



An exuberant Nicole Shahinian capped a fabulous year by taking home the blue at the Medal Finals in Harrisburg on Oct. 14. Nearly 250 finalists tackled the demanding course designed by Frank Chapot. Frank, along with his wife Mary, also judged the competitors.

The intricate and twisting course included two options. There were several fences sure to invite quits, such as an airy lattice gate with a bowed pole on top, and a white and grey brick wall in the shape of half an octagon. One of the options, placed along the wall, was designed to mislead the horse. Jumping into a combination, the horse would expect to continue straight on and jump out. Instead he had to jump in, turn, and jump out over a fence angled at 45 degrees to the out fence. There were so many refusals and breathtaking jumps at this fence, that many opted for the "safer" route, jumping straight out of the combination and then turning back to the next fence.

The rollback turns and spooky fences on the course took their toll on competitors. Refusals, falls, chips, dangerously long fences, cross-canter, and uneven pace eliminated one after another. But an even tougher test met the 25 finalists called back for the next round. Riders started with a bending line from a white wall to a brick wall oxer, then turned left to a white gate set at 90 degrees to the wall on the short end of the arena. They continued down an outside line consisting of a rolltop oxer to a choice of two narrow walls offset to one another, and then another rolltop oxer. A left turn brought them to a vertical of blue rails which had to be ridden conservatively because it was followed immediately by a halt. The halt had to be prompt because the riders then had to pick up a counter-canter and make a sharp right turn to the next fence. If the riders strayed too far, they were then off track and in the midst of several fences, which made for a very inaccurate ride. The counter-canter was difficult to maintain because it was a sharp, nearly 360 degree turn to the next fence. After this there was a left turn to a very forward outside line, starting over the picket fence; and followed by a long four strides to an in and out.

After demonstrating their ability to lengthen, the horses then had to be collected for a tough, 180 degree turn from the grey and white brick wall back to the airy vertical. A right bending line to the rustic panel and rail took the riders home.

This comprehensive test caused some major upsets in the standings. Riders dropped out of sight or moved up by leaps and bounds. Problems included not keeping the counter-canter, overshooting the halt so that the rider had to go all the way around several fences, and poor turns in tight spots, which nearly resulted in collisions with the obstacles. Carrie Ellington didn't hold the counter-canter, and dropped down a couple of notches. Sarah Goldsmith had a lovely trip and moved up quite a bit. McLain Ward jumped in fine at the long outside line, but then never moved up, resulting in a very long fence at the first part of the in and out which left the crowd gasping. Alex Warriner had a really pretty trip, although the halt wasn't great, and the first element of the in and out came down. But the judges must have allowed some leeway at this fence, as the horses were coming off a long distance and as a result were jumping quite flat. The fence came down numerous times. Nicole Shahinian then came in and put in a gorgeous course, making everything difficult look simple. Unfortunately, her horse was very fussy at the halt, never quite standing still.

In a few minutes, the judges called for one further test: Nicole and Alex were to switch horses and jump the same course. Nicole was to go first. She was fabulous hitting every distance, making the long four look easy, flowing around the tight turns with no perceptible adjustments. Alex also had a beautiful course, but with one major flaw: the horse swapped from the counter-canter to the right lead.

The AHSA Hunter Seat Equitation Medal Championships

By Ann Jamieson

AHSA Medal Finals Results

1. Nicole Shahinian, Montvale, NJ
2. Alex Warriner, Edgartown, MA
3. Keri D. Stout, Mobile, AL
4. McLain Ward, North Salem, NY
5. Lauren Kay, Hidden Hills, CA
6. William Lowry, No. Scituate, RI
7. Carrie Ellington, Lebanon, NJ
8. Sarah Goldsmith, Rumson, NJ
9. Sarah Watt, Schomberg, ON
10. Michelle Howard, Newport Beach, CA

It was all Nicole's!

While Nicole was bedecked with flowers, a jubilant Fairfield Team consisting of Brian and Leslie Lenehan and Bruce and Sari Burr, was accepting the trainers' award.

When the Lenehan half of the "team" was asked if they felt Nicky would win, Leslie replied that "she knew Nicky would eventually win, it was just a question of when." She thought it might be this year because Nicky was well mounted on Kandi, a Selle Francais owned by Sloan Lindemann. Brian was sure that Nicky's brilliant first trip helped clinch the win. Although she couldn't afford to blow the test, he felt that the first trips weighed heavily in determining the final standings.

Nicole was ecstatic over her win. She really enjoyed the course, saying that it was "great, it was complicated and you really had to think about it." She said that Kandi doesn't usually fuss at the halt, but he was nervous. She had no problems with Alex's horse. Saying that the horse was very nice to ride.

This is only the beginning of a very bright future. A USET and Maclay win are still easily within reach in the next few years. As Nicole is only 15 years old! (horse show age).



Nicole Shahinian was the winner of the AHSA Hunter Seat Medal Finals.

James Parker Photo