

# 2010 OHTA Eventing Championships at Dreamcrest – How did we fair?

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*By: Peter Gray*

Another eventing season is all but over; it has been a terrific summer thanks to our hard working event organizers who make such a huge contribution to the sport by providing these fun filled weekends and fantastic competitions!

Assisted by the highly successful and innovative “One event at a time” programme, financing from the OHTA assisted Dreamcrest in putting on an impressive display of what a provincial Championship course should offer. The courses were perfect; beautifully built cross country jumps with a clever Championship type challenge involving either the terrain or technical design of the course. It seemed all of the difficult combinations had alternatives for the more cautious or less experienced horses or riders.

I had the privilege of judging the “Cross country style award”, a very worthwhile educational competition backed by the OHTA. I was able to observe every cross country ride with a critical eye and get a really good idea of the standard of cross country riding in Ontario!

My interest in analysing these types of performances actually began over 2 years ago when I became the National Safety Officer for Canada and with that role, report to the FEI on the “state of the nation” in our country. At coaching symposiums and at National congress I have been harping on about the correct- and safe- technique for riding across country.

So how did we fair at Dreamcrest? I am pleased to say that there was not a single example of unsafe riding during the entire competition and the improvement in cross country riding (the correct balance, speed and rider position) is overwhelming in all levels. This is a healthy sign of the good education that is available in Ontario.

However! Did you notice the disappointing number of finishers at the preliminary level and at all levels, our province's best Championship competitors finishing with cricket scores at the end of the weekend. While there is now good riding style and safe technique shown for cross country, I would say the horses at all levels are not adequately trained to do the questions with ease, that are asked at this level. In other words, our training is not up to standard.

In the training levels as a group, 63% of starters finished the whole competition. At pre-training those percentages improved to 83%. Compared to the recent US Eventing Championships the percentages of finishers was actually very similar at the training and pre-training levels, but what we do not have compared to our counterparts south of the border, is competitors consistently finishing on very low dressage scores with nothing to add.

To summarise, we have similar percentages of finishers at the respective levels as is seen in the US, but we are incurring many more penalties throughout the 3 phases of competition; we just don't see the low scoring top 10 on the leaderboard . This tells me one of two things: that horses in Ontario are upgrading too quickly and not perfecting the required skills before advancing to the next level, or that coaches need to tighten up on the standard of their student's performances in all 3 phases.

How is this accomplished? Education!

We are so lucky in Ontario to have some of the world's best clinicians visit us every year. These clinics should be audited by coaches; in addition, we have some very successful coaches who are resident here year round and available for mentoring. It isn't only the riders that need to attend these educational opportunities! I would like to challenge all coaches to attend some professional development of their own.....and there is no time like the present! If coaching is your profession, further education is a natural progression to advance your own training skills.

PSG

