

CDS students compete at Royal Horse Show

By Kim Sillcox

Earlier this month, the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair celebrated its 97th year as the world's largest combined, indoor and agricultural equestrian event. The 10-day event took place on the Canadian National Exhibition grounds in Toronto, and one of its highlights, The Royal Horse Show, showcases world class equestrians from across Canada and around the world.

This year, three Country Day School students competed in this much-anticipated event.

Lauren Adams, a Grade 12 student from King City, was among the top competitors in the U18 category in the 1.20 metre Junior Jumper class on her horse ES Quantro (aka Ricky). Only 24 Jumpers qualify for this class at the Royal – eight riders from Ontario, six from both the Atlantic Provinces and Quebec, and four from the West. This year 15 actually competed in the Royal Horse Show. Lauren first started riding at the age of 6. At the time, her family was living in Jordan in the Middle East. Her family relocated to Ontario when she was 10 and she started competing provincially, quickly advancing from Hunter to Jumper class in the Trillium Circuit. Today she trains with her riding coach Mark Hayes at Kestrel Farms in Schomberg.

The horse show season runs from May until October. Riders accumulate points and are ranked by division over the course of the summer. Last year, Lauren's horse was injured mid-way through the season and she wasn't able to qualify on her replacement horse. This year, she teamed up with a Jumper Ricky and consistently placed 1st at the start of the season. However, she fell back to 5th and 6th place finishes later in the season, and although she still qualified for Nationals, she wasn't sure how she would do at the Royal.

While Lauren was riding and preparing every day leading up to the Royal, the day of her first competition, Ricky wouldn't take the jumps in either round. However, on the second day, they finished the first round with near perfection, before nicking a rail during the second round, earning her a 6th place finish to cap off an impressive U18 career.

Caitie O'Connor, a Grade 11 student from Peterborough, qualified for the Canadian Equestrian Team (CET) National final at this year's Royal by winning the Junior Equitation Division CET Medal Ontario Regional in September, where she won Ontario's 1.20 metre Junior Jumper division on her horse Stormreaver.

This was also Caitie's first time qualifying for Nationals. Last year, she just missed qualifying in show jumping by two spots. For the past two years, Caitie has trained with Olympic show jumper Beth Underhill, one of Canada's most decorated riders.

"The Royal is a stressful atmosphere for both horse and rider," explained Caitie. "We were in the ring practicing at 4 a.m. for nine days straight. But it's a great learning experience as a rider."

Caitie and Stormreaver finished 2nd in Speed class and 5th in Welcome.

"I was really happy to earn a ribbon and look forward to returning again next year."

For Ella Davison, a Grade 10 student from King City, this was her sixth consecutive year competing at the Royal. Ella competes in the Large Pony Hunter class as a catch-rider, and in Equitation with her own horses, which she keeps in Wellington, Florida, where she trains with coach Missy Clark.

At this year's Royal, Ella competed in four different classes on Northwind Crispin: three Over Fences, of which she placed 1st in one, and one Under Saddle, in which she placed 2nd, yielding her a 2nd place overall finish in her division. Northwind Crispin is owned by Sue Pritchard and Courtney Vince, who trained Ella at this year's Royal Winter Fair.

Congratulations to all three riders!