

Endurance Finish

Spain's, Maria Mercedes Alvarez Ponton riding the 15 year old, Nobby, has won her third Endurance Championship in two years. HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, on Ciel Oriental and d HE Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Maktoum, on SAS Alexis, made a dash to the finish to claim the silver and bronze individual medals in that order. The finish in good time of HE Sh Majid bin Mohammed Al Maktoum on Kangoo D'Aurabelle and Sh Rashid Dalmook Al Madtoun on Rukban Dikruhu assured the first team gold medal for the United Arab Emirates at a World Equestrian Games, the first time it has been on US soil. France received Silver Team with a ride time of almost an hour behind the combined times of the UAE team. Germany took Bronze.

It is with some disappointment that I write that the US did not finish the team of three for a score.

In fact, at the end, the US finished only one rider, Deborah Reich on DJB Juniper. Deborah was the first alternate and was boosted into the mix as the individual rider at the 11th hour when previous individual, Lindsay Graham and Monk, replaced team rider Ellen Rapp. Reich did not have the experience of some of the other US riders, and this may have stood her in good stead, as she went a bit slower and finished in 18th place. The gleam of a medal on home ground lent urgency to the US and the riders were smokin' through the third loop. In a heartbeat, the US hopes were dashed when Meg Sleeper and Jan Worthington were eliminated at the third Vet Check. Lindsay Graham did not make it through the fourth loop. Heather Reynolds left in second place on the sixth loop and finished fourth, but Ssamiam did not make it through the final Vet Check and was eliminated.

Ponton's win came just seven weeks after she gave birth to daughter, Maria, and now she is truly a modern woman, juggling breast feeding with horse training and keeping fit enough to best a field of some of the top endurance riders in the world. The fact that many told her it would be an impossible task to ride at the WEG so soon after she gave birth did not dampen her enthusiasm for the endeavor. As many husbands help a pregnant wife, her husband, Jaume Puntí-Dachs, one of Sheikh Mohammed's leading trainers, kept Nobby in top shape in the last months of her pregnancy.

At the medal ceremony, Best Condition was awarded to the 15 year old French horse, Hanaba du Bois ridden by Jean-Philippe Frances.