

Sonoma Horse Park – The Destination

Luxury Atmosphere & Showmanship Creates the Experience Like No Other



Howard Herman had the vision for a premier show park the day he bought Riverside Equestrian Center on the bank of Sonoma County's Petaluma River more than 15-years-ago. He knew Northern California was ripe for a competitive environment; with two daughters showing, the family had to travel to Southern California and beyond to chase the A-circuit. That property has now transformed into Sonoma Horse Park, Northern California's most prominent show and training facility. In 6 short years, the shows have become a destination for the country's most outstanding equestrians because it's innovative management brings quality of competition and a premium experience, captivating competitors and spectators alike with its ever-evolving agenda.

The Sonoma Horse Park Identity

The Herman family owns and operates the entire 70-acre facility; daughter, Meredith Herman, has her Burgundy Farms training barn on-site and daughter, Ashley Herman, is the show park's director. *"To me, it's not just a show, it's a destination. I want the experience to feel luxurious. Every little thing we do reflects who we are and I want every touch to be beautiful and special."*

Ashley Herman returned to Sonoma from her corporate career in New York and a job at Goldman Sachs coordinating global events – a world of high-end branding of both vision and detail. The Hermans then forged a partnership with Sally Hudson, a veteran in the sport who still serves as a steward, and manages other shows on the circuit. Sonoma began by hosting Sally's former dates with the Pebble Beach Equestrian Center, and added a few of it's own. Now, the pair co-manages the season: Sally serves as manager of the



competition, while Ashley manages the facility and the exhibitors' experience.

Ashley brings another advantage, she has the perspective and ability to bring new ideas and something different to the table. Her Sonoma team is professional – yet playful. They have the skills and approach of a high-end hospitality business, serving clients with a refreshing attitude, yet understand and acknowledge the commitment the equestrian lifestyle requires.

“People are happy to be there – everyone has a smile, asking what can they do for me, seeing to the details,” says Susie Hutchison, top Grand Prix rider and trainer, “You can even feel the crowd is happy and it’s a fun atmosphere. The other shows can have similar amenities, but it doesn’t feel as good.”

A well-managed brand, Sonoma keeps company with leaders in other fields. Wells Fargo Private Bank is the anchor presenting sponsor with Tesla Motors, Molton Brown and

Shaklee, returning this season. Colin Cowie Celebrations, the world-renowned event planner, with clients that include Oprah Winfrey, Jennifer Aniston, and Ryan Seacrest, is the presenting sponsor of the 2015 Giant Steps Charity Classic Gala on August 1st – the jewel in the Sonoma Horse Park schedule.

Designed by Equestrians for Equestrians

True to its word, the details of Sonoma shows are different than most. Prizes, ribbons, jumps, footing, food, and wine – every part is first class. In addition to her corporate background, Ashley was one of the most successful Junior riders in the country, so her sensibilities are grounded by practicality. She feels, for example, that the most important thing the park has is its Martin Collins footing – footing often being a downfall for show facilities. After much trial, she truly believes it is the best in the world and doesn't



SHP sees to every detail – hand-made ribbons are works of art. Photo by Mary Kate Moulton

is as efficient as it is lovely. All of the rings are over-sized, the smallest ring having the dimensions of a main hunter ring. It still feels very intimate, spacing its furthest corners only a few minute's walk. The centerpiece is the Grand Prix and Main Hunter rings, separated by a permanently-covered VIP Pavillion. Events and entertainment happen with clear views of the competition on both sides and the beauty of the Marin and Sonoma hills. The Petaluma River's bank serves as front row seating during the shows' Grand Prix. It all adds up to the opportunity of big-league competition with the energy and familiarity of an intimate show.

"The facility is top-notch, and yet they have the Friendship Series. It allows all of the clients to come along – I don't have to split our time to attend different shows," says Olivia Brown, Grand Prix rider and co-owner of Harley Brown Equestrian. "It's all here for us. Even my tack supplier (The Equestrian's Concierge), is here, measuring horses, helping my clients and delivering to my barn. One less thing to worry about."

hesitate to put the resources behind it. That feeling is echoed by nearly every trainer one can ask.

"Of all the rings I ride in throughout the show season, Sonoma's Grand Prix is my favourite," says Meredith, "It feels fresh and new with the best footing, terrific jumps, and some of the industry's best course designers."

The layout of everything in the park was carefully considered with competitors in mind. It is a well-organized layout that

Straight from the Horse's Mouth

The show park's consistent improvement and the management's willingness to listen – and take action – is one the most often-mentioned among trainers reviewing the park. The management views the park's growth and future as a community effort. Six A-Circuit Trainers and a premium tack and services store have businesses on site year-round, so there is a constant feedback loop and



Gucci presenting sponsor of Giant Steps Charity - Grand Prix, Kristin Hardin
Photo by Erin Gilmore

view into the hunter-jumper circuit. Sonoma Horse Park views this as vital to its growth plan, and the feedback as components of the to-do list. The best suggestions and improvements are usually from the competitors' input.

"Every year we come back there's something new, something even better than before," says Buddy Brown, one of the nation's top riders and co-owner Derby Hill Farm, *"We feel the fees we pay for showing actually go into improving our experience."*

The Gateway to Wine Country

Sonoma being only 25 miles north of San Francisco, allows for partnership with leading brands from all over the Bay Area. Ariat International, for example, is a true partner and provides all of the championship prizes and awards: a premium piece of clothing from their industry-leading line. For other first-place awards, competitors have the excitement of choosing from several premium brands and



World Cup rider, Harley Brown clears the Charleigh's Cookies jump in Grand Prix. Photo by Erin Gilmore



Atop the levy, walking ponies and watching boats
Photo by Alden Corrigan

charitable organizations like Molton Brown, One Hope Wine, and Tom's shoes.

Premium foods and wines are central to the Sonoma offering and boasts regional wine-pouring Thurs – Sat in the VIP Pavillion for competitors to sample and enjoy. One will never pay for wine at Sonoma, the Hermans feel it is part of the experience and offer it to their guests. Local premium caterers provide the lavish breakfast lunch and dinner and all are welcome at the Pavilions terrace, offering dinner and wine free for all on special nights.

"It is a great facility that goes above and beyond to always make improvements, with terrific jumps and great footing," says Missy Frole, owner/trainer of Hunter Bay Farm, *"and they offer fun classes with good prize money, doing a great job entertaining the people not showing."*

Stand Out and Give Back

The 2015 season doesn't disappoint. Sonoma has doubled the prize money for this month's HMI June Classic, making

Relay Class entertains at Giant Steps Charity Gala
Photo by Deb Dawson





Missy Froley takes a victory lap, winning the Hunter Derby
Photo by Woodside Images

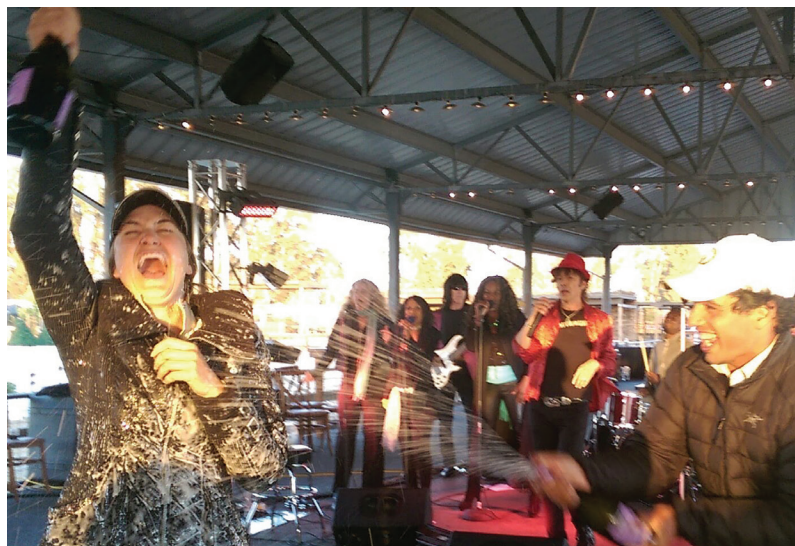
it more than any other on the West Coast, including two Grand Prix, totaling \$50,000. The \$20,000 USHJA 3' National Hunter Derby is double the next closest in prize money and The \$20,000 Equestrian's Concierge Open Equitation Team Challenge is one of the biggest crowds they will draw all year, providing the fun, suspense and challenge of being part of team, over a two-day competition open to professionals, amateurs, and juniors.

The SHP Finale, in September, has the first \$50,000 Grand Prix and the second year that Sonoma will do circuit awards. Management sees it as a reward for loyal clients and serves as a send off from the season. Even the smaller classics are \$5,000 and are comprised of the top 40 competitors from the rest of the season.

The signature of Sonoma Horse Park is the Giant Steps Charity Classic (July 28 – August 2) and in Ashley Herman's opinion, is *"one of the best shows in the country – bar none. It is my passion, and the show that I do best. More importantly, this organization does important work, giving voice to those who are marginalized. It gives us all a chance of being part of an organization that performs miracles."* The show and gala hosted by Sonoma raised over \$1,000,000 last year and allowed Giant Steps to double enrollment for children, adults, and veterans. The equestrian community is connected to the organization through contributions, auction sales, and the constant presence at the show. The tone is celebratory – of life, of equestrian passion, and the joy of giving back. The unique ribbons are exquisite, every

prize is outstanding, and there are special classes and evening events – leading up to the Saturday night Gala presented by Colin Cowie.

Sonoma Horse Park has helped raise the level of competition for Northern California – and seeing more visitors from Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Arizona, as well as Canada and Mexico. This year will bring even more impressive sponsors, prize money, and competition, and the Herman family will still be asking how you enjoyed your stay and where to go from here.



Jan Humphrey Celebrates her Grand Prix win in the VIP Pavillion
Photo by Carly

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HMI Equestrian Classic 1: July 21 – 26

Winner receives Horseware Ireland's new Ionic Negative-Ion Therapy Blanket and Boots
10% off all in-stock Horseware blankets

Giant Steps Charity Classic: July 28 – August 2

Winner receives riding apparel & accessories from Schockemöhle Sports
10% off all in-stock Schockemöhle inventory

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