

Euro trip a winning experience

Chesler hones her show jumping skills on continent

By JENNIFER WARD

A YEAR in Europe turned out to be the best thing Frankie Chesler could have done for her show jumping career.

The Orangeville-based rider, 24, packed her bags last June and headed for The Netherlands.

With equestrian as popular in Holland and Germany as hockey is in Canada, Chesler was immersed in the horse culture and was able to attend a competition every weekend.

The skills she learned in Europe helped her at the Capital Classic Show Jumping Tournament, an international competition which ends today at the Nepean National Equestrian Park.

"I learned the most by watching other riders," said Chesler, who was named after her grandfather Frank. "Unlike the shows here in Canada where you have a lot of horses and clients to worry about, I usually only had three horses to compete with at each competition in Europe, so there was really nothing else to do at the horse shows except watch. Even better, I got to study the riders I see on television and look up to."

Impressive career

Following an impressive junior career, Chesler had the distinction of representing the Canadian Equestrian Team at 17 at Madison Square Garden in New York, making her the youngest rider to ever compete for Canada in international competition.

In 2001, she was part of a Canadian Riders' Tour that competed in team events in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and the following year rode on the Canadian Team at the prestigious Spruce Meadows Masters Tournament in Calgary.

Millar, Kersley split top prize

The rain put a damper on the competition at the Capital Classic Show Jumping Tournament last night, but the spirits of Ian Millar and John Kersley were high after they opted to split the win.

Several of the 39 entries in the \$35,000 jumping derby had completed the course when lightning and heavy rain put a halt to the competition.

Following an hour delay, the competition resumed. Only eight-time Olympian Millar and Kersley, who had completed clear rounds before the rain fell, qualified for the jump-off.

Instead of bringing their horses

back from the barn for a jump-off, the athletes agreed to split the prize money awarded for first and second place, giving them \$8,500 each.

"This happens from time to time, and always because of inclement weather," said Millar of Perth.

Millar, riding Promise Me, posted the first clear round of the day. Kersley, riding Moritze, was the only other rider able to match Millar's faultless performance.

The five-day competition — with more than \$150,000 up for grabs — ends today.

— Sun Staff

Chesler's father Alan has been her trainer throughout her career. He was a former show jumping competitor himself.

Being on her own for the first time in Europe was an eye-opener, although Alan did make frequent trips across the Atlantic.

"I missed him when he wasn't there because, honestly, those were the first competitions I ever went to without my father," said Chesler.

There is also another man in Chesler's life these days. On Sept. 17, she will marry Venezuelan show jumping competitor Juan Ortiz, who is also 24.

They opened a business together, training both horses and riders for the show ring as well as selling show-jumping prospects.

Her European experience has prepared Chesler for the challenges that lie ahead, both as a business owner and a competitor.

"When you are doing everything yourself, you really get to see the mistakes that you make, but you al-

so get the chance to fix them," she said. "By riding so many different horses, you learn so many things. I would ride 12 horses a day and then at 7 o'clock at night, we would go to another farm to try more horses. It taught me how to be tough."

Chesler says the experience changed her for the better.

"I went over there and basically became a new person," Chesler said. "Little things don't bother me anymore. If I see a problem with a horse, I know I can fix it. After riding so many different horses, I feel confident to critique or judge them. And I feel better prepared to buy promising horses."

In addition to coming home with a new set of skills, Chesler also came home with two new horses. They join VDL Oscar and Chesler's personal favourite, VDL Nuit de Pomme, at the Capital Classic. With four top horses and a year in Europe under her belt, Chesler's chances of winning some serious prize money are better than ever.



Jason Ransom SUN

FRANKIE CHESLER and Oscar hang out in the paddocks at the Capital Classic Show Jumping Tournament at Nepean National Equestrian Park. Chesler used her European show jumping experiences to become one of Canada's top jumpers. You can see her at the Classic, which wraps up today.