

August 21, 2006

Endurance News

Spain's Endurance Golden Boy Miguel Vila Ubach (ESP), and Hungares Win Individual Gold FEI World Equestrian Games - [FEI Press Release](#)

Today in Aachen, the Spanish rider Miguel Vila Ubach (ESP), 33, aboard the grey Arabian gelding **Hungares***, won the Individual world title in Endurance. Two young French ladies join him on the podium: Virginie Atger, 22, on Kangoo d'Aurabelle in silver and Elodie Le Labourier, 24, on Sangho'Limousian in bronze. This is the first time since the FEI World Endurance Championships began in 1986 that a Spanish rider wins the supreme title.

This definitely was an emotional victory. After 160 km in six loops and a riding time of 9 hours 12 min 27 seconds, the winning pair entered the main stadium to cross the finishing line under torrential downpour. The crowd cheered loudly the new World Champion and the tears of rider and crew were streaming down with the rain drops. "I knew we were good but I don't believe I'm here today," a happy Miguel declared at the press conference that followed his arrival. "I was a European Champion back in 1999 and I've been dreaming for another title ever since but I'd never have thought it would be this one."



Photo: Miguel Vila Ubach (ESP), 2006 FEI World Endurance Champion / © Cealy Tetley

The pair were in 47th position after the fourth vetgate but this had not discouraged them. On the contrary, they had been saving their strength for the last 13-km loop. "I knew my horse could fly over the last bit. We rode out of the vetgate, I saw the French girls and decided to follow them as I was sure they would get good placings. The horse felt so strong that we found ourselves quite up front. And then I felt we could make it and decided to just go for it."

Silver medallist Virginie Atger (riding time 9:16:13) praised the great spirit of the French team. "We started slowly from behind all together as a team. And we made our way forward as a team and it has paid off." Currently fourth on the FEI World Endurance Riders' Rankings, Virginie Atger definitely has Endurance under her skin. Her mother, Bénédicte Atger, was on the gold medal winning French team at the 1994 FEI World Equestrian Games in The Hague.

Elodie Le Labourier (riding time 9:16:14) paid a special tribute to her 16-year old Arabian grey gelding. "He was wonderful today. I am going to retire him after this and I am very happy that he finishes his competition career on such a fabulous win." Elodie, who is also member of the French team, has gradually made her way to the top level placing seventh individually in the 2002 FEI WEG and fourth in the 2005 FEI European Championship.

*** Hungares:** Hungares, the Shagya-Arabian gelding was bred by the Bábolna National Stud and was born in Hungary, Bábolna in 1998 as Siglavy Bagdady VIII-1. He was imported to Spain in 2004. Due to the training in Spain and the special training-education method of the Bábolna Stud he achieves great results.



All three winners agreed that the greatest difficulty of the day had been the weather. The morning was dry and fresh with an ideal temperature for the horses, but as the day went on, rain came making the footing very deep. "The hills [that some thought would prove particularly challenging] were no problem, we have the same in Catalonia, but the weather was the hard part," Miguel Vila Ubach commented. The performances achieved today are remarkable given the adverse climatic conditions.

159 riders from 41 nations started the competition which makes the 2006 FEI World Endurance Championship in Aachen the largest international event to date. The course, running through Germany, The Netherlands and Belgium, attracted some 20,000 spectators proving the increasing interest taken in the Endurance discipline.

Individual Results (first 10 riders)

1. Miguel Vila Ubach (ESP) / Hungares – 9:12:27
2. Virginie Atger (FRA) / Kangoo d'Aurabelle – 9:16:13
3. Elodie Le Labourier (FRA) / Sangho'Limousian - 9:16:14
4. Jaume Puntí Dachs (ESP) / Elvis HB – 9:22:07
5. Philippe Benoit (FRA) / Akim du Bouleve – 9:24:30
6. Joao Raposo (POR) / Sultao - 9:24:31
7. Valerie Ceunik (BEL) / Kouros des Iviers – 9:27:39
8. Shane Gray Dougan (NZL) / Vigar Riffal – 9:30:38
9. Sultan Ahmad Sultan bin Sulayem (UAE) – 9:30:42
10. Pascale Dietsh (FRA) / Hifrane du Barthas – 9:30:44

Team Results (first 3 teams)

1. France – total riding time 28:11:27
2. Switzerland – 29:57:20
3. Portugal – 30:38:32

Did You Know

Today's ride had a royal touch to it: no less than 10 members of royal families took part in the competition.

The first ever sports ride of over 100 km was organised in 1973, year of birth of today's winner Miguel Vila Urach.