

Bateson-Chandler Scores A Pair Of WEC CDI Wins With Haute Couture

By ROSE KELLER

A Florida season that began with a broken foot culminated in two international victories for Katherine Bateson-Chandler and Haute Couture, her newest Grand Prix mount and heir apparent to her longtime partner Alcazar, at the World Equestrian Center—Ocala May CDI3*. In only their second CDI, held May 24-28 in Ocala, Florida, the pair edged out stiff competition in both the Grand Prix for the Special (70.84%) and the Grand Prix Special (73.08%).

"When I had finished my test, I knew it had gone well. We hadn't had any mistakes, and I was of course happy to get a great score. But that wasn't my thought at the moment," Bateson-Chandler said. "I was just thinking, 'What a great feeling. What a great ride that was.'"

While Bateson-Chandler's regular trainer Ashley Holzer wasn't available to coach her at this competition, owner Jennifer Huber was there to help support the pair. Huber co-owns Haute Couture, or "Merrie," an 11-year-old Dutch Warmblood mare (Connaisseur—Destiny, IPS Krack C), with Bateson-Chandler. Though Huber is an amateur, she is a seasoned competitor at

the Grand Prix level, and she has a history of going above and beyond what is expected of most owners.

"[Huber] is very involved in all of her horses' lives, and Merrie is no exception," said Bateson-Chandler, 48. "She comes every day to watch my lessons, so she knows exactly what [Holzer] says to me every day. For this show, we had our marching orders, so we went off to the show without [Holzer], and it worked out really well."

The mare was trained through Grand Prix by top Dutch Grand Prix rider Dinja van Liere, who rode her in the 2021 FEI European Dressage Championships (Germany). Though Huber didn't accompany Bateson-Chandler when she tried Merrie at van Liere's barn, she put her faith in Bateson-Chandler's judgment.

"It's amazing that [Huber] totally trusted my feeling. She said, 'Look, if you think this is the horse for you, let's go for it.' So it's pretty incredible when somebody has that kind of trust in you, and it's a big responsibility," Bateson-Chandler said.



Katherine Bateson-Chandler and Haute Couture earned wins in the Grand Prix for the Special and Grand Prix Special at the World Equestrian Center—Ocala May CDI3*. Q2 PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO

DRESSAGE

Bateson-Chandler and Merrie joined forces in 2021, and initially Bateson-Chandler was aiming her for the 2022 ECCO FEI World Championships in Denmark. But the rider realized Merrie's big personality and athleticism meant they needed more time to get to know each other. Merrie is a "boss mare in the best way," who will take charge if allowed, Bateson-Chandler said.

"In the beginning I think I was trying to be almost too passive with her, because she is quite an alpha mare, and she will try and lead the whole dance if she can," she said. "I didn't want to upset the apple cart, but that also didn't go well. I had to learn to be a boss mare, and she had to learn to let me lead her a little bit. That's sort of a transition we've both gone through. Honestly, really recently, as in the last couple of months, she has finally started to feel like my horse, like she trusts me and respects me."

Bateson-Chandler described Merrie as extremely sharp, and she said she's reaped the benefits and suffered the consequences of the mare's intellect.

"She's a very quick thinker, which makes her an athlete like nothing I've ever seen," she said. "I mean, she can turn herself inside out to the point of being a little terrifying; when she spooks, she goes so fast. She's just quick at everything. But when you have her with you, I have got to say, it is a pretty incredible feeling."

The mare's alert nature proved a double-edged sword in February, however, just days before she was supposed to go down centerline. She spooked, spun and stepped on Bateson-Chandler's right foot. After begrudgingly submitting to an X-ray, which revealed a fracture, Bateson-Chandler had to spend a month out of the saddle to heal.

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"I had never broken anything before, and I really didn't think I broke my foot," she said. "I tried to ride the next day, even though everyone was telling me I was wrong."

But the ill-timed setback had an unintended upside for Bateson-Chandler and Merrie's partnership: Holzer began riding Merrie while Bateson-Chandler was out of commission, which deepened the trainer's understanding of the mare and how to instruct the team moving forward.

"Things happen for a reason: That's what I said to myself when it happened, and I'm sort of a big believer in that," Bateson-Chandler said. "The fact that [Holzer] rode her for a bit was a pivotal turning point."

Along with Merrie, Bateson-Chandler showed her longtime partner Alcazar in the WEC CDI3*. Jane Forbes Clark's 18-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding (Contango—Polina, Ferro) demonstrated his decade-plus relationship with Bateson-Chandler, scoring a 67.21% and 70.76% in the Grand Prix for the freestyle

World Equestrian Center—Ocala May CDI3* Ocala, Fla.—May 24-28

Grand Prix For The Special

Judges: E. Jane Weatherwax (USA); H. Debbie Rodriguez (USA); C. Cesar Torrente (COL); M. Maria Collander (FIN); B. Isabel Wessels (GBR)

Horse/Rider/Country	E	H	C	M	B	Total
1. Haute Couture/Katherine Bateson-Chandler/USA	69.78	71.52	70.76	71.41	70.76	70.84
2. Jubis Tenacity/Jan Ebeling/USA	67.50	70.10	70.43	70.21	71.41	69.93
3. Paxton/Katie Duerrhammer/USA	69.02	68.15	68.69	70.00	69.67	69.10
4. Fire Fly/Anna Marek/USA	70.10	69.56	68.69	67.71	68.80	68.97
5. Mejorano HGF/Kerrigan Gluch/USA	66.41	69.67	69.34	68.91	68.15	68.50
6. Indeed/Benjamin Ebeling/USA	68.58	67.50	68.47	66.52	68.58	67.93

Also competed: 7. F.J. Ramzes/L. Custer/USA, 67.84; 8. Imperial/B. Berkold/USA, 66.73; 9. Inshallah/K. Kohmann/USA, 66.32; 10. Davidoff V.H. Trichelhof/R. Moussa/CAN, 66.23; 11. Elvis/P. Ferrando/VEN, 66.04; 12. Ronaldo/V. Yarus/CHI, 65.95; 13. Hobbit Interagro/T. Ernesto/POR, 65.56; 14. Eragon Vo/N. Smith/USA, 64.80; 15. Skyfall/M. Munter/USA, 62.58; 16. Faro SQF/N. Batchelder/USA, 62.45; 17. Chiclic/R. Foster/GBR, 59.65; 18. Grison/C. Mallmann/URU, 58.82.

Grand Prix Special

Judges: E. Kristi Wysocki (USA); H. Collander; C. Wessels; M. Torrente; B. Weatherwax

Horse/Rider/Country	E	H	C	M	B	Total
1. Haute Couture/Katherine Bateson-Chandler/USA	74.36	71.17	74.89	73.29	71.70	73.08
2. Paxton/Katie Duerrhammer/USA	69.57	68.61	73.08	71.59	74.57	71.48
3. F.J. Ramzes/Lehua Custer/USA	65.63	71.80	71.27	71.80	68.29	69.76
4. Jubis Tenacity/Jan Ebeling/USA	67.87	70.10	70.53	70.10	69.68	69.66
5. Fire Fly/Anna Marek/USA	67.23	68.08	70.42	68.72	68.40	68.57
6. Mejorano HGF/Kerrigan Gluch/USA	70.42	68.72	66.17	67.34	68.83	68.29

Also competed: 7. Indeed/B. Ebeling/USA, 66.70; 8. Inshallah/K. Kohmann/USA, 66.66; 9. Ronaldo/V. Yarus/CHI, 66.00; 10. Eragon Vo/N. Smith/USA, 65.70; 11. Hobbit Interagro/T. Ernesto/POR, 65.40; 12. Elvis/P. Ferrando/VEN, 65.10; 13. Skyfall/M. Munter/USA, 64.76; 14. Davidoff V.H. Trichelhof/R. Moussa/CAN, 64.27; 15. Imperial/B. Berkold/USA, E.

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Grand Prix For The Freestyle: 1. Jewel's Goldstrike/J. Mendoza Looz, 74.41; 2. Dunensee/K. Kohmann, 68.15; 3. Alcazar/K. Bateson-Chandler, 67.21. Grand Prix Freestyle: 1. Jewel's Goldstrike, 80.05; 2. Dunensee, 72.16; 3. Honnaissance S.J./P. Ferrando, 72.12.

and the freestyle, respectively. The gelding is a joy to compete even in subpar conditions, Bateson-Chandler said.

"We had to show in the pouring rain, which made my saddle really slippery," she said. "It was a little terrifying because it was absolutely hammering rain, but he took care of me. He didn't put one foot out of place."

"I just I love him with all my heart," she added. "He's like my best friend."

Bateson-Chandler said she has prolonged Alcazar's storied career, which has included competing for the United States in numerous Nations Cups, by prioritizing his physical and mental fitness. In mid-June, Bateson-Chandler will make her annual pilgrimage to England with Merrie and four other horses to train with British Olympian Carl Hester for the summer. Alcazar will be staying Stateside for the trip.

"He owes me not a day," Bateson-Chandler said. "He gave me my three personal bests at Aachen [Germany]—I'll never forget that he gave me that, and so much more. As long as he's happy and healthy, we'll just see if it's still fun for him to go out and do it, and if so, then great. He gets to stay home this summer and have fun staying fit on the track."

As for Merrie, she and Bateson-Chandler will make their European debut this summer in hopes of preparing for next year's Olympic qualification process.

"I'm very much a show-to-show person," Bateson-Chandler said. "Of course every body dreams of the Olympics, so next year is big, but there's a million short-term things that have to happen in between now and then. I think we're going to do some smaller CDIs this summer, just to get some international exposure. Hopefully next summer we'll do some bigger international shows, and then maybe getting ready for Paris, if we're ready." 🍎



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