

Giddy UP!



50th time competing ponies up a win for Dena Weiner

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PHOTOGRAPHY GORDON SMITH

The 2005 Fitness Hollywood weekend, held November 18 to 20 in Hollywood, California, featured four separate contests – the Fitness America Pageant (FAP), Ms. Bikini America, Model America Championships and Musclemania's 15th Anniversary – that drew more than 350 competitors from around the world. This year's venue – the newly renovated Hollywood Renaissance Hotel, next to the world-famous Grauman's Chinese Theatre and its Walk of Stars – seemed a fitting location for the convergence of athletes to make their mark on stage. Indeed, adding to the heady mix of world-class fitness athletes and show business celebrities was an on-location shoot of an upcoming episode of Jennifer Garner's CIA action series, *Alias*.

The path to this year's FAP World title seemed to be wide open this year, as several favorites were missing from the competition: Last year's winner, Allison Ethier, was five months pregnant and happily sat this one out. Rhonda Finlayson, the 2005 Fitness Universe winner, was busy celebrating her wedding anniversary rather than going for a second title. And Wendi West, the 2004 Fame Canada runner-up and 2004 FAP Universe winner,

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remained in Florida. So for veteran competitor and 2002 Fitness Universe Pageant (FUP) winner Sylvia Tremblay, this weekend's FAP World title looked especially ripe for the taking. Tremblay promised her fans a new routine – one that was not only technically sound but also fitting for this year's location. But as with all good competitions, this one was unpredictable, and no one could rest on her laurels. After all, surprises are what keep the competition going.

Unfortunately, the weekend's events started fitfully: The contest promoters were repeatedly bedeviled by eleventh-hour obstacles and unexpected red tape spawned by the host hotel, and the FAP competition itself was delayed by a couple of hours. But the inevitable grumbings from the crowd soon dissipated once the competition got underway and the audience was able to turn its attention to the wonderful routines, sparkling swimsuits and next generation of FAP competitors. The large stage and multiple runways – complete with a catwalk for the women to strut their stuff – proved to be the perfect setting for an inspired series of fitness performances.

For the first time, the FAP treated the audience to performances by five competitors in the FAP Junior division. Cathy Savage and Celia Thompson of Savage Choreography trained all five juniors [dubbed the "Savage Juniors"]



in this division and managed to bring along a large contingent of family and friends, all of whom were cheering up a storm and supporting everyone to the max. Add to this three dance troupes that offered interval entertainment throughout the entire weekend, along with Celia Thompson's Cheer South Outrageous Team and MaDonna Grimes Dance Fitness Theatre Company, and the venue was rocking.

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The main event opened with long-time competitor Dena Anne Weiner's fitness routine. The odds weren't in Weiner's favor, though: Historically, she comes in too lean, performs with too many props and, at age 43, is one of the oldest competitors. This time, however, the past definitely wasn't prologue as Weiner scored an upset win over a strong field of contenders.

It was certainly a tight race for first place. Weiner and runner-up Rhianna DaCruz's scores were flipped going into the interview round: Weiner was first for Fitness; DaCruz was first in swimsuit. If Toneka Pires hadn't won the interview round, the outcome might very well have been different.

1ST DENA ANNE WEINER

"I am a performer, and I've been performing all my life," says Dena Anne Weiner. "I have fun playing to the audience and judges. This is why each year I come back with more and more props, a theme and an outfit. It's my theatrical production." She wasn't kidding. With twelve props, Tony Gonzales, the mercurial choreographer and judge for FAP, warned her that she was becoming too predictable. But Weiner surprised the audience and judges alike by deftly combining her props with just enough dynamic fitness moves to best the entire field in the fitness round.

At age 43, Weiner is the oldest competitor to win a Fitness America Pageant. And as this was her 50th show,

her win had to be an especially satisfying milestone in her fitness career. Her physique was in phenomenal condition, though I'm sure the naysayers of her win would claim she was too lean. But her combined score of third place in swimsuit and first place in Fitness, topped off with a third-place win for the interview round, was just enough to get her first place overall.

"I have known Dena and her family for many years, so to be able to watch her finally win Fitness America was very satisfying," says Lou Zwick, FUP producer and president of Fitness Universe, Inc. "She will be a great representative of the FAP, fitness women and especially mothers everywhere."