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Christopher Hickey Brings Home Lessons from Abroad Hickey Earns Top Finishes at White Fences Polar Express

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Christopher Hickey and Douglas Hilltop in the Grand Prix at White Fences Polar Express

Loxahatchee, FL – December 14, 2013 – Christopher Hickey is back in Florida for the winter show season after an intensive three months of training abroad. He took four horses to Denmark to compete and train with Morten Thomsen from September through November.

He and his horses are settling in for the Florida season, and he brought two of his top mounts out on Saturday at the White Fences Polar Express show held Dec. 14-15 at the White Fences Equestrian Center in Loxahatchee.

Hickey and Douglas Hilltop took third in the Grand Prix with 68.085%, finishing behind Caroline Roffman on Her Highness O (72.340%) and on Sagacious HF (69.894%). Douglas Hilltop, a 13-year-old Württemberger gelding owned by Hilltop Farm, Inc., will compete in CDIs in Florida during the 2014 season.

"I was really happy with Douglas Hilltop," Hickey said. "He was very relaxed in the canter. He usually does better when he competes more, so I was happy with how well he did here after making the trip from Europe."



Christopher Hickey and Douglas Hilltop

Later on Saturday, Hickey and Ronaldo, a 7-year-old Danish Warmblood gelding owned by Cecelia Stewart, took second in a large Prix St. Georges class. The pair scored 72.763%, putting them not far behind first-place finishers Neve Myburgh and Topper.

Hickey plans to take Ronaldo to a few more national shows and get at least one Intermediaire I test under his belt before testing the waters in a CDI competition. Ronaldo qualified for the Markel/USEF National Developing Horse Prix St. Georges Championship, but Hickey opted not to travel to the Championship since it fell right before the trip to Europe.

"Ronaldo is a blast to ride," Hickey said. "He's very elastic. I'm really excited about him."



Christopher Hickey and Ronaldo

Another of Hickey's top horses, Witness Hilltop, qualified for the Markel/USEF National Developing Horse Grand Prix Championship but did not attend. The 10-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding owned by Hilltop Farm, Inc., traveled to Denmark along with Ronaldo, Douglas Hilltop, and Balissa HTF, a 6-year-old Hanoverian mare also owned by Hilltop Farm, Inc.

Hickey is on the Faculty of the USDF Instructor Certification Program and co-chairs the USDF Trainers Council. He has been working with Thomsen for about four years and said the Danish Olympian's training philosophy fits well with his own.



Christopher Hickey and Witness Hilltop at the Wellington Nations Cup CDI03 in April 2013*

"He's very patient," Hickey said of Thomsen. "His training methods are very clear and kind and progressive. You learn one step and then the next step – it's a very systematical approach."

"Training with him has really worked well for me," Hickey added. "It helps me bring my horses along in a way that allows them to learn things in progression. He has a lot of good exercises, and he works on the horses being reactive and light. I agree with his principles."

Now that Hickey is back from Denmark, he is working on incorporating new ideas and exercises from Thomsen into his everyday riding routine.

"I try to do one thing at a time," he explained. "I warm my horses up the way I normally do and then choose one topic, such as canter or trot work, to focus on. It's good to be able to repeat the exercises. I have Morten in my head, but I don't have him standing in the ring telling me what to do. Now I have time to feel what's going on and make the necessary changes."



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Christopher Hickey and Witness Hilltop

He values the concentrated training with Thomsen, but believes that it's also critical to work on his own and have time to think back over his work in Denmark.

"As trainers, we have to be able to process what someone's teaching us," Hickey said. "I'm really enjoying my time to process what I've learned."

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