

# STATESIDE

BY NANCY JAFFER



Photo: Nancy Jaffer

Beezie Madden rode Breittling LS to win the President's Cup for the third time.

basketball and hockey teams; it is not designed for equestrian sport. The warm-up area is tiny and features pillars that riders must work around to avoid disaster. With no parking in the area, horses are vanned to the city from a Maryland facility, in a precision operation arranged by show management. While some horses are housed behind the ring in the arena building, others live in fenced tents on the streets in the shadow of skyscrapers and among a cacophony of city sounds, including the scream of police sirens. A lot of security is required, as well as coordination with city authorities and officials.

### Horses in the city

Raising funds is a key mission of the show's directors, who are always seeking more backing to insure the show, which in the past has been precariously close to disappearing, will continue. That is important not only for the exhibitors and the audiences, but also for the people who come up out of the metro or go down the street, amazed to see horses walking on the sidewalks and stabled along the curb.

It has hosted presidents, been staged in three different venues and gone through some struggles to survive, but the Washington International Horse Show was better than ever for the celebration of its 60th anniversary in October, with compelling competition and enthusiastic audiences.

### Location, location, location

Part of the North American Fall Indoor Circuit, it is the only horse show held in the heart of a major US city. The fact that it is the capital of the country makes it even more special. Close to hotels, restaurants, museums and monuments, WIHS is also just a short walk from the White House. While the location is so much a part of its charm, it is also an expensive and inconvenient venue in which to run a show. The Capital One Center is, after all, home to

part of the International as the competition. Over the years, there have been dressage exhibitions, barrel racing that pitted jumpers against cowgirls and Jack Russell races. The latter has been replaced by Shetland pony hurdle races, complete with tiny jumps and children in colourful racing silks. The International actually started in Washington's National Guard Armory, where foreign teams would compete in the nations cup. There were always diplomats aplenty on hand, many of whom had been cavalry officers. Big name entertainment figures such as Arthur Godfrey and Zsa Zsa Gabor attended. In the early days, it was a multi discipline show with carriages, saddle horses and Tennessee walking horses; which is the breed Zsa Zsa made an appearance on. US presidents who came to watch included Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy. First Lady Jackie Kennedy designed the President's Cup. One of the most coveted trophies in the US, it is given to the winner of the Grand Prix. The ranks of those victorious at Washington include Rodney Jenkins, Ian Millar, Melanie Smith, Hap Hansen and Joe Fargis, who was inducted this year into the show's Hall of Fame.

### Unique atmosphere

WIHS moved out of the District to a modern facility in Maryland in 1975, but 25 years later, it was back in the city at its current location. One of its regular features is the puissance, believed to be the only such class held at a major show in the Western Hemisphere. The faux brick wall in the middle of the arena is a drawing card spectators, and the few riders who dare to try clearing it. "It is special to



A typical street scene outside the arena at the Washington International Horse Show.

come do it and there is always a great crowd. It is a fun night, especially when you have a horse that is pretty good jumping the wall," said Aaron Vale, who has won the class three times in a row with Finou 4 and played to a packed house this year. German course designer Olaf Petersen Jr. made his Washington International debut this year and was impressed. "I really like this show because it is in the city. It is also my first time in DC. I think it is a unique atmosphere. The show has a very good reputation all over the world and I am very excited to be here" He understands the venue's shortcomings, and designs accordingly. "You have to give them the

chance for the first two or three jumps to get the rhythm, because it is not possible in the warm-up ring," he pointed out.

### Know it matters

Washington's atmosphere is a big selling point, and it raises the level of horse and rider as they play to the fans. The enthusiasm that greeted Beezie Madden's victory this year on Breittling in the Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping Washington for the President's Cup reflected what having the seats filled means to competitors in an ambience similar to that of a Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping final. "The experienced horses know it is important when there is a crowd," said Beezie, who won the finals in April on the bold stallion.

"You need that at the end of the week, because your horse might be a little tired or a little ready to go home, but when Breittling feels that atmosphere and goes in the ring, it helps pump him up a little." Beezie went home with plenty of souvenirs, including a stack of pink boxes containing the heavenly cupcakes that are given to winners at the show, along with sashes signifying she had won everything from Leading International Rider to the style award, Leading Lady Rider, and a few more titles.

### Missing the National

Washington became even more important when the National Horse Show, which traditionally followed Washington on the calendar, departed for good from its home of more than a century at New York City's Madison Square Garden after 2001. "Always the Garden was such a cool show for us," reminisced Grand Prix competitor Molly Ashe Cawley. "I think everybody misses that and this is as close as we come to replacing that. I think it is fun to be in the city and a bit of a challenge with the horses sometimes, but nevertheless, it is a great venue." <

They often are fascinated, or simply in awe. "So many people have their first experience with a horse at Washington," said WIHS President Vicki Lowell. "It is a show that has many, many good memories for a lot of people, and we want to keep creating those memories." Georgina Bloomberg remembers that as a junior rider she did not do well at the show. "Washington was a nut I could never crack," she recalled, but when she finally won in the amateur-owner jumpers, "I remember how good it felt," she continued. "I think it is wonderful that this show is still standing and it is one of the last traditional classic indoor shows that has stuck it out. They do a great job in trying to keep it in the city," said Georgina. While it is difficult for riders who have to get up in the middle of the night to exercise their horses in the ring, she believes, "It is great to be in the middle of a great city where people can walk in off the street and be exposed to our sport."

### Hall of Fame

Entertainment always has been as much a



Photo: Abbie Rowe/White House Photographs/John F. Kennedy Presidential Library

Alice Roosevelt Longworth, daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt; President John F. Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy attend the Washington International Horse Show in 1961.