



FIRST TRIP DOWNTOWN

BY MORGAN GEELHAAR • It had been a dream of mine for as long as I can remember to show at Indoors. This past year was the first time I was able to qualify based on the division I was showing in with my horse. My horse, Beau, helped me step up to the AA's from the Low Adults. He, like many other horses, has his own quirks, showing at indoors is definitely outside of his comfort zone. I think when a rider qualifies for this type of show experience they need to keep in mind what is a realistic expectation to set for their horse. For me, I understood that he may peak or spook while on course because this is unlike any other shows that we have been to over the past year. I think that you can not lose sight of what an incredible achievement it is just to qualify. So many people never have the chance to experience that same thing that I did. I went through a lot of personal challenges just to qualify and had to make personal sacrifices along the way. You don't get to this point on your own without the support of your family, friends, and trainer(s). It truly does take a village. You should be grateful for not only the fact that you qualified for WIHS but also the love and support that surrounded you the entire year.

Located in the heart of Washington, DC, the Washington International Horse Show is an iconic feature on the indoor show circuit. Read about three equestrians who met the challenge of qualifying for and ultimately took their first trip downtown to participate in the WIHS.

Morgan Geelhaar & Beau



FIRST TRIP DOWNTOWN

Located in the heart of Washington, DC, the Washington International Horse Show is an iconic feature on the indoor show circuit. Read about three equestrians who met the challenge of qualifying for and ultimately took their first trip downtown to participate in the WIHS.

Continued from page 44...

BY ELLA BALTUS • The night before I flew out for Washington D.C. to compete in the WIHS Adult Hunter Championships for the first time I received a text message, "Congratulations, you have been pulled off the waitlist for the 3'3" Amateur Owners!" I couldn't believe my eyes, I hadn't shown in the 3'3" since May and never in a million years did I think I would qualify to show in such a competitive division at a prestigious event like the Washington International Horse Show. The only word I can think of to encompass my entire WIHS experience is indescribable. My trainer, Emily Elek, had been describing Washington to me for close to a year, but it's just something that words cannot really capture. Between my horse literally sleeping on a closed off Washington D.C. street to nearly a hundred people taking out their phones to take pictures of my horse on the walk to the ring, the WIHS is definitely one of a kind! My horse, Z, brought everything he had to the ring for me that week and acted as if he had been there a million times. Literally nothing phased him, not even when I kept pulling up in a panic in the crowded underground parking garage turned schooling ring. He's the horse of a lifetime and I'm so happy I got to share this once in a lifetime experience with him. It's safe to say I have a new favorite horse show!



Ella Baltus & Amadeo

WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL HO

283

AMADEO

R: Ella Baltus

O: Ella Baltus

H: 84.000

LONGINES
INES



Continued on page 91...



FIRST TRIP DOWNTOWN

Located in the heart of Washington, DC, the Washington International Horse Show is an iconic feature on the indoor show circuit. Read about three equestrians who met the challenge of qualifying for and ultimately took their first trip downtown to participate in the WIHS.

BY CLAIRE TAYLOR • I first heard about the Washington International Horse Show (WIHS) when I was eight or nine years old. From that moment on, WIHS—along with the Pennsylvania National Horse Show (Harrisburg) and Madison Square Garden—became the pinnacle of horse showing goals for me. It was the best of the best: the fanciest hunters and the scopiest jumpers.

It often felt like an unattainable goal, but at the end of last year, my trainer suggested I sign up to try to qualify for the WIHS adult hunter finals. When she said this, I had to take some time to process it. Indoors always felt like it was meant for someone else; certainly not for someone busy parenting a toddler, working, and often shoehorning rides in as I drove into work or before birthday parties. However, I also saw this as a chance to focus on self-care and reaching a lifelong goal. Just setting the goal seemed like a huge step towards something I'd wanted for so long. And finding out that I qualified for the show was the realization of a dream in and of itself.

Driving into the city, I was so excited that I was babbling away to my toddler, who had fallen asleep in the backseat almost as soon as we'd left home. It takes a lot to get me to drive into downtown DC, but the show was certainly worth it.

To my surprise, WIHS wasn't how I imagined it, even after years of dreaming about competing there. I never thought about a marching band playing outside our stalls—nonstop for hours—but it did. I'd never put much thought into schooling and warming up the horses, either, but like every aspect of the show, that proved a unique experience as well. We were able to hack in the arena the night before our classes and at 5:00 am the morning of my class... which wouldn't begin until 8:00 pm. Schooling at Washington, I kept thinking, "These are the some of the best amateur and professional riders in the country in the ring with me right

now. I just wish there were fewer of them so I could get to the jump..." One thing that I definitely gained from showing at WIHS is that I cannot imagine ever having warm-up ring anxiety again. The Capital One Arena was not built for horses, so warming up entails turning to a jump set two strides out of the corner and right next to a gigantic column.

Neither my horse nor I had ever done any of the Indoors shows before this year. However, my Oldenburg, Pluto, was absolutely perfect at Harrisburg the week prior—earning 10th place—which made it hard for me to enter Washington with no expectations. Still, I tried to set attainable goals to enjoy the experience and see what it's like to show at such a high-profile show.

As I walked into the ring and looked around at the crowd and the impressive jumps, I felt a thrill that it was actually happening. Then Pluto spooked at a jump and brought me right back to reality. I ultimately let my nerves get the better of me for the first couple of jumps and didn't find the distances of my dreams. After the second jump, I remembered to breathe and focus on my canter and trying to soften my hands. I don't know that I ever did actually soften my hands, but I was able to kick my brain into gear and find the rest of my jumps. Pluto handled the show so gracefully, and I could not be more impressed with him and his performance.

I didn't win a ribbon at Washington this year, but this doesn't change the fact that getting to show there was truly a dream come true. It was the culmination of years of hard work, dreaming, and goal-setting. I did not enter the show in order to win a ribbon. I wanted the experience of competing in such an old and hallowed show, and it did not disappoint in the least. I wanted to achieve a lifelong goal, and I got over every jump in that ring and met that goal. I can only hope that I will be lucky enough to get to show there again. ■