



# Sullivan Shocks Herself With Golden Gate Grand Prix Victory

*In just her fourth grand prix start, this amateur exceeds all of her expectations.*

Molly Sorge

JESSICA SULLIVAN had an unusual strategy between the first round and the jump-off of the \$30,000 Golden Gate Grand Prix. "I was tempted to pack up my tack trunk and go home," she quipped.

Sullivan's nerves were on high alert. In just her fourth grand prix start, she'd jumped clear. "Being in the jump-off was so far beyond anything I expected. I got very nervous. I had no experience going in the jump-off of a grand prix," she said.

"The [first-round] course was technical enough and long, and when I crossed the finish timers and realized I was clean, I

threw my hand over my mouth. I didn't know if I was going to scream or throw up," Sullivan continued.

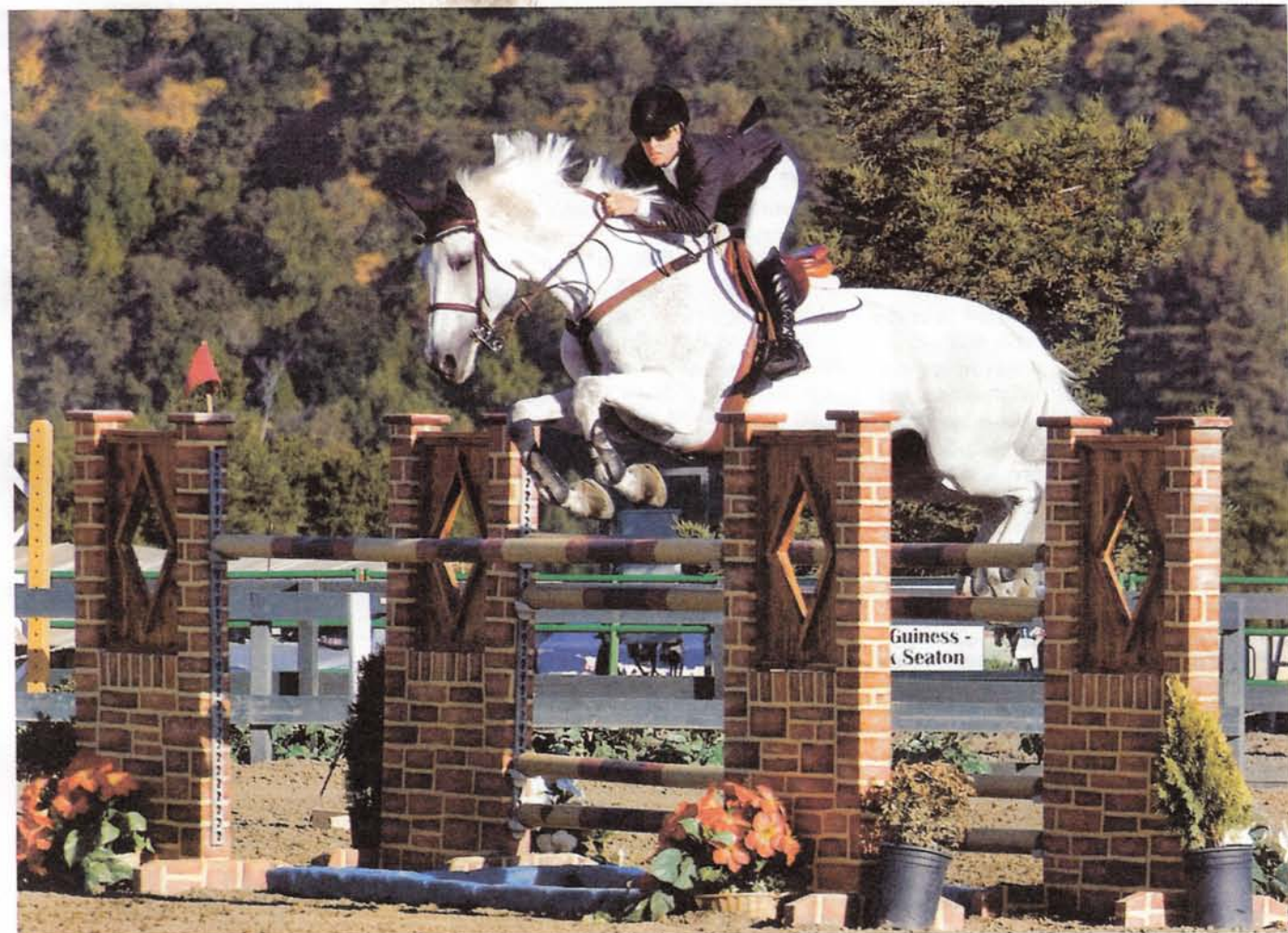
She had one goal for the jump-off—to cross the finish line.

"My horse isn't fast, so my plan was just to go in and jump the jump-off and survive. Helen McNaught went first, and I couldn't watch. But when I came up to the gate, someone told me she'd retired. I thought, 'Oh my God! If I just finish, I'll be second!'"

"I didn't think anything beyond just finding the finish timers. And then I jumped clear! I was just ecstatic. I thought

for sure Liz Denny was going to go clean and much faster than me, so I'd already made up my mind that I was second and I thought that was amazing. I couldn't watch her go, but I saw one of my friends react when she had a rail. Patrick Seaton yelled to me, and we almost fell to the ground. I couldn't believe it! Things don't happen like that."

Sullivan, the only clear round in the jump-off aboard the gray mare Classic Europa, had won the class, July 5 in Menlo Park, Calif. The win came after Sullivan's three other starts at the grand prix level, which weren't quite as auspicious.



(Sheri Scott Photo)

Jessica Sullivan had the best ride of her career with Classic Europa at the \$30,000 Golden Gate Grand Prix, topping the three-horse jump-off.



## "I didn't know if I was going to scream or throw up."

—Jessica Sullivan

### ► Isn't It Normal To Fall Off?

Sullivan dipped her toe into grand prix waters in May at the Pickwick Summer Classic (Cal.).

"I think we made it to jump No. 8. I got so excited that I'd jumped the water, which was No. 7, that I think I forgot about the rest of the jumps for a few seconds. By the time I found the next fence, I didn't even know what happened, but we met it on that horrible half-stride, and rails went flying, and I was on the ground," she recalled.

"But I hopped right up and thought to myself, 'The first seven jumps were awesome!'" she added, laughing.

In Sullivan's second grand prix, she said she stopped counting rails at 20 faults.

"But we finished! I think the whole word 'grand prix' just freaked me out," said Sullivan. "I think it was all in my head. The day of that first grand prix, I couldn't even eat or drink. I put on my white breeches, and they looked even whiter than usual that day. When I fell off in the first one, I thought, 'OK, that's totally normal. It's my first one, of course, it's not going to go well.'"

But after Sullivan got the first two grand prix classes out of her system, she traveled to Woodside. "I thought, 'Well, nothing could go worse. It's only going to get better from here.' And it did," she said. "I think I just got the nerves out of my system."

Sullivan and Classic Europa jumped to a four-fault score in the \$20,000 Bayfest Grand Prix during the Bay Area Summer Festival, June 24-28, at the Woodside facility in Menlo Park. "For me, that was like winning the Olympics, after falling off in the first one and barely surviving the second," Sullivan said.

So, for the \$30,000 Golden Gate Classic the following week, she had no expecta-

tions. "Just to be in the class was enough for me. I was nervous and had that whole nauseous feeling," Sullivan said.

She usually trains with Santiago Rickard, but he was showing at the Spruce Meadows (Alta.) venue this summer, so her good friend Patrick Seaton helped her at Woodside.

"Patrick was tremendously supportive, firm and encouraging all at the same time," Sullivan said.

"I chipped my first jump schooling for the jump-off, and he took me aside. He said, 'This is not your first horse show, just calm down.' And I got it together. It was intimidating. I had to jump off against Helen McNaught, who's ridden all over the world, and Liz Denny, who was one of my first trainers. To be in that company was just incredible."

### ► You Never Know

Sullivan's goal for this year was to move up from the amateur-owner jumpers to the grand prix, but when she broke her hand on Jan. 4, those plans looked iffy: She hit her hand on a horse's shoulder over a 2-foot jump.

"I hit it the wrong way and broke three bones in the hand and a few fingers. That kind of put a damper on the beginning of the year. And then I broke my thumb on the other hand," she said.

So, when John Endicott called her in February and told her he had a grand prix horse she might be interested in, she told him that if she could ride the horse with the few fingers she had working, she'd take her.

"Getting on was the hardest part. She's 13 hands, and I couldn't use my hands to pull myself up. But I jumped her around with my broken hands and put her on the truck that day," said Sullivan.

Classic Europa, 11, was a veteran of young horse and grand prix classes in Europe. "She's been there and done that, and she's the sweetest, kindest horse I've ever had. Plus, she's big, which makes the jumps look very small," Sullivan joked.

"She's very slow, and she's not crazy fancy, but there's a lot of scope. For a first grand prix horse, she's perfect. My goal is just to finish, so what was appealing about her was her generosity. I can make mistakes, and she just keeps jumping. It's nice to have one with a bit of experience," she said.

Sullivan recalled that they went through the typical "getting to know each other" phase, with its usual ups and downs

and days of absolute joy and days of woe. After Sullivan got her cast off and her hands had recovered, she started the mare in the high amateur division.

Sullivan, 32, has only been showing in the jumpers for four years. She'd dabbled in the hunter divisions as a junior and young adult but discovered the jumpers and her niche.

"When I started, my goal was the modified junior/amateur-owner division. As soon as I did that, I thought, 'Maybe I should try the lows.' And it kind of went from there. Never did I really think I'd be at the grand prix level! Every year, when you get the right horses and work with the right people, you never know how your goals might change," she said.

Sullivan, of Santa Monica, Calif., rode at Endicott's barn at first, then trained with Joie Galin for a period before finding Rickard closer to home. She teaches Pilates part time and rides every day with her younger sister Tiffany, who also shows in the jumpers.

## "I jumped her around with my broken hands and put her on the truck that day."

—Jessica Sullivan

She plans to continue in the grand prix ring with Classic Europa.

"We'll just take it one day at a time and see what happens," she said.

Sullivan also has young horses on their way up the ranks. In fact, she won the junior/amateur-owner jumper classic on her 7-year-old at the Golden Gate Classic.

"I should probably retire!" she joked. "It's all so unexpected, and I'm so unused to it all. But I'm excited to keep bringing the young ones along and have fun in the grand prix ring."

**WOODSIDE, CA—JULY 1-5.**  
REGULAR WORKING HUNTER CH: Sleepwalk, Diane Reager.

RES: Double Eagle, FDL Farm LLC & Sue Sadler.  
AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER CH: Double Eagle, FDL Farm LLC & Sue Sadler.

RES: Chance Of Horses, Sovereign Farms.  
PRE-OPEN HUNTER LHC: Black Pearl, Anje Patterson & Ann Janis.

RES: Danamica, Jennifer House.  
ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER, 18-35 CH: Black Pearl, Katie Patterson & Ann Janis.

RES: Puzzle, Cindy McGuire.  
ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER, 36-49 CH: Sleepwalk, Diane Reager.

RES: Lindmark, Climmer Dubin.  
ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER, 50 & OVER CH: Fusion, The Dobson Family.

RES: Romantica, Kristin Kendall.

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## \$30,000 GOLDEN GATE GRAND PRIX

Woodside, Calif.—July 4

HORSE/RIDER	FAULTS	TIME	PURSE
1. Classic Europa Jessica Sullivan	0-0	4:27	\$9,000
2. MMC Electrifying/ Liz Denny	0-1	4:30	6,600
3. Ocean City/ Helen McNaught	0-VW		3,900

21 horses competed.