

FEI WORLD CUP LAS VEGAS APRIL 2009



Photo Credits: Tish Quirk

MEREDITH MICHAELS-BEERBAUM CLINCHES THIRD ROLEX FEI WORLD CUP JUMPING TITLE!

Defending champion Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum secured her third Rolex FEI World Cup Jumping title with consummate ease at the Thomas & Mack Center in Las Vegas where America's McLain Ward finished second ahead of The Netherlands' Albert Zoer in third. The sheer class of the German winner's 16-year-old gelding determined the result on a day when Anthony D'Ambrosio's course building tested many to the very limit. For Shutterfly however limits don't seem to exist. No fence is too high or too wide, and the clinching second-round run from this partnership was an exhibition of near-perfection.

Stamina and concentration played a major role in the closing stages, but most of the leading contenders proved equal to the challenge and none of the top three finishers lowered a pole throughout three days of world-class jumping. Lying fourth however, America's Rich Fellers and Flexible slipped two places with a double-error and then disappeared from the reckoning when adding another 22 faults second time out.

Switzerland's Christina Liebherr produced a career-defining performance when anchoring the runaway No Mercy to great

effect in both rounds and this moved her up from fifth to fourth in the final analysis, but the real battle was played out among three great proponents of the sport. Perhaps Ward and Zoer are a little unlucky that their two heroic mounts are at the top of their game at the same time as Michaels-Beerbaum's extraordinary horse. The American rider's mare Sapphire and the Dutchman's great gelding Oki Doki are exceptional by any measure, but Shutterfly has once again shown that he is in a class of his own.

Michaels-Beerbaum talked about her preparation before going into the ring which is also a team effort. "Because Shutterfly doesn't like to do too much it's a nerve-control thing for me - it's not easy to do very little before going in to jump at a big championship," she said. "I try to keep him happy, my husband Markus tries to keep me calm and my groom also keeps a rein on me," she explained. With Geneva, Switzerland selected for the Rolex FEI World Cup Jumping Finals next year and Leipzig, Germany, Hertogenbosch in The Netherlands and Goteborg in Sweden scheduled for the following three seasons while the Dressage will go to Hertogenbosch in 2010 there has been much speculation about the equestrian highlight returning to Las Vegas.

America's Steffen Peters and Ravel claimed the 2009 Rolex FEI World Cup Dressage title with a show-stopping Freestyle test that raised the roof of the Thomas & Mack Centre in Las Vegas. The



STEFFEN PETERS AND RAVEL DANCE TO VICTORY IN THE ROLEX FEI WORLD CUP DRESSAGE FINAL!

44-year-old rider from San Diego, California edged Germany's double World Cup champion Isabel Werth into runner-up position with an inspirational performance, while nine-time winner Anky Van Grunsven from The Netherlands had to settle for third. This was just the second-ever U.S. victory in the 23-year history of the Dressage World Cup - the previous American to take title was Debbie McDonald who officially retired the great mare Brentina who carried her to World Cup success in 2003. Peters was chasing Werth's leading score of 84.500% when third-last into the arena. The German rider's 15-year-old gelding Satchmo can be nervous and fearful on occasions, but he kept his cool to produce spectacular movements this time out and snatched the lead from Dutchman Hans Peter Minderhoud and Exquis Nadine who were real crowd-pleasers; there had been something magical about Peters and Ravel. **HT**