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Morris Claims Wire-To-Wire Galway Downs Victory

Temecula, Calif., Nov. 4 – Heather Morris won the Galway Downs CCI** the hard way – by holding first place on all three days of the ninth annual Galway Downs International Three-Day Event. Her faultless show jumping round today on Genial guaranteed the victory.

But Morris just grimaced when asked how hard it is to be the rider everyone else is aiming for. “When you’re in the warm-up ring, all you can think is, ‘Why am I doing this to myself?’ But it’s so great when it’s over!” she said.

Morris’ competitors didn’t make her task any easier. Third-placed Nicholas Cwick, of Saratoga, Calif., on Asterix, and second-placed Leigh Mesher, of Redmond, Wash., on Mar De Amor, also finished show jumping with no penalties. Morris did have some breathing room, though. She could have afforded to lower one rail since her dressage score was almost 8 penalties better than Mesher’s and Cwick recorded 8.8 time penalties on cross-country.

Morris and Genial had previously won the short-format CCI* at Galway Downs in 2006. This is her first victory in a CCI** ever. “And coming back here to do it in front of all my friends made it extra special,” said Morris, who now lives in Lewisville, Texas, but grew up just a few miles away from the Southern California Equestrian Center.

Tory Smith, of Camarillo, Calif., finished fourth and received this year’s new memorial award. Smith earned the Mia Ericksson Memorial Award, given for the first time to the top-placing young rider (age 16 to 21) in the CCI**. Eriksson was a beloved young rider from California who died after a fall at the 2006 Galway Downs CCI**. The award will be given annually in her memory.

Tiana Coudray, 20, of Carmel Valley, Calif., vaulted to first place in the short-format CCI* with a faultless round when overnight leader Kristi Nunnink and R-Star

lowered two rails. Coudray's mount, Ringwood Magister, is a 6-year-old, Irish-bred gelding by Master Imp, the sire of King Street, on whom she finished second in the 2005 Galway Downs CCI** and then won the Galway Downs CIC**** in March 2007.

"I love this event, and I've been lucky to have had some tremendous success here," said Coudray, who is also a young rider.

Therese Washtock drove 40 hours from Summerland, British Columbia, and it paid off with a victory on Chesterland in the long-format CCI*. Her perfect round moved her into the top spot when overnight leader Max McManamy lowered one rail and had one time penalty on Beacon Hill. McManamy won the award as the division's top junior/young rider, and Beacon Hill won the award as the fittest horse in the long-format CCI*.

Galway Downs was the second long-format CCI* Washtock, 43, has contested on Chesterland this year. "He's mostly young and mostly green, and he had an absolutely fabulous cross-country round in the one-star I did at Rebecca Farm in Montana in July. And it's been hard to replicate ever since, so I thought I would try it again," said Washtock. "And this was the best steeplechase ride I ever had."

Washtock bred Chesterland, 8, and she also bred his sire, Another Wild Night. She explained that she'd hoped to develop her own breeding program by standing Another Wild Night at stud, but in the year after Chesterland was born, none of her six broodmares conceived and the stallion developed fertility problems. So she gelded Another Wild Night. "I call Chesterland 'the immaculate conception,'" she said with a laugh.

Washtock, a former Olympic rider for Canada, said that Galway Downs is a tremendously important competition for her and other Canadian riders. "I have to come to events like Galway Downs to keep my skills sharp enough to be competitive, and by the influence of Ian Stark's cross-country design, we get a taste of what we'd find if we were competing in Europe."

Two teams of junior/young riders contested the new Western National CCI* Team Championship this year. The Area VI team (Max McManamy/Beacon Hill, Fiona Graham/Good Barter and Allegra Aiuto/Harley) scored 1,232.0 points to win the title. The Areas VI/VII/X team (Kelsey Kristosik/Smoke Alarm, Erin McElhone/Parkiki Star and John Michael Durr/Phoenix Secret) finished second, scoring 1,296.8.

For more information on the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event, visit their website (www.galwaydowns.com) or call 951-303-0405. To learn more about eventing, visit the U.S. Eventing Association's website (www.useventing.com).

(Complete results are available at www.galwaydowns.com. Photos are available upon request.)