

Promoting the Connemara as a Performance Pony

by Chris Knox

Especially today, when the sport horse and sport pony are getting so much attention, it is important that we showcase our wonderful Connemaras as the great performance animals they are. As breeders begin to realize the large market for competitive and athletic ponies they see that performance geldings can comprise a desirable portion of their production goals. In years past mares were in the greatest demand as they were marketed primarily for their ability to produce offspring. Geldings were often held in lower esteem and priced more modestly. Nowadays it is recognized that the ultimate 'end user' of the ponies we produce is more often a junior or amateur adult rider looking for a competitive or recreational riding animal, rather than a fellow breeder looking to add to his herd of bloodstock. Connemaras enjoy a positive image worldwide as being kind, tractable and enjoyable companions who also possess the athletic ability to compete successfully in myriad disciplines.

In an effort to encourage and reward the use of Connemaras and halfbred Connemaras, the American Connemara Pony Society has an extensive awards program. This awards program not only recognizes Connemaras which are shown in hand and under saddle at breed shows, but also rewards Connemaras performing on the larger stage of national and international open competition.

There are several subdivisions within the ACPS awards system. Each is tailored to bring attention to the talents of the Connemara breed and to reward owners and riders of Connemaras for showcasing the breed heritage of their animal. Connemaras can and do compete successfully in all disciplines and against horses and ponies often bred specifically for one particular discipline. The ACPS is trying to do its part in exposing this great secret and let the world know Connemaras are not only great pleasure animals and companions for juniors and amateur adults, but can also compete and win in any company!

ACPS Hall of Fame Awards

These are lifetime awards based on the distinguished career of the pony in producing offspring or in the competitive arena. They include the following trophies:

Tooreen Laddie Trophy

Awarded to an outstanding stallion that has had a positive influence on the breed

Broodmare Trophy

Presented to a broodmare that has had a positive influence on the breed

An Tostal Trophy

Awarded in recognition of outstanding achievement, both competitive and non-competitive, of a purebred stallion

Camlin Trophy

Presented to a mare of gelding that has had a career of outstanding competitive performance

Tre Awain Halfbred

Awarded in recognition of a career of outstanding achievements of a halfbred Connemara

US Equestrian Federation Awards

These awards are presented at the annual Horse of the Year awards banquet of the US Equestrian Federation, which is the governing body of all horse sports in the U.S.

USEF Clifden Trophy

Awarded to the top ranking purebred Connemara in the USEF Pony Hunter divisions

USEF McKenna Trophy

Awarded to the purebred or halfbred Connemara with the most points in USEF recognized Events at Preliminary (Novice in England), Intermediate and/or Advanced Level

National Awards

In its National Award program, the ACPS teams with national organizations which track points in their particular disciplines, such as the US Eventing Association, the US Dressage Federation, the North American Trail Ride Conference and the US Equestrian Federation for its hunter and jumper disciplines. Awards are given to the highest placing purebred and halfbred Connemaras in the nation. In eventing all levels are awarded including Beginner Novice (a 2'6" introductory level in the US), Novice, Training, Preliminary (equivalent to Novice in the UK), Intermediate and Advanced.

The US Dressage Federation has a cooperative program with many US breed associations which it calls the All Breeds awards. Owners or riders must declare their horse as a particular breed and provide proof of registration with the designated breed association. Points at all levels of dressage from training level through grand prix are tracked throughout the country and tabulated in categories of open, amateur and junior rider. The ACPS rewards Connemaras and halfbreds in all categories. Winners are showcased at the USDF Annual convention. A list of Connemara winners and their photos also appear in the USDF Dressage Connections magazine, bringing more recognition to our wonderful breed.

The ACPS National Awards program has led to an increased interest on the part of owners and riders in making sure their Connemara is fully ACPS registered. Oft times riders in national, open, discipline based competitions are unaware or uninterested in the breeding of their equine partner. Providing awards based on breed association registration can help breeders track their produce and insure the breed gets the recognition it deserves in a larger competitive arena.

Achievement Awards

The ACPS Achievement Awards program provides a way to recognize Connemaras who are used in a variety of competitive and non competitive endeavors. Points are accumulated yearly based on show performance or regular service to the rider as a mount for Pony Club, foxhunting, etc. When an animal reaches the required number of points over a period of time, perhaps years, it is awarded a bronze, silver, or gold medallion in that discipline. If a pony reaches the gold medallion level of points in five different disciplines it is awarded the coveted ACPS Golden Shamrock. This program is particularly popular with owners and riders whose pony may not be winning at the highest levels, but puts in a workmanlike performance time and again in its discipline. Points are awarded in eventing for each completion and in dressage based on the percentage score earned, rather than the ribbons won. It also rewards the pony who may be passed from child to child in Pony Club or who has served as a reliable foxhunting mount for many years. For more information on the ACPS Achievement Awards program, or any of the ACPS awards programs, please visit the ACPS website at www.acps.org

Other programs

There are three additional programs within the ACPS Awards system which help promote the use of Connemaras. Through the ACPS junior and adult scholarship program individuals write an essay on how they use their Connemara and why they deserve to be awarded a monetary prize which may be applied to further training for themselves or their pony. The Connemara of the Year award is presented to an animal which in some notable way, within a given year, brings positive recognition to the breed. The ACPS also offers a program to show managers of open competitions by which they can award lovely championship ribbons to the highest placing purebred and/or halfbred Connemara. This serves to draw attention to the breed by giving the Connemara name recognition at the awards ceremony of a large competition in which many breeds and crossbred horses are represented.

The ACPS is doing all it can to let the world know Connemaras are competitive in all disciplines and at all levels. Not only can you win with a Connemara, you are sharing that win with the best equine friend you could ever have!