

US Dressage Finals

AMATEUR'S HOUR

Several adult-amateur riders win big at the 2025 US Dressage Finals

BY ALICE COLLINS FOR JUMP MEDIA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUSANJSTICKLE.COM

BIG WINNER: Adult amateur Christina Morin-Graham not only won the Grand Prix-level AA Finals titles (cover photo) but also all three small tour AA championships with her mare Ici De La Vigne





dult-amateur (AA) rider Christina Morin-Graham was the standout competitor at the 2025 US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan®. She went home with six championship titles on her trio of mares.

On her 16-year-old Damon Hill daughter, DSP Dauphin, Morin-Graham headed up both the Grand Prix AA and the GP Freestyle AA with scores of up to 72.633%. Her second small-tour horse, Mondlicht, topped the Intermediate II AA Championship and was runner-up in both AA Grands Prix.

On her small-tour superstar, the Jazz mare Ici De La Vigne, Morin-Graham was untouchable, topping all three AA championship classes on the 12-year-old with great scores, including the only plus-70% in the Prix St. Georges.

“It’s a once-in-a-lifetime thing,” said the full-time private-equity firm partner from Malvern, Pennsylvania. “I’ve never won anything at Finals before. I’d been working on the partnerships with my mares and keeping their energy up. There’s room for a lot of improvement still, but it’s all on me. There’s nothing more that I could have asked from them.”

The Mason Machine

Morin-Graham’s trainer, New Jersey-based dressage pro Heather Mason, is a familiar face at Finals who rarely goes home empty-handed, and the 2025 event was no exception. On her eight-year-old Manuskript SCF, Mason clinched the Prix St. Georges Open Championship with 70.392%. Manuskript (Jazz x Krack C) also won the Intermediate I Open Freestyle Championship on 73.325%. To say that Mason was busy at Finals is an understatement: She had a hand in helping with a staggering 28 horses during the course of the competition.

With her huge four-year-old Rock It P, Mason won the First Level Open Freestyle Championship—with the Finals high score of 77.241%—to music from the movie *Enola Holmes*. They also took the First Level Open title with 73.194%.

Two riders who also train with Mason emulated her results, dominating at Second Level.

Katrina Heilbronner rode her six-year-old Dutch Warmblood mare, Odanse GS, to 72.842% in the Second Level AA Freestyle. The private chef edited her Adele and Madonna music herself. Heilbronner, who also works

with Jannike Gray, won the 2024 Training Level AA Championship with the Franklin x Vivaldi mare.

Emily O’Neill, Elverson, Pennsylvania, captured the champion’s neck sash in the Second Level Open Freestyle on Johanna Walters’ six-year-old MW Empire with 75.798%, ridden to music by Imagine Dragons. O’Neill has ridden the Escamillo x San Amour gelding since she found him as a just-backed three-year-old at breeder Jen Vanover’s Maplewood Warmbloods.

“The test felt great, and I knew he could do it,” said O’Neill, who also runs marathons. “To have it all come together in the right moment was really cool.”

A Bugs Bunny Bonanza

A bold freestyle including double pirouettes on the first center line and a daring Bugs Bunny operetta soundtrack netted the Grand Prix Open Freestyle Championship for Kristin Wasemiller-Knutson. The ride on the 17-year-old mare Vashti, bred by Sherry Koella, earned a score of 72.25% and marked their second win in this showcase class.

“I could not have been happier with my ride; I didn’t care what the score was,” enthused Wasemiller-Knutson, who designed and edited the freestyle herself. “I always wanted to use that music, and it took me years to get it the way I wanted it.

“We’ve been second several times in this class, so it was our goal to come back and win it,” added Oklahoma City-based Wasemiller-Knutson, who trains with her mom.

In the Grand Prix Open division, Wasemiller-Knutson and Vashti finished second behind Jorge Arauz on the Lusitano London Do Vouga (65.036%). The 11-year-old stallion was bought for owner Dulce Borjas to ride; but Arauz, who works for Borjas at her Los Encinos Equestrian Hacienda in Magnolia, Texas, saw his potential. The horse had just stepped up to Grand Prix last summer, and Finals was only his third show at the level.

“It’s been an amazing journey with this horse,” said the Nicaraguan-born Arauz, who has benefitted from training with Spanish Olympian Rafael Soto as well as riders from the Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art. “We are new in this, so we had no big expectations, but we tried our best.”

Leeloo Dallas Delivers Again

Lauren Chumley and Leeloo Dallas are another pair that is familiar with the winner’s circle at Finals. They found themselves in it once again following a 68.48%



GRAND PRIX OPEN CHAMPIONS: Jorge Arauz on the Lusitano stallion London Do Vouga

test in the Intermediate II Open Championship.

“She’s green at this; she was good in the test, but she was amazing in the warmup, so that was a feeling of what’s to come,” said Chumley of her nine-year-old mare (Gaspard de la Nuit DG x Negro). “I can’t wait until I can have it all in the ring.”

Chumley bought Leeloo Dallas sight unseen as a foal from her breeder, Racheal McKinney, in Arizona. She made the nine-hour drive from her Pittstown, New Jersey, facility, to Finals with a large barn crew, including her coach, Michael Bragdoll.

Kymerly Pullen, who works for Chumley, watched her barn mates rake in titles but had to wait until Sunday afternoon to claim her own. She rode her eight-year-old Grand Galaxy Win x Rohdiamant gelding, Mojito, to top honors in the Fourth

Level Freestyle Open Championship on a score of 72.35%.

“I realized as I turned onto the final center line that I hadn’t done a pirouette to the left, so I had to add one in last-minute,” admitted Pullen, who rode to music made by Wasemiller-Knutson. “I’ve had this horse since he was three, and I love him. He’s spicy, and I have to pre-ride him in the mornings, but my goal is that he’ll be a CDI Grand Prix horse.”

Another of Chumley’s students, Mila Perry, boosted the Lauren Chumley Dressage family’s tally with two additional championship titles. Her lovely four-year-old, Jabberwocky Eden, won the Training Level AA Championship with 73.933%, while another super test scoring 73.241% secured them the First Level AA Championship—a six-hour-long class with 35 starters.

Of her mare, Perry said: “She’s unbelievable—with the best temperament ever, especially for an amateur—but it was an utter shock to win.”

Perry, who gets up early to complete barn chores before heading to work at Verizon, has owned the Jameson RS2 daughter since she was three and produced her herself.

Briscoe and Vavrick Double Up

After a mammoth seven hours of competition in the 36-strong Second Level AA Championship, detective Alexa Briscoe and her seven-year-old Lincolntime nosed ahead with 71.032%. They repeated the feat with a 71.15% in the Third Level AA Freestyle Championship.

Briscoe has owned the Londontime x Weltmeyer gelding

since he was three, but his propensity to add his own moves meant that they avoided recognized competition until he was six.

“There were a few points I had to leave on the table to get through the test and avoid a bigger issue, so I’m proud we pulled it off when it counted,” said Briscoe, who has trained with Rebecca Langwost-Barlow for three decades.

Autumn Vavrick rode Eleonora Frey’s six-year-old One de la Fazenda to the top of the leader board with 72.731% in the First Level Junior/Young Rider Championship, then secured her second win on the Valverde gelding in the Second Level Jr/YR Championship with 71.349%.

“Doing the double is pretty incredible,” said the 16-year-old USDF gold medalist from Oxford, Michigan, who trains with Laurie Moore. “I’ve never had a horse like him who’s so consistent, calm, and easygoing. We’ve worked hard this season, and this is a great way to end it.”

Matchmaker to the Finals Stars

Dressage-horse sales pro Jenny Wetterau helped two 2026 Finals champions, Taryn Anderson and Amelia Hellman, to find their dance partners.

Anderson, of Erie, Colorado, was first to go in the Third Level Open, and held the line with 71.625% on the seven-year-old Figardo (by Fürst Wilhelm).

“He warmed up kind of tight, but I went in the ring and he was just so lovely,” said Anderson. “Everything I asked him to do, he was right there, and his back was soft. He gives me a magical feeling.”

Anderson has produced Figardo since Wetterau found him as a

four-year-old with help from coach Petra Warlimont and Florida-based trainers George Williams and Lars Petersen.

Courage and belief in her horse led Virginia-based grandmother and career attorney Amelia Hellman to the winner’s circle in the Fourth Level AA Championship. She produced a 70.833% performance

from the eight-year-old mare Magnifique (by Indian Rock). She bought the horse two years ago as a green “problem child” from a sales barn in Holland, with Wetterau’s encouragement.

“I asked if they had anything a little spicier, and they showed us ‘Maggie,’” said Hellman. “Jenny rode her first and said I’d be OK, and we

AWARDS AND TROPHIES

Several prestigious awards and trophies were awarded at the 2025 US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan®.

Regions Cup

The annual Regions Cup Perpetual Plaque competition features four horse/rider teams, from across the country in designated divisions, vying for top honors and bragging rights for their USDF regions.

The 2025 winning team, with an average score of 69.826%, was **USDF Region 1:** Kathleen Herbig/Lleytonwaard (72.407%), Amelia Hellman/Magnifique (70.833%), Meagan Kelliher/Baron De Ley (69.2%), and Kymberly Pullen/Mojito (66.863%).

The Janine Westmoreland Malone Perpetual Trophy

Christina Morin-Graham and Ici De La Vigne

The Calaveras County Perpetual Trophy

Christina Morin-Graham and DSP Dauphin

The George W. Wagner Jr. Perpetual Trophy

Christina Morin-Graham and DSP Dauphin

The Lloyd Landkamer Perpetual Trophy

Ici De La Vigne, owner/rider Christina Morin-Graham

The Veronica Holt Perpetual Trophy

Jorge Arauz and London Do Vouga

The Miki Christophersen Perpetual Trophy

Heather Mason and Manuscript SCF

The Jazzman Perpetual Trophy

Kristin Wasemiller-Knutson on Vashti

The Top Hat Perpetual Trophy

Heather Mason and Rock It P

The Verne Batchelder Memorial Trophy

Manuscript SCF, owner/rider Heather Mason, breeders Carlos and Karin Jimenez.



THIRD LEVEL JR/YR CHAMPIONS: Finley Peterson on Chrevi's Camelot

clicked. They were open about the fact that she was a rearer, so we've done a lot of ground work. Once she gained security and confidence, she shot up the levels. The future is exciting."

Against the Odds

A horse that is blind in one eye and that was bought for \$15 headed up the Intermediate I Open Championship with a score of 68.676%. Christine Calao purchased the now nine-year-old gelding, Freshman SHS, as a weanling knowing that he had a detached retina; but she liked his Fürstenball x Sandro Hit bloodlines.

"He's super-talented and sensitive, with a very good brain," said Calao, who trains with Lehua Custer and Leslie Morse. "He's schooling all the Grand Prix. He's a machine, he's a rock star, and he's a barn favorite."

Residential architect Sarah Pyne's 72.9% win in the Fourth Level AA Freestyle Championship was an emotional one. Her 13-year-old former eventer, Dirhonn C, "tried to die" three years ago and has since been rerouted to dressage.

"We found him panting with a temperature of 107.3 degrees," explained Pyne, who trains with Susanne Hamilton and rode to a Johnny Cash compilation by Ruth Hogan-Poulsen. "For six weeks we couldn't lead him out of the stall because he would try to collapse. He had EHV-5 [equine herpes virus], and as a result he doesn't have very good lung capacity now, so after six years of eventing, we switched sports. I can't stop smiling the entire time I ride freestyles. I'm just excited he's alive."

Ava Noone was not sure she would make it to Finals at all. Her

horse Gucci developed two abscesses shortly before the competition and came sound only days before the show. Their trip from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, proved fruitful, and they won the Intermediate I Jr/YR Championship title with 61.618%.

"The test was not our best, but it was clean and I was thrilled just to be able to come, so to catch this win is pretty special," said Noone, 18, of the 14-year-old Dutch gelding by Brillant. "He's a saint."

New Combinations Excel

Valerie Golden began riding the 19-year-old Brunited (United x Jazz) only last summer, but in that time he took her to her first Great American/USDF Regional Championships and then to Finals, where they won the First Level AA Freestyle Championship with 72.343% to a *Last of the Mohicans* compilation.

“He was tired, so it took a lot for me to ride him through the test, but he was wonderful,” said the full-time equine accountant from Belville, Ohio, who trains with Jennifer Roth. “I was honestly just pleased that we got around the test without spooking; that was awesome.”

Katie Cumberford teamed up with the Danish mare Schnell’s Alley Cat in April 2025, and they topped the Fourth Level Open Championship with 70.972% despite a loud crash mid-test. She describes the horse she found through Caroline Roffman as her “dream horse” and has been helped by regular trainer Emily Miles in Kansas City, Missouri.

“A table fell over in our extended canter, so she swapped leads,” said Cumberford of the 10-year-old by the Ampère son Antobello. “But even with that, she’s just so

good—the same horse to ride at home as at shows.”

Tiny Margins

Just 0.4 percentage point separated the champion and reserve in the Second Level Open. Nora Batchelder nosed ahead with 71.389% on Gnomonic, Anna Jaffe’s eight-year-old.

“Our warmup was amazing, and even though we’re not quite getting our best work in the ring yet, he’s so talented he still does really well,” said Batchelder, of Williston, Florida, who has had the ride for a year on the Goldberg x Fürst Romancier gelding. “He’s definitely going to be a Grand Prix horse in future.”

It was also tight at the top in the Third Level Open, with local rider Nicole Harrington prevailing. All three top rides scored over

72%, with Harrington besting the pack with 72.725% on the eight-year-old Destano x Belissimo M gelding Despacito Corazon. He was imported as a six-year-old and bought by Gail Garvin.

“It was nail-biting to see if my score could hold,” said Harrington, who trains with Scott Hassler and runs a training barn in Pleasant Plain, Ohio. “He was behind in his training, but he’s been a fabulous horse who keeps showing up to the plate.”

The top six in the Training Level Open Championship all scored over 70%, with Cody Armstrong Pierce emerging best of the 17 entries with 71.4% on Sandie Gaines-Beddard’s five-year-old Floriscount x De Niro mare, Rhapsosfloria.

“There were a lot of wonderful professionals with great young horses, so I felt this class was

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probably going to be about which young horse could be the most relaxed in this environment,” said Pierce, whose preparation included hacking on trails through water and her very busy 1,500-acre farm, as well as remote training with Charell Garcia and Jim Koford.

Going back to basics has worked wonders for Lucy Tidd’s Third Level AA champion, Kayla. The spicy 10-year-old mare by Ferdeaux pulled off a 68.958% test, the best of the 24 starters.

“She’s really hot, so with my trainer Jeremy Steinberg we spent the last year going back to work on the basics,” said the Maryland-based small-animal veterinarian, who has owned Kayla for six years. “She’s a lot of fun, like a little sports car.”

Young Talent

Thirteen-year-old Grace Christianson’s mature riding won out in the Training Level Jr/YR Championship, which she and Karissa Gearen’s six-year-old Outsider DRH (Spielberg x Apache) rocked with 71.467%, beating 15 rivals.

“A lot of the hard work we’ve put in with Outsider is starting to finally pay off,” said the Indiana-based rider, who trains with Jennifer Conour. “I’m thankful for the opportunity to ride him; it feels surreal. My expectations were not super high, since he’s still a baby. This is only his sixth show ever and his first big win.”

Ella Fisk and nine-year-old Quaresma set the bar in the Fourth Level Jr/YR Championship, claiming the title with 67.778%. She has owned Quaresma (Quantensprung x Fürstenball) for two years after sourcing him in Germany.

“We were Third Level Junior/Young Rider champions here last year, so it’s a really cool full-circle

moment to be back here at the next level a year later,” said the 17-year-old from Aiken, South Carolina, who trains with Laura Abner. “He has so much talent for the higher levels, so I’m excited for the upcoming year.”

Friends Ryleigh Koch and Finley Peterson picked up a title apiece. Koch clocked up a 67.696% on Ruben D4K to claim the Prix St. Georges Jr/YR Championship, and Peterson rode Chrevi’s Camelot to 68.583% for the Third Level Junior/YR title.

Koch initially acquired Ruben D4K, a 15-year-old gelding by Rubinero, through the Dressage4Kids program, and after three years was able to buy him in 2025.

“He has become really special for us,” said the 19-year-old from eastern Pennsylvania, who trains with Cara Klothe. “He’s taught me a lot, and this win is a huge marker for us.”

Peterson, 16, of Woodstock, Vermont, found Chrevi’s Camelot (by Tailormade Lancelot) in Florida when her family was looking for a potential FEI Junior horse for her.

“The moment I sat on him, it clicked,” said the rider, who trains with Ruth Hogan-Poulsen. “He always tries his heart out.”

The Finals, which since their inception in 2013 had been held at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, moved to a new facility last year. World Equestrian Center in Wilmington, Ohio, hosted the October 30-November 2 competition and will be the site of the 2026 edition, October 29-November 1.

