

Michael Pollard topped the CIC*** at the Richland Park Horse Trials on the Thoroughbred Mensa G. STOCKIMAGESERVICES.COM PHOTO



Pollard's Plan B For Mensa G Turns Into Blue At Richland Park

*After the short list eludes them, the World Games hopeful alleviates disappointment with a CIC*** win on his off-the-track Thoroughbred.*

BY TAYLOR JOYCE

Michael Pollard thought his 14th-placed finish on Mensa G at the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event in April would land them on the short list for the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games (France) in August, so when that honor eluded them, they were more than ready to take on the CIC*** at the Richland Park Horse Trials, held Aug. 21-24 in Richland, Mich.

Pollard simplified Mensa's training program when his goal changed, and the refocus paid off when they topped the division ahead of second-placed

Sharon White and Under Suspicion.

"I was kind of surprised that [Mensa] didn't at least make the short list [for the World Games]," said Pollard, 33. "I didn't have a perfect Kentucky, but I'd certainly had a good season with him in general, and I thought he went well enough in Kentucky to at least be in contention.

"So I'd been getting him ready as though he was going to the WEG, then I backed off quite a bit because there was no sense in having him that fit since he wasn't going to do a four-star in the fall," he continued. "And I really wasn't

planning on doing a three-day event, so I said I'd give him a little bit of an easier summer."

Marilyn Payne sat down with Pollard to review his Rolex Kentucky dressage test after the competition and offered some advice that he used to tailor a new program at his and wife Nathalie's Pollard Eventing in Chatsworth, Ga., and Ocala, Fla.

"Marilyn wanted a bit more of a marching walk, and so I thought that was really quite improved," said Michael, who was also pleased that their flying lead changes were more fluid.

"In an effort of trying to work so hard at [the changes], I kind of messed up the timing a little bit for myself," he explained. "So I just went back to the basics a little bit, and Nathalie filmed quite a lot for me, and then we talked about it afterward.

"I just realized that while I was often preparing properly, the timing of my half-halt wasn't fantastic, so I stopped worrying about the preparation so much and just sort of rode across the diagonal and worked more on the timing of the half-halt and the give of the inside hand. As soon as I fixed that, the changes were much better."

Pollard and Mensa topped a section of open intermediate at Chattahoochee Hills (Ga.) in July on their way to Richland Park, where they sat in fourth place after dressage (45.6). And after a rail down in show jumping and 2 time faults on Ian Stark's cross-country track, they ended up in first.

Pollard took the ride on the 16-year-old Thoroughbred gelding (Colonial Affair—Fire The Secretary, Stop The Music) last spring from his father-in-law, Carl Bouckaert.

Mensa was bred at Rutledge Farm in Middleburg, Va., and had a successful racing career, retiring with 40 starts and earnings of \$92,901 before Andrea Leatherman bought him as a sound 7-year-old and introduced him to eventing. Their career together ended with a win at the Jersey Fresh CCI*** (N.J.) in 2011 before Bouckaert purchased Mensa later that year.

Bouckaert and Mensa were selected to represent Belgium in the 2012 London Olympic Games, but Mensa pulled a shoulder muscle while on the walker,

derailing that plan. Bouckaert competed his alternate mount Cyrano Z instead, and Michael rehabbed Mensa for a short time before building their own partnership together.

"I knew him because Andrea had trained with us for about three years, basically from the time he was doing two-stars until he did his first three-star," Michael explained. "So I knew him fairly well already, and Nathalie had ridden him quite a lot. And then we'd helped Carl with him a little bit, so I knew how to ride him essentially. I'd never ridden him cross-country, so that took a little bit of time to figure out, for us just to get to know each other. But he's a professional; he's done a lot of three-day events at this point and had some good results with everybody."

Michael also rode Tsetserleg, better known as "Thomas," a 7-year-old Trakehner gelding (Windfall *PG*—Thabana) owned by Christine Turner, to the top spot in open preliminary, division 1. They finished on their dressage score of 31.4.

Ping Gets Back Into A Groove

Jennie Brannigan and Cambalda also checked off a few boxes on their training to-do list after their last competition, Rolex Kentucky, before taking home the advanced win at Richland Park.

Brannigan and "Ping," owned by Nina Gardner, had solid spring outings at the CIC*** level, taking ninth at Red Hills (Fla.) in March then third at The Fork (N.C.) in April.

But after a technical elimination at Rolex Kentucky later that month, Brannigan realized that Ping's desire to go forward to the jumps just wasn't there anymore, so she made a change at home, where she runs Brannigan Eventing out of Wiseguys' Farm in West Grove, Pa.

Peter Brette, a jockey and assistant to Thoroughbred trainer Michael Matz, started regularly galloping Ping on the track for Brannigan, and the 12-year-old Irish Sport Horse (Balda Beau—Cathy's Lady) has gained more natural impulsion.

"I've wanted the horse to take me to the jumps a bit more; I was really thrilled with how he's done

RICHLAND PARK HORSE TRIALS Richland, Mich.—Aug. 21-24

▶ CIC***

| HORSE/RIDER | DRESSAGE | CROSS-COUNTRY JUMP/TIME | SHOW JUMPING JUMP/TIME | TOTAL |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------|
| 1. Mensa G/Michael Pollard | 45.6 | 0/2 | 4/0 | 51.6 |
| 2. Under Suspicion/Sharon White | 48.3 | 0/4.8 | 0/0 | 53.1 |
| 3. Shame On The Moon/Emily Beshear | 44.7 | 0/12 | 0/0 | 56.7 |
| 4. Landioso/Mackenna Shea | 43.5 | 0/6.8 | 0/7 | 57.3 |
| 5. Wundermaske/Sharon White | 46.8 | 0/5.6 | 4/3 | 59.4 |
| 6. Tsunami III/Sarah Cousins | 56.7 | 0/2 | 0/2 | 60.7 |

Also competed: 7. Totally Frank/K. Lehari, 63.6; 8. Blackfoot Mystery/K. Prather, 67.6; 9. Muggle/N. Moreira da Silva, 69.9; 10. In It To Win It/A. Klunick, 72.4; 11. Luckaun Quality/T. Bourke, 76.7; 12. F.I.S. Prince Charming/L. Barry, 79.7; 13. Westerly/S. Cousins, 79.7; 14. Proper Timing/J. Holling, 80.7; 15. Music Man II/A. Peterson, 81.2; 16. Houdini/K. Frei, 85.7; 17. In Style/J. Henry, 88.2; 18. Zatopek B/J. Holling, 89.1; 19. Sir Donovan/P. Humphreys, 90.1; 20. Sparrow's Nio/A. Sacksen, 92.0; 21. Cool Decision/A. Wilson, 93.9; 22. Rich N Famous/P. Humphreys, 96.9; 23. Win The War/J. Bortner-Harris, 102.0; 24. Mainway's Dry Ice/L. Ferguson, 105.2; 25. Fernhill Flutter/K. Keane, 106.3; 26. Covert Rights/C. Rutledge, 111.8.

Mandatory retirement on cross-country: Doesn't Play Fair/M. Black. Rider fall on cross-country: Jazz King/R. Smith. Withdrawn before cross-country: Can't Fire Me/B. Holder; Cavendish/J. Wendell. Eliminated in show jumping: Matapeake/S. Dunkerton.

Show jumping was held before cross-country.

▶ ADVANCED

| HORSE/RIDER | DRESSAGE | CROSS-COUNTRY JUMP/TIME | SHOW JUMPING JUMP/TIME | TOTAL |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------|
| 1. Cambalda/Jennie Brannigan | 30.0 | 0/7.2 | 0/0 | 37.2 |
| 2. No Boundaries/Erin Sylvester | 28.0 | 0/8 | 8/0 | 44.8 |
| 3. Lucky Devil/Lauren Kieffer | 35.9 | 0/12 | 0/0 | 47.9 |
| 4. Bantry Bays Dublin/Eliza Farren | 37.7 | 0/8.4 | 8/0 | 54.1 |
| 5. Glendening Avis/Callie Evans | 35.0 | 0/15.2 | 4/0 | 54.2 |
| 6. Anna Bella/Kurt Martin | 36.8 | 0/14.8 | 4/1 | 56.6 |

Also competed: 7. Bellamy/J. Schramm, 57.6; 8. Autorytet/D. Ivandava, 64.1; 9. More Inspiration/H. Jacks, 66.2; 10. A.P. Prime/L. Lang-Gluscic, 69.7; 11. Share Option/L. Heard, 71.9; 12. Honor Me/L. Ferguson, 77.7; 13. El Paso/L. Beer, 89.0; 14. Yoshi/K. Slezak, 131.30.

Retired on cross-country: Danio/K. Martin.



Cambalda has taken up gallop sets on the track, and it's made all the difference in his desire to jump, leading to his blue ribbon in the advanced at Richland Park with rider Jennie Brannigan.

SHANNON BRINKMAN PHOTO

Victoria Jessop piloted her own Desert Mystery to the top of the CIC** at Richland Park.

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with that galloping,” said Brannigan, 27. “I thought that I could go out and ride him more quietly than I normally ride because he actually wanted to be more in front of my leg. I just went out and thought, ‘I don’t just want to run around, but I really just want to give the horse a good ride.’ Everything rode exactly as planned, so that was lovely.”

Though the pair still picked up a handful of time penalties, they were fault-free in show jumping and moved up from second place, where they stood after scoring a 30.0 in dressage. Erin Sylvester was leading after dressage on No Boundaries, but ultimately dropped to second behind Brannigan.

“On the flat, I was really happy with him; he put in a very workmanlike test,” said Brannigan. “The horse naturally just doesn’t have a huge trot, and to be honest I haven’t ridden him in a national horse trial at the advanced level in a long time. He’s done the FEI test a lot. So that test has got a lot of walk, and he doesn’t have the greatest walk, but he’s got very good changes.”

While confident that show jumping course designer Marc Donovan would lay down a good, fair track, “it’s always quite tough to make the time and jump clean there with the terrain,” said Brannigan. “Knock on wood, he’s quite a good show jumper and jumped a nice round. He ticked a couple in the beginning, but it was a very smooth round.”

Brannigan credits the clean and clear round to her long partnership with the horse, their recent training with grand

prix show jumper Scott Keach and competing in the Walton Cup Mini Prix (Pa.) in August for extra practice in that phase.

“As I’ve gotten more accurate with the training I’ve done with Scotty, combined with Peter galloping at the track, I’m hoping I’ll have a horse that wants to take me to the jumps a little bit more this fall,” she said. “It’s been very helpful to get the horse fit and have him a bit more competitive to the jumps—it makes it easier for me to ride him when I don’t feel like I kind of need to send him all the time.

“Everybody’s asking me if there’s something wrong with him because I haven’t run him,” she continued. “That’s not the case. I just think at this point I’ve got a lot of horses, and I’m not going to run a horse’s legs off just to have something to run advanced. I want to preserve that horse and have him strong for another four years. That’s my plan.”

Brannigan also won the preliminary horse division on Cool As Ice, took second in open preliminary, division 1, aboard Celtic Heritage and rounded off the weekend with an open training win on Class Century.

Dez Scores CIC** Win

Desert Mystery has been to Richland Park once before in 2012, when he won a section of preliminary with longtime owner Victoria Jessop.

Since then, the pair has collected several top finishes at the next level—including second place at intermediate

at Fair Hill (Md.) in April and third at the Jersey Fresh CCI*** the following month—so when they returned to Richland Park to contest the CIC** this year, they were due for a win.

Jessop took “Dez” out for his customary “pre-ride”—an hour hack at the walk to familiarize him with the area—before warming up for dressage and putting in the leading score, a 44.4, out of 39 starters.

“He gets tight in his back and then loses his movement, but he really held it together,” said Jessop of the off-the-track Thoroughbred (Mojave Moon—Maternity Leave, Northern Baby). “He’s just grown up; he’s getting more rideable in the ring. I didn’t come out going, ‘Oh my God, that was a winning test.’ I still really feel like he could have gotten more points; there were a couple mistakes. So in a way that’s kind of exciting, that there’s more to get out of him. He’s got a really competitive test in there.”

Barry Thomason, Jessop’s husband of six years, serves as her main groom at events and the perfect calming factor for the gelding, who gets nervous in big show atmospheres.

“He’s always my groom, but I’m not always his!” Jessop joked. “He says I make him too nervous. He’s very much Dez’s buddy and does all the grooming for my shows. Dez very much likes a quiet, one-on-one experience. I do a lot of it, too, but it’s really nice that I can get on and ride, and I know everything’s taken care of and the horse is happy.”

The two run an eight-stall barn full of their own and client-owned horses that they’re bringing along at their Little River Farm in Middleburg, Va. Thomason has competed at the upper levels and currently competes his horse The Irish Rogue at preliminary, though he takes the ride on Dez and does a lot of the conditioning on other horses while Jessop focuses on flatwork and jumping at home.

“Cross-country, Dez is an amazing horse,” said Jessop, 40. “That’s what he’s bred to do, and he loves it. He makes a very easy ride; he’s got a beautiful gallop, he doesn’t pull. And everything went really well.

“Show jumping I would say is our crux, the hard part for both

of us,” she continued. “It helps that we got to show jump before we went cross-country because he gets a little quick and flat and nervous again, so it’s hard for him to hold his shape in the show jumping. But again, he held it together, and I’ve been working hard.”

They took one rail down in show jumping and then went clean and clear cross-country to hold onto the lead.

Allison Springer coaches Jessop regularly, and Jessop spends a few months training with Springer in Aiken, S.C., each winter. But she also credits her success to her extensive background in the equine industry.

“I was the classic, star-struck little Pony Club girl that aspired to riding in the Olympics and all of that,” said the native of England with a laugh. “But I also enjoy being behind the scenes, too—bringing along all the young horses.”

After going to art school in England, a passion she still keeps up by drawing

pastel portraits of animals in the winter months when there’s less to do in the barn, Jessop started grooming professionally.

She served as the manager and head groom of the Japanese Eventing Team that competed in—and led to her move to—Atlanta for the 1996 Olympic Games.

While there, Jessop scored a job working for Bouckaert in Chatsworth, Ga., where Pollard Eventing is now based. “And then I came up to Middleburg, and I worked for Jan Byyny, then I went to Karen and David O’Connor, and then I went out on my own and started my own business,” explained Jessop. “I’ve been very lucky; I’ve had great jobs and great support along the way. I think it’s so nice because everyone’s very happy to see me have a horse and go up the levels.”

When Jessop branched out on her own, Thoroughbred trainer Rusty Carrier would often send her horses to help train on the flat.

“Dez was one of his group,” she said. “I said to Rusty, ‘If this one ever goes on the market, please let me know, because it’s one I would like.’ Fate and circumstance got me to that point where he did one day call me.”

In the seven years she’s had Dez, now 12, he’s gone from “manic” to manageable. “I think taking my time with him and having the one-on-one partnership has made him come through,” said Jessop. “He’s come a long way; he wasn’t quite so rideable when I got him. I’m very happy to have him. It’s an improvement each time we go out.” 🐾

▶ Richland Park Horse Trials

Richland, MI—Aug. 21-24.

▲ **CIC**** - 1. Desert Mystery, V. Jessop, 48.4; 2. Paddy The Caddy, E. Sylvester, 49.9; 3. Rubens D’Ysieux, M. Kuchta, 50.3. ▲ **Int. Rider** - 1. Blitz Volo, S. Anton, 37.6; 2. Merlot 325, A. Thompson, 44.9; 3. Bust A Groove, N. Cannon, 56.6. ▲ **Open Int.** - 1. Calle, M. Kuchta, 35.6; 2. Sportsfield Candy, J. Simmons, 38.1; 3. Meadowbrook’s Scarlett, L. Kieffer, 42.8. ▲ **Open Prel., Div. 1** - 1. Tsetslerleg, M. Pollard, 31.4; 2. Celtic Heritage, J. Brannigan, 32.3; 3. Landmark’s Monte Carlo, L. Kieffer, 34.1. ▲ **Open Prel., Div. 2** - 1. Fernhill Cascum Marco, K. Hewson, 31.4; 2. GV Tuscany, J. Simmons, 32.1; 3. Bee Hive, K. Prather, 35.5. ▲ **Prel. Horse** - 1. Cool As Ice, J. Brannigan, 29.6; 2. Cossino Rio, D. Payne, 32.2; 3. Delta Queen, S. Murphy, 32.3. ▲ **Prel. Rider, Div. 1** - 1. Spectacular Tap, M. Thomas, 39.1; 2. King Bust, M. Koppin, 47.6; 3. Spartagon, D. Kreittl, 47.8. ▲ **Prel. Rider, Div. 2** - 1. Cool Jack, D. Bayly, 39.1; 2. The Contender, K. Zapala, 39.8; 3. Storm Warning, L. Markham, 40.6. ▲ **Prel. Rider, Div. 3** - 1. Yahya, J. Smith, 33.2; 2. Newmarket Venture Flight, A. Karnes, 36.7; 3. Raptor Force, E. Shirley, 37.7. ▲ **Jr. Trg. Rider, Div. 1** - 1. Aron, G. Hogan, 30.8; 2. Princess Sophia, A. Morrison, 34.5; 3. Anastasia, D. Dunayczan, 37.3. ▲ **Jr. Trg. Rider, Div. 2** - 1. Mercury, A. Smith, 35.5; 2. Fifi Brindacier, E. Clarke, 37.7; 3. No Objection, E. Hartley, 39.2. ▲ **Open Trg.** - 1. Class Century, J. Brannigan, 27.3; 2. Master Eli, P. Humphreys, 28.6; 3. Spot On Cosmos, D. Stebbins, 30.0. ▲ **Sr. Trg. Rider, Div. 1** - 1. Fun Maker, D. Brandt, 31.4; 2. Artful Impulse, O. Greene, 43.6; 3. Zero Gravity, C. Wilkinson, 50.2. ▲ **Sr. Trg. Rider, Div. 2** - 1. Peterbuild, K. Giancola, 31.8; 2. Nic Nac, M. Pagani, 35.5; 3. Always A Thrill, E. Wilkinson, 39.1. ▲ **Sr. Trg. Rider, Div. 3** - 1. Grace Under Pressure, L. Adams, 32.2; 2. Treetop Flyer, H. Helton, 35.9; 3. Ned Divine, C. O’Hara, 41.0. ▲ **Trg. Horse, Div. 1** - 1. Absaluut Annabelle, D. Payne, 34.1; 2. Cobra, R. Wood, 34.1; 3. Replika, J. Sack, 34.4. ▲ **Trg. Horse, Div. 2** - 1. Ringwood Army, A. Klunick, 33.3; 2. Uncle Ralph, R. Walker, 38.0; 3. Pandora, K. Hill, 42.2. ▲ **Jr. Nov. Rider, Div. 1** - 1. True Grift, F. Cotter, 28.0; 2. Arlington, E. Granley, 34.0; 3. Black Tie Affair, S. Tisdall, 34.0. ▲ **Jr. Nov. Rider, Div. 2** - 1. July’s Wild Idea, C. Lundberg, 34.0; 2. Alegrio, E. Sharkey, 36.0; 3. Allegretta, S. Keesee, 36.5. ▲ **Nov. Horse, Div. 1** - 1. Alice Alice, R. Walker, 31.0; 2. Harlequin, C. Hollnagel, 35.5; 3. Rumson Road, N. Parkin, 37.5. ▲ **Nov. Horse, Div. 2** - 1. GunSlinger, C. Garcia, 30.0; 2. Copperfield, D. Kreittl, 30.0; 3. SBT Good Guy, R. Walker, 32.0. ▲ **Open Nov.** - 1. McGinty’s Irish Rose, C. Luedke, 28.0; 2. Jamaica Skodstrup, C. Garcia, 29.0; 3. Henry The Eighth, S. Lansdale, 31.5. ▲ **Sr. Nov. Rider, Div. 1** - 1. Teddy Bear, S. Jones, 28.0; 2. Barney, B. French, 34.6; 3. Indy Jones, L. Czarniecki, 36.0. ▲ **Sr. Nov. Rider, Div. 2** - 1. Will.I.Am, M. Jensen, 27.5; 2. Irish Park’s Diamond, A. Wavryk, 32.0; 3. Restore The Roar, A. Tittle, 37.5.

▶ A Focus On Fitness

Ever wonder how upper-level horses and riders stay fit for big events? Specific fitness regimens at home, which don’t include much jumping, have made all the difference for the leaders of the Richland Park Horse Trials.

Michael Pollard eased up his training program on Mensa G as they transitioned from the four- to three-star level after the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event, and while he focuses most often on flatwork, he maintains a consistent conditioning schedule.

“While we’re in Chatsworth, [Ga., the horses] do a lot of trotting because we’ve got a lot of space there and a lot of dirt roads that they can trot on. And then twice a week they do some canter sets,” he said. “We have a pretty nice hill here, so I do hill repeats, basically where we canter to the top in about a minute and 30 seconds, and they walk for 20 seconds, and then they trot back down to the bottom. So it’s basically

about 1:30 on, about 2 minutes off, or 2 minutes of trotting.”

Jennie Brannigan employs jockey Peter Brette to do gallop sets with Cambalda to prepare for events and has given him a break from jumping. “When [Brette] started working the horse I said, ‘When’s the last time you sat on a horse that’s not all Thoroughbred?’ And he said 20 years!” said Brannigan with a laugh. “So that’s been cool. I alternate that with galloping the horse on hills as well.”

Victoria Jessop takes her Thoroughbred Desert Mystery for a breeze on the track once a week while training for a CIC** and goes every five days to prepare for a three-day event, and she mostly saves the jumping for competitions.

“He’s a very fit horse, so I try not to get him too fit,” she said. “I spend a lot of time on the end of the Parelli rope, hand grazing and just getting him out of the stall. He goes out at night and just spends a lot of time being a horse. I’m a great believer in that.”