

Our Cross Country Day ended sooner than we would have liked when I opted to retire at the second water jump. Sometimes things are just not right and it is far better to play it safe and call it a day rather than to push it and risk an injury or a fall.

The day started out great with the previous days rains having added just the right amount of rain to the ground and with overcast skies. I went for my final walk around the course, looking at the lines I planned to take in each combination and going over each jump and each minute marker multiple times in my mind until I had the whole course committed to memory and had a plan for attack. It was going to be a tough course with the first part very twisty and turny and with lots of jumping efforts in the first six minutes. Then the next two minutes were a long slow pull up the entire property climaxing in a very steep hill at the 8 minute marker before turning for the final 2 1/2 minutes home. The course had several serious accuracy questions with some very steep angles into and out of lines. With a limited number of Advanced competitions as a team, I still don't know Ron that well, but was confident that we could give it go. As we were tacking up for our afternoon cross country the sun began to come out, heating things up. Ron came out to the warm up on fire and ready to take things on. I had to spend more time than usual getting him settled and listening to me, trying to be careful not to use up too much of his energy. I made sure to finish his warm up soon enough before my start time to allow some time to cool down. I was towards the end of the order of go and the course had been riding really tough. Lots of problems at the water jump and some horses running out of steam mid way through.

Ron stood calm in the box for the count down and then we were off! Jumps one and two were smooth and right out of stride and then I took a bit of time to get straight to jump number three, a huge double brush. Makenna Shea had had a fall here earlier, so I didn't want to take it for granted. You had to approach Jump 4a on quite an angle to get lined up for the corner at 4B. Even on the angle, you approached the corner at quite a slice and that had caused problems earlier on. We hit the A perfect and then were right on the line for the B. A big flier over a cabin in to the woods and then up the hill to another accuracy question. A narrow house on a three stride line to a cabin that angled very steeply away. I landed from the first cabin and took a stride then realized we were going to be a bit off of our distance so had to pull right to get it done. The course designer had placed a tree in the middle of the out to increase the difficulty of the question so we got as close to the tree as we could and pressed to get out in the three. A gallopy open oxer came next and then the first water. The first water was a water to water corner, something I haven't seen on courses without first having a jump in. It jumped fine for us, but I saw lots of horses jump the corner very awkwardly. Not sure if was that horses were not expecting it there, the vertical face of the corner, or the deep water we galloped through to get to it. The skinny lighthouse coming out jumped great and then it was a bit of a breather to the next three galloping jumps. 12AB was another combination in the woods, at the top of quite a steep hill, so you couldn't really see the arrowhead until you were jumping the A element. Ron jumped the first element pretty big, but was right on target for the skinniest chevron I have ever seen. A perfect distance right out of stride to the big triple brush at 13 and we were headed to the second water. The in was a very big, very narrow brush that had to be jumped on an

angle to get the line to the skinny brush in to the water. As I came around the turn to set up , I saw what I thought was a very good, forward stride and pressed with my leg for the line. Ron got to the brush and just didn't seem to understand the question. I think he thought I was running him in to a wall! He got to the distance and said "What?" I re-routed him to the option line, which he jumped with ease. I learned later that quite a few riders had opted for that route. It was a long way through the deep water to the next element, the bounce bank up to a very large log. The distance on top of the bank was short, so you didn't want to come humming in too strong, so I worked to compress Ron's stride and be patient to wait for the distance to kick in. I saw a bit of a deep one and pressed with my leg, but Ron missed with his front legs and sprawled up the bank and landed with not enough impulsion to get over the log. I though for a split second he was going to give it a try, but I'm glad he didn't, as I don't think he would have made it over! Initially I though we didn't keep enough impulsion across the water, but when I went back and looked at the video, it looked like he mis-read the bank and missed his stride jumping up. At that point, I called it a day and headed back to the barn. I finished the day, not with a completion, but with a sound horse that is ready to come out and play another day. That always makes for a good day.

Every competition is a chance to reflect on both successes and failures. I think we had good preparation coming up to Jersey with an excellent cross country run on a difficult CIC track at Galway. Our dressage definitely is headed in the right direction and I was mostly bummed to not see how the work we did on the show jumping the week before was going to pay off. For homework, I need to keep working on getting Ron comfortable in his hind end. More chiropractic and acupuncture! To compete successfully at this top level, the horses need to be feeling at the top of their game, and I think there is more we can do there to help Ron out. We plan to head home to CA, and run a couple of Advanced horse trials before aiming for the CIC*** at Rebecca Farm and then finishing the year with the CCI*** at Galway Downs.

