

CAPITAL CHALLENGE

Evolving Through 29 Years of Elite Competition

In 1994, Billy Glass and Oliver Kennedy joined forces to create a unique horse show at Prince George's Equestrian Center in Upper Marlboro, MD. Little did they know, the Capital Challenge Horse Show would one day become one of the most elite hunter, jumper, and equitation competitions in the country.

Story By Sabrina Brashares, Jump Media



John French and Babylon on their way to winning the \$25,000 WCHR Professional Challenge presented by The Gochman Family. Photo by Jump Media



In 2021, Heather Williams piloted DiCaprio 3 to victory in the \$5,000 WCHR Developing Pro Challenge presented by The John R. Ingram Fund. Photo by Jump Media

Year after year, the Capital Challenge Horse Show attracts the top horse-and-rider combinations from across the United States. The competition continuously sets a high standard of performance, from the level of horses and riders, to the innovative upgrades, to the most spectacular awards presentations. Similarly, the horse show always aims to improve and grow to satisfy the needs of riders and trainers. On September 29-October 9, 2022, the Capital Challenge Horse Show will welcome exhibitors back for the 29th year of competition.

Expanding Disciplines

When Capital Challenge first became part of the fall indoor circuit, the event mainly attracted hunter riders, but it also hosted international jumpers and a World Cup qualifier grand prix. While open jumpers are no longer on the schedule, Capital Challenge became known for hosting the World Championship Hunter Rider (WCHR) Finals and became the event where top hunter riders wanted their horses to peak. Riders work all year to earn WCHR points in order to qualify for the finals.

"I attended the first Capital Challenge in 1994, and then I missed a few years while I attended college but I have been at every show since 1999," said Amanda Steege, winner of the 2018 WCHR Pro Challenge aboard Lafitte de Muze. "Right from the beginning, you had the feeling that Billy and Oliver had created something special. Over the years it has grown so much and has become one of the most prestigious shows in the country."

Capital Challenge offers opportunities for professional, amateur, junior, and pony hunter riders to take center stage in The Show Place Arena, which is one of the most welcoming indoor facilities in the country. In addition to having regular hunter divisions for each level, the horse show also hosts

WCHR Challenges where riders show off their hunter style and smoothness in a classic round.

The show also gives young hunters a chance to shine. The \$25,000 3' and 3'3" North American Green Hunter Championship has become a popular class for riders to test their up-and-coming hunters in a championship environment.

"I think this is the place where the next superstar hunters are determined," said Kennedy. "It is often the class that forecasts which horses are going to be the best First Year Green horses or the great conformation horses for the next year."

In addition to highlighting the hunter discipline, Capital Challenge has become a year-end goal for many equitation riders of various levels. The horse show is home to several adult and junior equitation finals. The event hosts the EMO Insurance Agency/United States Hunter Jumper Association (USHJA) 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal Final for the East Coast, the North American Adult Amateur Equitation Championships, the Taylor Harris Insurance Services (THIS) National Children's Medal Finals, the Ariat National Adult Medal Finals, and the Palm Beach International Academy (PBIA) North American Junior Equitation Championships.

The EMO Insurance/USHJA 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal Final for the East Coast was added to the list of equitation finals in 2017 and has become an increasingly popular class with more than 150 entries during the 2021 event.



Amanda Steege and Lafitte de Muze competing in the WCHR Professional Finals presented by The Rein Family during the 2021 Capital Challenge Horse Show. *Photo by Jump Media*

▼ **Riley Hogan** bested a field of 153 entries to claim the top prize in the EMO Insurance/USHJA 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal Final for the East Coast.
Photo by Shawn McMillen Photography



"We dedicate the opening weekend of Capital Challenge to equestrian riders of all levels," explained Kennedy. "We have had a great response to the 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal Final at Capital Challenge. I think it really exceeded expectations as far as interest and participation."

In 2017, Capital Challenge expanded to include a third division for junior and amateur jumper riders. Three years later, Capital Challenge began hosting the North American League (NAL) Finals. The five NAL divisions showcased are the Adult Jumper, Children's Jumper, Low Junior/Amateur Jumper, Children's Hunter, and Adult Hunter.

Additional Days

As Capital Challenge has expanded in disciplines offered over the years, the show has also gradually increased in days. In 2017, the horse show extended to 10 days with the addition of the EMO Insurance/USHJA 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal Final for the East Coast. The 2022 horse show will add an eleventh day to the schedule during Equitation Weekend in response to an increasing number of entries, especially in the equitation divisions.

"We are thrilled to see the continued development of equestrian competition at the Capital Challenge," said Kennedy. "The expanded schedule will help accommodate the growing popularity of our equestrian offerings and allow each of our major equestrian finals to be a featured event each day."



Scott Stewart and Ackergill Castle jumping in perfect form to win the \$25,000 KASK North American Green Hunter 3' and 3'3" Championship in 2021.
Photo by Shawn McMillen Photography

Constant Improvements

Capital Challenge is a favorite first stop on the indoor circuit for many competitors. For this reason, the management always looks for ways to improve the experience for riders, trainers, and horses so that it remains a beloved event.

"This year we are working with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission as well as Prince George's County on several improvements," commented Kennedy. "We are focusing on redoing the rings with new sand and fiber footing. The drainage system for the main schooling area and show ring outside will be updated. We will also start improvements to the stabling area."

Since the event attracts the top competitors in the country, the venue is constantly improving to accommodate the exhibitors. As needs change over time for horses and riders, Capital Challenge aims to stay up to date so competitors always have a good experience.

"Capital Challenge is a special final unlike any other competition in the country," said Kennedy. "We have a phenomenal group of supporters and sponsors that allow the horse show to attract the nation's top horses and riders. We're looking forward to another great year of seeing the best that the country has to offer."

Learn more about Capital Challenge at www.capitalchallenge.org.