

Fellers Wins Head-To-Head Jump-Off In The \$75,000 Footing Unlimited Grand Prix

Equestrian News Release

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Indio, CA – February 26, 2006 – The total number of faults after the \$75,000 Footings Unlimited Grand Prix was staggering, to say the least. From the class of 35, Rich Fellers and McGuinness became the only duo to leave fences untouched and stay on pace. They vigilantly snatched the win in a head-to-head jump-off of against John Pearce and Urioso, who won the \$75,000 HITS Grand Prix three weeks ago.

But the fact that only two horses navigated the first round without fault doesn't necessarily represent the performances of those who showed. On the contrary, the talent was phenomenal; it had to be to face such a course.

Olaf Petersen, two-time Olympic course designer from Seefeld, Germany, presented a masterful maze of questions that challenged every aspect of the horses' and riders' abilities. "Olaf is a master," said Fellers. "I walked the course and talked to several riders and I said, 'that course designer knows something that we don't know yet in our careers.' Maybe we'll know it when we're at his level."

Fellers commented that he didn't find the course as obviously difficult as it initially appeared, rather the layout subtly kept riders guessing where tricks were hidden. When all was said and done, that subtlety was what made the course so demanding.

Approaching the fences of question, jump 12 presented the most difficult challenge. Its rails seemed abnormally attracted to the hooves of horses. This tight vertical/oxer/vertical combination prevented most of the class from advancing and required a clever approach.

With the first trip of the jump-off, Pearce and Urioso finished with 41.86 seconds on the clock. They managed to decode the tricky triple combination, but the final fence, a 5' 1" vertical, lost a rail as the pair passed. "I should have trusted [Urioso] a little more. Bad luck I guess," Pearce said. Now, Fellers had an open invitation.

After seeing that final rail fall, Fellers finalized his strategy. "I purposely went quick early on because I knew I was going to take more time on that line," he said. "It was not a massive triple and it was going toward the out gate. A course designer could have built a big triple, but Olaf was clever enough that he didn't need to build that combination huge," he explained.

Fellers' observation ultimately revealed the code to claim victory. "Olaf very cleverly sucked all the riders in to doing six strides before the triple. It walked six strides and seemed to be the obvious approach," Fellers continued. "But I took seven strides to come into it slower."

And as planned, slow and steady won the race. His time of 46.03 seconds might have been significantly slower than Pearce's, but that extra time and extra stride made all the difference.

Patience has been the name of the game with McGuinness all along. “I have to say, I’ve been more patient with this horse than I’ve been with any other in my life. He’s got the biggest heart and he will dig in and fight until the end,” said Fellers. “But I really didn’t want to take that fight and aggression out of him because that makes him who he is. There really hasn’t been anything we’ve run into that he can’t handle.”

Standing at just over 16 hands, McGuinness doesn’t seem to notice his dimensional deficit among the predominantly larger Grand Prix horses. What he may lack in height, this 10-year-old Irish Sport Horse more than makes up for in heart. “He was a star even before I got him,” said Fellers who found McGuinness dominating young horse classes in Ireland at 5-years-old. “A lot of the big-time European riders passed on buying him because he was so small and tough to ride.”

But Fellers saw his potential and put in the time and effort to bring McGuinness up to his sixth year of showing and winning on the Grand Prix circuit. The pair has earned more than \$400,000 in their career together, with 2005 being one of the most profitable years. “He won more money in the US last year than any other horse,” said Fellers. “And he did it all in 11 weeks of competition.”

Today’s World Cup Qualifier class also marked a big score in points for McGuinness and Fellers who will be among the top to compete in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, for this year’s FEI World Cup Final. But first, they will make their round at Indio’s final Grand Prix of this year’s circuit, the \$150,000 Grand Prix of the Desert, after a well-deserved week off.