

CAPITAL CHALLENGE:

Rising to the Challenge by Providing a Safe Season Finale

By Emily Randolph
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Scott Stewart and Regent won the 2019 \$25,000 North American Green Hunter 3' and 3'3" Championship, beating out more than 140 entries from across the Green Hunter 3' and 3'3" divisions. Photo by Shawn McMillen Photography

As equestrian competitions began to resume in early summer, after months of unprecedented cancellations due to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), many took it as a positive sign that the impact on the fall show calendar, still months away, might only be limited.

However, the hunter/jumper year-end finale shows – including the Capital Challenge Horse Show, held annually at the Prince George's Equestrian Center in Upper Marlboro, MD – referred to colloquially as "indoors," present a concern that the majority of summer events do not. As their popular nickname suggests, they take place primarily indoors, which continues to be a challenge during these uncertain times.

Capital Challenge, though, has adapted to the changes necessary to run a safe and successful year-end horse show amid continuing COVID-19 concerns. With guidance from state and local government officials as well as the show facility management, the Capital Challenge team is ready to "rise to the challenge."

When the 2020 Capital Challenge Horse Show kicks off September 25 and runs through October 4, exhibitors can expect to find several important new protocols in place. Show manager Oliver Kennedy is confident, however, that the event will be able to deliver on its reputation for featuring top-level competition and a great exhibitor experience.

"Prince George's Equestrian Center has been our home for the past 26 years, and we're looking forward to welcoming exhibitors there again this fall," said Kennedy. "In order to do that, we are working closely with both the facilities team at Prince George's and with local and state government officials on protocols and guidelines that will allow us to host a safe competition."

"With a number of safety protocols in place, some things are going to look a bit different than they have in the past,

but the level of competition, the finals competitions that we offer, and the prestige of doing well at Capital Challenge are all the same," continued Kennedy.

As the host of the World Championship Hunter Rider (WCHR) Program's year-end finals and challenge classes, Capital Challenge attracts more of the nation's top hunter horses and riders than any other stop on the "indoors" tour.

Highlight events on this year's WCHR schedule at Capital Challenge include the \$25,000 WCHR Professional Challenge, the WCHR Developing Pro Challenge, and the \$10,000 WCHR Pro Finals, in which the country's top professional hunter riders go head to head in a uniquely formatted class that sees them taking turns catch-riding unfamiliar mounts.

The featured WCHR classes at Capital Challenge are coveted feathers in their caps for many hunter professionals, including 2019 WCHR Pro Finals winner Victoria Colvin. A win identifies them as one of the best of the best.

"[The WCHR Pro Finals] has meant a lot to me," said Colvin following her 2019 victory. "I've been watching it since I was riding in the juniors, and I've seen Scott Stewart win it a lot, so to be able to be someone who won it is amazing."

Capital Challenge also hosts WCHR challenge classes for Amateur Owner, Adult Amateur, Junior, Children's, and Pony riders.

For young horses, the \$25,000 North American Green Hunter 3' and 3'3" Championship is the highlight event of the 10-day horse show. In 2019, more than 140 entries



Shiloh Roseboom thanks Heavenly Patch of Blue for a job well done after earning the 2019 Grand Pony Hunter Championship. Photo by Jump Media



Martha Ingram rode Fonteyn to the win in the 2019 \$2,500 WCHR Amateur-Owner 3'3" Challenge. Photo by Jump Media



Prince Georges The Capital Challenge Horse Show makes use of the indoor arena, outdoor rings, and a covered arena at Prince George's Equestrian Center. Photo by Jeff Ridout



Cassandra Kahle and Monday Balous, winners of the 2019 \$30,000 WCHR Professional Challenge at Capital Challenge. Photo by Jump Media

contested Capital Challenge's Green Hunter 3' and 3'3" divisions, and 33 of the divisions' top finishers qualified to compete in the two-round championship class. This year, the same format will be followed, showcasing many of the country's most-promising young horses and up-and-coming stars.

In addition to its impressive hunter class offerings, part of what makes Capital Challenge unique are the facilities at Prince George's Equestrian Center, which allow the event to utilize indoor and outdoor rings and a covered arena simultaneously throughout the show.

This year, as part of the event's rigorous effort to adhere to health and safety guidelines, the covered arena and outdoor ring will house many of the under saddle classes previously held in the indoor arena.

"By using the covered arena, we can allow riders to enter through one in-gate and go out a separate exit gate to allow plenty of distance between themselves and other riders, rather than having a situation where riders are congregating on the ramp to the in-gate where they all come in and out," explained Kennedy.

Flat classes held during the show's opening Equitation Weekend, September 25-27, will also be held in the outdoor ring and covered arena.

Once again this year, Equitation Weekend at Capital Challenge will feature more equitation final events than any other year-end horse show. Schedule highlights for 2020 include the Taylor Harris Insurance Services National Children's Medal Finals, the EMO Insurance/United States Hunter Jumper Association (USHJA) 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal Final – East, the Palm Beach International Academy North American Junior Equitation Final, and the North American Adult Amateur Equitation Championship. Capital Challenge is also home to the Ariat National Adult Medal Final, to be held Friday, October 2.

Not to be forgotten on Capital Challenge's list of 2020 offerings are the jumper divisions, which include the \$10,000 1.30m-1.35m Medium/Amateur-Owner Jumper Classic, the \$10,000 1.20m-1.25m Low Junior/Amateur-Owner Jumper Classic, the \$10,000 Adult Amateur Jumper Classic, and the \$10,000 Children's Jumper Classic.

Horses competing in any of the hunter, jumper, and equitation classes will be stabled in the outdoor barns and stabling tents, with spaces left empty between neighboring barns.

The facility's outdoor, open-air stabling is proving to be advantageous for the Capital Challenge team as they work hard to ensure a safe and socially-distanced horse show atmosphere, and it is just one of many aspects of the event that the management team is grateful for as they prepare to invite exhibitors to rise to the challenge of taking on the nation's best at the 2020 Capital Challenge Horse Show.

Learn more about Capital Challenge and the 2020 horse show at www.CapitalChallenge.org.