rare opening in his hectic show schedule allowed Graham to come to the Fleur de lis Classic. He participated in the event (which debuted last year) at the urging of his friend and Fleur de lis Farm trainer, Wendy Thompson.

"Wendy invited me last year, and I couldn't make it," said Graham, "but I heard great reports about it from other riders who went, so I made the time to come this year. And I'd definitely like to come back again."

► A Rough-and-Tumble Start

Graham's foray into the equestrian world began when he was 12 and living on his parents' "hobby farm," where they kept cattle.

"My dad bought my sister a pony," Graham said, "but I turned out to be the only one in our family who was interested in riding. Every morning, I'd ride the pony ¾ mile to the school bus. I'd jump off, and he'd run as fast as he could back home. His feed would be waiting, and my mom would just shut the stall door after he came home."

At age 14, Graham started riding junior steers (a tamer version of bull riding) at rodeos.

"Even though I was champion in Ontario that year," Graham remembered, "I got bucked off a lot. Then I switched to calf roping and was champion in 1965. In 1968, while I was competing in New York, my roping horse fell on me and broke my leg. I never went back to calf roping."

Instead, following high school graduation, Graham went to work for renowned Canadian rider Jim Day, which led to his own career in show jumping. His passion for the sport has caught on with daughter Laurel, 22, who—between journalism classes at Griffith College in Dublin, Ireland—rides with Robert Splaine, chef d'equipe for the Irish show jumping team.

BARTONVILLE, TX—OCT. 30-31.

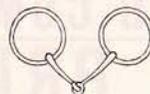
▲ **Jpr. Derby** - 1. Infinity 3E, KingRidge Stables; 2. CR Gardenia, C. Beecherl; 3. Zarafa, Blue Wolf Farm.
▲ **Child./Adult Jpr. Classic** - 1. Soprano, J. Richardson; 2. Amadeus, Equipro Investments Inc.; 3. North Atlantic, A. Kartsotis.



(David Mullinix Photo)

Soprano, ridden by Bethany Bolen and owned by Jamie Richardson, topped the children's/adult jumper classic at the Fleur de lis Classic.

TIDBITS



- Bethany Bolen of The Woodlands, Texas, won the children's/adult jumper classic. Bolen, 15, was aboard Jamie Richardson's Soprano in only her third show on the horse.
"Bethany rode smart, knowing that only a few had gone clean," said Bolen's trainer Will Roberts. "She made some good turns, and she rode to win. It helped that the horse is a veteran, so he wasn't fazed by being in an unfamiliar ring."
After rising through the pony ranks, Bolen acquired a horse and entered the junior hunter division in 2009.
- Louisiana natives Porter and Ashley Trimble own the 30-acre Fleur de lis Farm, which they bought in 2008. Their interest in developing an equestrian facility was inspired by daughters Audrey, 17 (who currently shows in the low junior jumpers), and Camille, 13 (who is starting in the children's hunter and children's jumper divisions). Every detail on the property is state-of-the-art, including the sophisticated all-weather footing in the grand prix ring and the top-quality grass in the derby field.
"It's one of the most beautiful places you've ever seen," said show manager Patrick Rodes. "The facility isn't set up to host a full-sized horse show, but it's perfect for special events like this."
A Saturday evening gala, Calcutta and Sunday luncheon all benefited the Naval Special Warfare Foundation.