

**American Connemara Pony Society at the
2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games**

by Susan McConnell, Chair for the WEG Committee

WEG: The Alltech Experience and Impact

Until 3 years ago, Alltech was a name few people in the horse world knew, even though Alltech owns several brands of horse feed and supplements. Now, thanks to the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games (September 25 – October 10, 2010) in Lexington, Kentucky, the company has received brand recognition. CEO and founder Dr. Pearce Lyons has already signed a memo of understanding to be the title sponsor of the 2014 World Equestrian Games in Normandy, France.

WEG: By the numbers

The Chronicle of the Horse (November 5, 2010 issue) reported that there were 752 horses and 632 athletes from 58 countries who attended the 16 days of competition at WEG, 507,022 spectators, 62,707 school children and 6,000 volunteers. There were 81 medals awarded in 8 World Championships (reining, driving, dressage, eventing, show jumping, endurance, para-dressage and vaulting). NBC showed 8 hours of TV coverage over three weekends, while Universal Sports Network showed 15 hours live. The WEG's website coverage received another 1.5 million views. The Kentucky government spent \$102 million on improvements to the 1,200 acre Kentucky Horse Park. Alltech spent \$10 million for the title sponsorship and another \$22 million to ensure financial success. The pre-estimated economic impact of the WEG was \$167 million.

These are unprecedented numbers for US horse sports.

In addition to the stadiums for the 8 World Championships, the WEG organizers set aside a large area next to the International Museum of the Horse and the Horse Park's Visitors Center called the Equine Village and Village Arena (180' x 200'). Spilling out into the training track and infield were individual tents for breed organizations, sporting organizations, and clinicians from all over the world. Daily, thousands of people were milling about visiting the tents and attending the continuous, free demonstrations, clinics and performances (10:00AM – 6:30PM).

The American Connemara Pony Society was in booth #30 of the Equine Village – ideally located beside the Horse Park Visitor's Center, and booths for world renown, Irish vet, Brendan Furlong, DVM, the United States Pony Club, Goresbridge Horse Sales (Ire) and the Irish Draught Horse Society (NA).

WEG: Connemara Performers

Over the two weeks of WEG, the ACPS had 14 purebred Connemara ponies giving daily demonstrations in dressage, eventing and driving. There were stallions, geldings and mares – buckskins, greys and bays – ridden by Junior and Senior riders. The ACPS showcased the Connemara Pony as a useful, multi discipline, working pony, plus a pony that can learn "tricks" or jump a picnic table with silverware, plates and glassware! Melanie Trimper of MMT Communications (Pennsylvania) organized green jackets, navy blue and green monogrammed polo shirts, matching saddle pads and ear veils for the demonstrations. The ACPS provided these keeper items for all the riders and drivers. Many thanks to the following Connemara Pony owners and riders/drivers for bringing their ponies from "near and far":

*Aille Coretca (Massachusetts) Lee Gregory and rider, Kate Alderfer

Conneleigh Raney McMor (Vermont), owner Ted Saggese and rider, Cailin Saggese

Grey Haven Pdraig MacDaire (Ohio), owner Stephanie Burk and groom, Keith C. Lewis

Greystone's Adirondack A'Herne (New York), owner Cindy Fletcher

Killian (Vermont) owner, Michele Sturm and rider, Michaela Whitty

Loughlin's Journey (Ohio), owner Martha Slamer and groom, Sarah Slamer
*Patty's Look At Me (Virginia) owner, Marian McEvilly and groom, Sarah McCrea
Ridgetop Windy City (Virginia), owner Karen McIntyre Welch and groom, Christopher Welch
Shadey Hill's Oscea (Kentucky) Debbie Shade and rider, Sarah Kleintop
Stonybrook Belmont (California), owner Lee Webster and helper, Joan Webster
Rosemont's Irish Abbey (Kentucky) owner, Fonda Eigel and groom, Meg Dumaine
Tricreek Greystone Riley (New York), owner Mary Lou Thall and rider, Kim Grescheck
Wildwych Eclipse (California) owner, Lisa Martin and Max Gerdes and rider, Danielle Casalett
Windy Hollow Lilia (Kentucky), owner Amy Plavin and rider, Katherine Short

WEG: Demonstrations in the Village Arena

Ireland is blessed with two native equines – horse size and pony size! The Irish Draught is the native Irish horse, and the Connemara Pony is a native Irish pony, named for the West of Ireland where it originated. At WEG, some of the Connemara Pony demonstration times were shared with Irish Draught horses. The demonstrations were ably narrated and commentated by an Irish Draught enthusiast, Fleur Bryan (Kentucky). Using her cheerful Irish accent, Fleur creatively engaged the crowd with relay races between the Irish Draughts and the Connemara Ponies! Lee Webster, Katherine Short, Karen Welch and Chris Knox wrote and rewrote the script for the demonstrations so each pony was included. Chris Knox (Idaho) helped “pass the baton” as the ponies out jumped and out paced the horses - usually! The driving demonstrations showed the horses and ponies beautifully presented, driving between cones and doing pirouettes. There were musical freestyle dressage demonstrations as well as Caprilli, grid jumping and show jumping over higher fences. The crowd cheered loudly and loved every minute, every day! Thanks to Katherine Short, all the ponies and people were well organized in the barn. During the demonstrations, there were volunteers (19 cheerful volunteers over 16 days) going through the stands delivering brochures from the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society (Ireland) plus a promotional, information booklet created by Janice Meyer (Ohio) and Amy Plavin (Vermont) which included paid advertisements and the ACPS Breeders Directory. Fonda Eigel (Kentucky) was “the boots on the ground for the ACPS”.

WEG: Distinguished Visitors

Everyday brought new faces, pony stories, plus national and international dignitaries to the ACPS Booth in the Equine Village. Janice Meyer wisely created a three ring notebook “Guest Book” for people to sign with their name and address or requests for further information. Now, the public relations and promotion committee can communicate with these people. From the web, Janice ordered emerald green plastic wrist bands with the inscription “I (heart) Connemaras” and the web site www.acps.org. It has been a tradition to collect “pins” from countries, breeds, clinicians and disciplines. The ACPS green wrist bands were a huge hit to the visiting public. The wrist bands were light weight, easy to wear and carry, eye catching and “different”. Pat Parelli had wrist bands for the first time, this year, so we were on the cutting edge!

The Irish Ambassador, living in Washington DC, His Excellency, Ambassador Michael Collins and his wife, Marie visited our booth. The day they visited was perfect timing so they could meet and chat with the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society, Clifden, Ireland, Chair, Dermot Power, and his wife, Carmel. The two couples had never met but instantly had friends in common. Ambassador Collins chose two ACPS Foundation ties and Mrs. Collins was given a scarf.

Jane Beshear, wife of the Governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Steve Beshear, visited our booth the next day. She was given a scarf, too, and chose a tie for her husband, the Governor. As some people may know, Jane Beshear was the successful rider of Mary Beth Fleming's gelding, Shammer Sandman, in many eventing competitions.

Niamh Philbin, Secretary for the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society, Clifden, Ireland, flew over to volunteer her help in the booth. The ACPS appreciated her extra hands. Undoubtedly, Niamh has some pleasant memories and stories to share!

Heather Dean Wright of the Ard Stud in Co. Westmeath, Ireland and the seller of the capable eventing stallion, *ArdCeltic Art, to Donna Miller, came to our demonstrations.

Dan James, of “Double Dan” fame began his trick riding career at Sue Clarke’s, Glenormiston Farm in Australia. While growing up at Sue’s, Dan broke her stallion, *Castle Baron (aka “Henry”), to do theatrical tricks on command.

And, Irishman Dr. Pearce Lyons and his wife, Deirdre, were given a tie and scarf from the ACPS.

So many visitors had happy, positive stories to share! The Connemara Pony was known to many Americans, Canadians, and Europeans. It was great to see old friends and make new friends.

WEG: Keep the momentum going

The question now – for US riders, leaders of national organizations and breed affiliates – is what will these numbers mean in the future? It may take many years to know if the increased exposure brings more people as fans, competitors, owners or breeders. It appears that the visibility and overall popularity of horse sports have changed as a result of the Games.

There is nothing like the World Equestrian Games! The Olympics pale compared to these Games. Unlike the Olympics, at the WEG, there are no other sports. The horse is the focus at the World Equestrian Games. The horse brought all those people together. Everyone wanted to see, learn, or talk about “The Horse” – all breeds, all disciplines.

Somewhere back in the caveman days, someone got on the back of a horse. And, the human and the horse have been partners ever since. Depending on its conformation, temperament and athletic ability, the horse has learned to jump (show jumping), pull (driving), slide (reining), go long distances (endurance), move gracefully (vaulting, dressage and para-dressage) or combine most of these attributes (eventing). At the World Equestrian Games, the “Best of the Best”, from all over the world, compete and remind us what a special animal “The Horse” really is. Mark your calendar for 2014 World Equestrian Games in Normandy, France. Don’t miss the next World Equestrian Games. The Connemara Pony should be part of the breed demonstrations showing the world that this pony breed “Can Do It All”.

WEG: Gratitude

As overall Chair for the ACPS at WEG, I want to express my gratitude to the people “behind the scenes”. It was my honor to work with so many wonderful people who made the American Connemara Pony Society’s experience at the World Equestrian Games so successful. Generous financial support and colorful brochures from the Connemara Pony Breeders’ Society, Clifden, Ireland were greatly appreciated. Numerous donors gave to the “Ride to the WEG”, the brainchild of Joanie Webster (California) and Sally Oxnard (New Hampshire) relying on the generous help of Christie Kelly (California). Donors, benefactors, and exceptional volunteers combined to make the exposure and publicity of the Connemara Pony possible. The booth and demonstrations were informative and well organized. A huge amount of credit should go to the Connemara Pony owners and riders/drivers who made the commitment to follow all the veterinary directives (starting 9 months in advance) and Homeland Security rules; ship long distances; work with people and ponies they had never met; and, then, give entertaining demonstrations! They were great!

And, last but not least, thanks to Irishman, Dr. Pearce Lyons and his company, Alltech, for providing this unique opportunity. Without his vision and commitment, none of this would have happened in Lexington, KY.