



Pletcher Is Right On Target At Texas Shoot-Out

The veteran professional lassos the top four spots in the hunter derby.

Anne Lang

AS PETER PLETCHER entered the ring on Valobra in the first round of the \$10,000 USHJA International Hunter Derby at the Texas Shoot-Out on April 29, he thought everything was in place to ensure a smooth trip aboard the 6-year-old Oldenburg gelding.

But before the pair even picked up a canter, "Ike" started to vigorously toss his head.

"Something blew into his ear just as we walked into the ring," said Pletcher of Magnolia, Texas, "and he was shaking his head throughout the entire course! He just couldn't get rid of it. But still, he

hung in there and just kept going. When he was close to the jumps, it was like he was saying: 'OK, one ear is off to the side, but the other one is paying attention, so let's go.'"

Pletcher opted to skip the taller options in Ike's classic round—content to qualify for the handy round in a comfortable fourth place, having scored an 85 and an 89 from the judges. Returning for the handy (Ike having since evicted the ear invader), Pletcher jumped two of the bigger option fences, "but not the two-stride in-and-out, which was just too close to the in-gate," he said.

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Those calculated choices—combined with the handsome gray's impressive way of going and some snappy tight turns—added up to a win in the handy



(Brent Eriksen Photo)

Peter Pletcher took home first through fourth place in the \$10,000 USHJA International Hunter Derby at the Texas Shoot-Out, winning aboard Eva Bisso's Valobra (pictured).



\$10,000 USHJA INTERNATIONAL HUNTER DERBY Tyler, Texas—Apr. 29

Judges: Panel 1: Kenny Krome, Pat Dodson; Panel 2: Keith Hastings, Pat Bostwick

HORSE/RIDER	1ST ROUND		2ND ROUND		TOTAL
	PANEL 1 Score/ Height Bonus	PANEL 2 Score/ Height Bonus	PANEL 1 Score/Bonus/ Height Option	PANEL 2 Score/Bonus/ Height Option	
1. Valobra/Peter Pletcher	85/0	89/0	86/6/2	90/9/2	369
2. Tell All/Peter Pletcher	85/1	87/1	85/8/2	86.5/8/2	365.5
3. Refined/Peter Pletcher	87/1	84/1	82/6/2	85.5/7/2	357.5
4. Carlano/Peter Pletcher	86.5/0	86/0	86/5/1	86/5/1	356.5
5. CR Carolato II/Jordan Siegel	84.5/4	81.5/4	83/4/4	83/4/4	356
6. Ovation/Courtney Calcagnini	84.5/4	83/4	74/8/4	78/8/4	351.5
7. Alezzio/Mary Riggs	84.5/0	81/0	84/6/0	88/6/0	349.5
8. Shine/Liza Richardson	84/0	88/0	79/8/0	78/7/0	344
9. Dominick/Peter Pletcher	81/2	79.75/2	83/8/2	76/8/2	343.75
10. Stella/Courtney Calcagnini	87/0	82/0	79/4/0	85/4/0	341
11. Day Dream/Taylor Reid	83/0	85/0	77/6/0	72/6/0	329
12. Carson/Courtney Calcagnini	86.5/4	91/4	45/8/4	45/5/4	296.5

32 horses competed.

and first place overall on the horse owned by Eva Bisso of Houston. But Pletcher's winning ways transcended Ike's coup: The trainer and veteran derby rider also finished second on Susan Baker's Tell All, third on Sparky Frost's Refined and fourth on Andrea Ramirez's Carlano.

Early on, one particular rider gave Pletcher a run for his money in the 32-horse field, which competed in the expansive main ring at the Texas Rose Horse Park in Tyler. Fellow trainer Courtney Calcagnini of Pilot Point, Texas, won the classic round on Carson, owned by Kristen Blomstrom, and was second in that class on Taylor Reid's Ovation. However, a rail in the handy knocked Carson down to 12th place overall, while Ovation ended up sixth.

Of the derby course set by show manager Patrick Rodes, Pletcher observed: "It had a nice flow to it, although there were some difficult options, for sure. In the first round, the 4-foot two-stride was really close to the in-gate, which didn't make it very promising for some of the horses. I think [Calcagnini on Carson] was the only rider who tried it, and she won the class. But the options and everything else were pretty much right on."

The sweeping classic course offered plenty of opportunities for hand-gallops, but the first half of the handy called for a series of tight twists and turns. "The handy jumps came up very, very quickly," Pletcher acknowledged.

Following fence No. 1 was a trot fence, to which riders could take a tight turn or make a bigger loop for the col-

lected approach. "It gave you a little more advantage if you chose the tighter turn, as I did," Pletcher said.

Rodes also challenged horses and riders with a walk-through element—a chute formed by two wooden gates. "But since the opening was pretty wide and inviting, no one really had trouble there," Pletcher said.

► Calm And Courageous

Pletcher has trained Ike for two years, ever since buying him from Philippe Jully in Germany. "He'd been doing a little dressage over there and had just started jumping a little bit when we bought him," Pletcher said. So he brought Ike along at a moderate pace, successfully showing him in the pre-green divisions in 2010 and easing him into the first year green working hunters this season.

The strategy paid off, as Ike was reserve champion in the first years during Week 2 of the FTI Winter Equestrian Festival (Fla.) and champion at Pin Oak II (Texas) last month—where he also finished fourth in the hunter derby, his second attempt at such an event.

"He's one of the bravest horses I've ever ridden," Pletcher declared. "He will try anything, anywhere. He's very straightforward—in fact, the spookier the course, the better he goes. I thought from the beginning that Ike would turn into a nice derby horse, and sure enough, he has."

Pletcher also predicted that Bisso will be riding Ike in the adult amateur

hunters very soon. She was inspired to name the gelding after a Houston jewelry and antiques store owned by close family friends.

A horse with a bit deeper résumé is runner-up Tell All, who finished 10th with Pletcher in the *Chronicle of the Horse* USHJA International Hunter Derby Finals in Kentucky last summer. "Ruby" has been very competitive in the derbies. She's been a bridesmaid several times," Pletcher said of the 11-year-old Holsteiner mare (Contagious—Gitte).

Baker, who brought Ruby to Pletcher in 2009, rides her in the older high amateur-owner hunter division, in which the pair won the championship at the Spring Gathering (Texas) in April. Baker also campaigns another hunter and a jumper.

Pletcher said he's confident Ruby will compete at the derby finals again this summer. "She's good at everything," he said. "From the juniors to the amateurs to the derbies, she's just a great horse. She's super-easy, super-quiet and always tries her best."

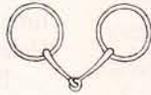
► Up And Coming

The third-placed ribbon collected by "Rooster" signified a positive development for "a horse that's really started to come into his own," Pletcher said of the 6-year-old Holsteiner gelding (Aco-detto—Rosalie). "Like Ike, I think Rooster didn't have a lot of jumping experience when he was imported. But he's a Steady Eddie now and has some scope to him, so eventually he ought to be able to handle all the higher options in the derbies."

Pletcher started working with Rooster two years ago when Frost brought him to Pletcher's PJP Farms. "Last year we started him in Florida, where he did the pre-greens," Pletcher recalled. "Then he moved up to the first years this year." Pletcher and Rooster were champions in that division at the Shoot-Out.

Frost also has shown Rooster—first in the adult amateur hunters, then moving up to the younger low amateur-owners at Pin Oak II. At the Shoot-Out, they were reserve champion in that division. Frost, who lives in Houston, has been balancing post-graduate work with her riding, having recently earned a master's degree from Rice University (Texas).

TIDBITS



- Christian Heineking of Wylie, Texas, won the \$25,000 Texas Shoot-Out Grand Prix on NKH LLC's NKH Barbosa, the only horse to go double clear in the jump-off over a course designed by Kenny Krome. Heineking also claimed third on Kai Handt's River of Dreams, while the runner-up was Martien Van Der Hoeven on Uno, owned by Cindy McCampbell-Wilkerson.

\$25,000 TEXAS SHOOT-OUT GRAND PRIX

Tyler, Texas—Apr. 30

HORSE/RIDER	FAULTS	TIME	PURSE
1. NKH Barbosa/Christian Heineking	0-0	49.08	\$7,500
2. Uno/Martien Van Der Hoeven	0-4	46.92	5,500
3. River Of Dreams/ Christian Heineking	0-7	54.44	3,250

19 horses competed.

- Jessica Zienkiewicz of Round Rock, Texas, swept the amateur-owner hunter, 18-35, division, winning champion on Optimized and reserve champion on Perico, on whom she also won the amateur-owner hunter classic. Zienkiewicz is trained by Steve Hummel.
- Taylor Sutton of Austin, Texas, captured the large junior hunter, 15 and under, championship and the junior hunter classic aboard her horse MTM Braggin Rights. Kelly Lorek is Sutton's trainer.
- Both of the respective champions in the two children's hunter divisions also won the classics in those divisions. The riders were Camila Trejo of Irving, Texas, on her horse Redfield in the 14 and under division and Libby Hardeman of Austin on her horse Calliope Rose in the 15-17 division. Trejo is trained by Debbie DiVecchia, and Hardeman by Susan McMorris.



(Brent Eriksen Photo)

Christian Heineking and NKH Barbosa jumped to blue in the \$25,000 Texas Shoot-Out Grand Prix.