

SPORTS & LEISURE

MacGillivray set to take on the world at championships in Italy

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Staff Writer

Two years ago, when Limehouse's Courtney MacGillivray qualified for the Equestrian World Singles Driving Championship, she was something of an unknown.

She won't be able to enjoy the advantage of anonymity this time around.

MacGillivray will represent Canada and test her mettle and horse against the 75 top competitors in the world this weekend in Italy.

It's the second trip to the Equestrian World Singles Driving Championship for the 20-year-old University of Guelph student, as she attended the 2004 event in Sweden, albeit as a relative newcomer to the sport. MacGillivray had taken up combined driving just five months prior to attending those world championships, where she would go on to finish 47th, so she is expecting a marked improvement this time around. And an excellent string of results in 2006 has her in a confident mood going into this weekend's events.

"I'm trying to think of this as just another international show, otherwise you can get really stressed out over it," she said from Belgium last week. "This season went quite well and we'll see if it bodes well for me in Italy. All you can do is just make sure everything's prepared and that Willy is healthy. The horse is quite young and you have to be delicate with them."

Willy is the stable name of MacGillivray's six-year-old Dutch Warmblood bay gelding, also known as Tyfoon Velvet on the competitive circuit. The duo achieved something unheard of for a non-European entry at a major competition in Belgium last month, winning outright against a world-class field.

Combined driving consists of three separate disciplines—dressage, marathon and cones—and MacGillivray recorded the best point total for the weekend, beating out former world champion Andr

Herman amongst the elite field. Several other top-10 finishes this year have elevated MacGillivray into contender status, but she's well aware that just one missed gate or misstep by her horse will result in elimination from the entire competition.

The marathon component of combined driving is the most difficult of the three disciplines. Rider and horse must traverse a 10-16 km course and complete pre-determined distances within a set time frame, and the pace is dangerously fast, so much so that MacGillivray wears a protective vest.

"Marathon is really fun but it's definitely nerve-racking because you have to memorize things beforehand and one wrong turn means you're finished," she said. "You want to be quick, but not so quick that you flip your carriage. At the same time, if you want to win, you've got to take risks and taking them at the right time is how you do well."

For the past three years, MacGillivray has lived in Belgium with her coach, Gerard Leitjen, from April to September to train six days a week and compete against the world's best.

An elite-level ice hockey player as well, she had to retire from the Brampton Jr. Thunder this past year in order to concentrate more on combined driving. She won't be going to Europe next year, preferring to compete on the North American circuit, but plans on having a long career in the sport.

"I'd like to maintain this as my professional hobby. I wouldn't want to do it for a living," added MacGillivray, who plans on a career in the insurance field.

"I've bought a young horse and I'd like to get another so that I can drive pairs, which is something I've always wanted to try."

Her father Bill will serve as the manager for the Canadian Equestrian Team in Italy.

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Courtney MacGillivray and her horse Tyfoon Velvet are in Italy this weekend to compete in the world championships of singles' combined driving, and based on their results from 2006, the locally-based combination has a chance to shake up the European-dominated sport.

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Acton racer racks up first late model win

When the checkered flag fell at Lucas Oil Flamboro Speedway earlier this month, Acton's David Elliott added another championship to his resume—his first track championship in a Late Model.

The 34-year-old Elliott captured 11 heat wins and one feature victory during the year, but it was consistency that was the key to winning this title.

His average finishing position at Flamboro Speedway was an impressive fourth. In fact, during the 18-race season, the Lucas Oil Chevrolet finished in the top five an amazing 16 times.

"The car worked really well all year," said Elliott. "Every week, when we rolled off the trail-

er, we were pretty quick."

Elliott becomes only the fourth driver to win titles in both the Canadian Vintage Modified and Late Model divisions.

But there is more to be done.

Elliott began the 2006 season with two goals—win the Late Model championship at Flamboro Speedway and capture the overall Weekend Warrior Series title. He's achieved half of his goal and is leading the Weekend Warrior Series points standings with three weeks of racing left in the season.

"Winning one title is fantastic," said Elliott. "Winning both in the same year would be amazing!"



Auto racer David Elliott of Acton has had a banner season on the track and enjoyed a post-race celebration recently with his pit crew and wife Jeannie at Flamboro Speedway after winning the 2006 Late Model championship. From left are: Jeff Searles, Dave Centwell, Dave Hennessey, Dave Pereira, Marty Hagan, car chief Brett Paveling, crew chief Eddie Askin, David Elliott, Jeannie Bates and Emily Paveling.

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