



Taylor Harris and Rachel Thurman at Saut Hermès

Horse & Style and Best Friends in Paris

For seven years, the Giant Steps Charity Classic Horse Show's live auction and Gala has provided critical funding for the nonprofit Giant Steps Therapeutic Equestrian Center and its therapeutic riding and equine-assisted therapy programs. For the 2015 Gala, Horse & Style put together a luxurious lot offering a trip for two to Paris for the Saut Hermès horse show. The winning bidder, Taylor Harris, a Southern Californian and life-long equestrienne, invited her best friend and barn mate Rachel Thurman, to join her on this European equine experience.

The adventure began soon after Taylor and Rachel settled in at the luxury five-star hotel Le Bristol Paris on Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. A lovely drive brought them to the Palace of Versailles at the Saint Anthony Gate (Grille Saint Antoine) to meet Baptiste Auclair from Horse in the City, who was waiting with his lorry full of enthusiastic horses ready to take them on a morning of exploring and galloping on the Palace grounds on a perfect, sunny Spring day.

Framing the ride with a perfectly French breakfast and luncheon, the guests were greeted with coffee, tea, and pastries, including delectable chouquettes (sugar-dusted pastry puffs); and post gallop enjoyed baguettes, cheese, charcuterie, and pate, accompanied by rosé, white, and red wines. Exploring the many hectares of the perfectly manicured, storied, historic grounds on horseback; and viewing the agriculture, livestock, and the Grand Canal between the ears of a horse, is a sight few tourists ever see. Meanwhile taking it all in while galloping on grass through the artistically and geometrically planted trees, with the Palace in view, was idyllic; a very fine beginning to a fabulous French adventure.

Taylor described the “exhilarating experience of galloping at full speed through Versailles” as having exceeded her expectations, as she “honestly had no idea what we had gotten ourselves into – how massive the grounds were and how fast the horses galloped, as if they had another gear.” Not too far into the ride, Taylor

nicknamed her gelding Habañero, and Rachel's mare became Sriracha.

Sharing her favorite memory, Rachel mused, “If I had to pick just one, which believe me is hard, It would have to be riding through Versailles. I was stunned to see it with my own eyes; I had no idea that it was even possible [to ride] there. While we were galloping, I remember laughing hysterically – crying really – because it was the purest form of joy. The scenery was splendid, and our tour guides were so wonderful. It felt like a newfound freedom, running in the wind through the vast fields and greenery that seemed to go on forever. And, mind you, this was not a horse show ‘hand gallop,’ these horses really went for it! It was breathtaking, and a memory I will always hold close to my heart.”

Next up was a walk across the palace grounds, this time on foot, to the Palace and the Grandes Écuries, or Grand Stables, for a private, behind-the-scenes, insider tour of the Académie Équestre Nationale du Domaine de Versailles. Bartabas, a horseman, actor, and troop leader, and his unique corps de ballet comprised of both human and equine performers, have been in residence at the National Equestrian Academy of Versailles since 2003. Their performances include various artistic disciplines such as dancing, singing, fencing, or Kyudo, a form of traditional Japanese archery.

Taylor and Rachel met several of the horses at the stables, which still exist as they have since they were originally completed in 1683

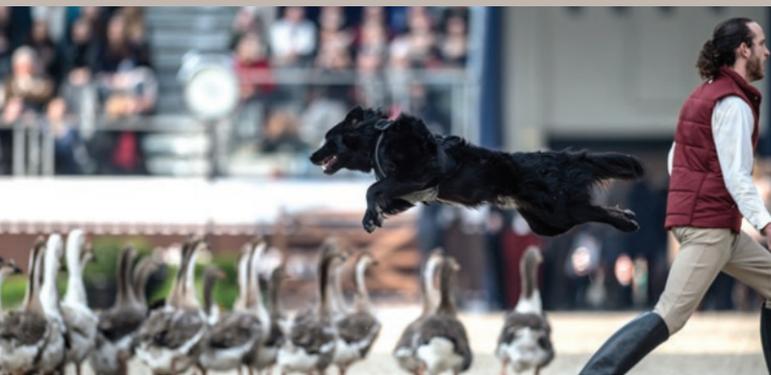


Rachel Thurman riding at Versailles





Bertram Allen and Romanov



to house 600 horses for King Louis XIV, who had a passion for equestrian art performances. Many of the resident horses were temporarily stabled in the heart of Paris because Friday and Saturday evenings Bartabas and his troupe performed the show Nature au Galop, or Nature at Full Gallop, at Saut Hermès. Each show day this artistic spectacle mesmerized the audience for an engaging half hour of both choreographed movements and free-form horses at liberty, loose in the arena, freely sharing their special beauty and unique personalities with the crowd.

For each of the last seven years, the luxury house of Hermès has presented the three-day-long Saut Hermès horse show at the Grand Palais in Paris. Charles Baudelaire's description of the dream world he creates in Invitation to the Voyage, also aptly describes the ubiquitous scene under the roof of the Grand Palais, where "all is order and beauty, luxury, peace, and pleasure." The sublime setting, the finely executed details, and the supremely talented horses and riders make spectators' dreams come true. From their front-row seats, Taylor and Rachel had an incomparable view of the world's top riders, select amateurs, and talented Under 25 competitors, all participating by invitation, as they dazzled the incredibly appreciative, informed, and passionate crowd with world-class sport in the most elegant setting imaginable.

Supplementing the competition, shopping and dining reigned supreme. Special edition Hermès commemorative scarves featuring Hermès partner rider Lillie Keenan and her horse Pumped Up Kicks, and special edition show Twillys and necklaces were hot sellers. In the true spirit of its seller tradition, saddle-making displays took a prominent position in the Grand Palais, as did Hermès' new saddle designs, the Allegro and the Arpège. In addition, Hermès curated a rich equestrian bookstore appealing to a wide range of tastes and needs, and engaged many of the authors to sign the books that fans purchased. Special photo opportunities allowed the spectators to immerse themselves in the entire experience.

Shetland pony races, a goose-herding dog, pony rides, and a petting zoo entertained kids of all ages midday. The elegant Minipalais restaurant and bar provided exceptional food and wine mere steps away from the horse show action. Plus the distinctive French tearooms, Laduree and Angelina, were there to indulge the sweet tooth of every spectator.

As for the main Friday horse show events, twenty-year-old Irish speedster Bertram Allen and the eighteen-year-old stallion Romanov (Heartbreaker x Fedor) owned by Billy Twomey, repeated his 2015 win in the Hermès Sellier 1.50 meter speed class. The pair bested the class by over two seconds. Jeroen Dubbeldam of the Netherlands aboard Carusso LS La Silla (Montebello La Silla x Joost) owned by Club Hipico La Silla A.C. and Stal de Sjiem, placed second. Frenchman Kevin Staut on his ten-year-old mare Ayade de Septon *HDC (Wandor van de Mispraele x Naiade de Thieusies) owned by Haras des Coudrettes, won the 1.50 meter Prix GL Events Grand Prix by three seconds on Saturday. Hardin Towell and New York (Verdi x Watzmann) owned by Jennifer Gates, LLC, placed second.

The Saturday evening event, Le Saut Hermès, brought back Friday's ten best-placed female/male rider pairs to challenge each other over two rounds for the win. Anna-Julia Kontio of Finland and Romain Duguet of Switzerland bested Jessica Mendoza and Roger-Yves Bost by having faster second-round times, after both duos posted two double-clear rounds each. The Franco-American duo Lucy Davis and Kevin Staut placed second.

It was a magical Moroccan Sunday at Saut Hermès, as the €400,000 Hermès Grand Prix CSI5* treated the capacity crowd to a jump off to remember. Quickly de Kreisker, a spirited twelve-year-old stallion (Diamant de Semilly x Laudanum XX) owned by the King of Morocco, gave his dynamic partner, Abdelkebir Ouaddar, everything he asked for, and more, with a spectacular rollback and a fearless, flat-out run to the final oxer, causing the capacity crowd to explode with appreciation for the utterly incredible, true-trust effort. Last in the order of go, Ouaddar beat the previous time to beat set by Scott Brash and ten-year-old Hello Forever (For Pleasure x Nimmerdor) owned by Lady Harris and Lady Kirkham, by more than two seconds.

The engaged and jubilant crowd had no need to look at the timers; the difference was palpably commanding. After watching the final oxer's rails stay up, the crowd rose nearly in unison, in a standing ovation, with wild applause and hearty jubilation for Quickly and Ouaddar. Once again, Hermès treated Paris to equestrian sport at its finest, while giving all participants yet another reason to love the luxury house and the City of Light. "After observing the way the Grand Prix riders walked the courses, warmed up their horses, and executed their strategies in the ring," Taylor noted, "I walked away from the horse show even more inspired to put in the hard work and practice in hopes of one day competing at the top level like this."

Rachel summarized these experiences in a way that should inspire all best friends to take a special trip together: "Paris is such a magical city, and Taylor and I shared so many laughs and priceless memories. We hit the city by foot, getting our daily steps in for sure, and really got to see almost everything that Paris has to offer. Not to mention, after a long day, coming home to the most gorgeous hotel palace every night was yet another stunning element! I am still unsure if this was all real; as I reflect on it, it was one thing after another – how could this trip keep getting better and better? The best and most special part to me are the life moments that I get to forever share with my best friend – we got to bond in such a special way."

Taylor shared that Paris taught her "the Parisian way of taking uninterrupted time to enjoy each other's company and of always being classic, poised, and stylish. The great thing horses provide is the ability to connect you to different places and people, as well as across generations and history. This trip gave us the opportunity to experience Europe with truly special people, and to make memories that we'll cherish forever." *H&S*



Romain Duguet and Oihello de Soleil

