

Irish Bred Connemara Pony Top Performer In Finland

- *Tuula Pyöriä*

The first Connemara pony was imported to Finland via Sweden in 1966. This pony was Cashel Eileen 2468. More mares straight from Ireland were to follow, most of them in foal. In 1971 the stallion Cocum Tiger Moth 334 (by Tiger Gill) was imported from Great Britain and he established the reputation of the breed as great performer in Finland.

The Finnish Connemara Pony Society was formed in 1984 when there were less than 100 purebred Connemara ponies in the country. The small society has actively promoted the breed,

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encouraged breeders and arranged shows and participated at international meetings in Clifden. It can be said the breed is now well recognised and held in high esteem here although we won't have more than maybe 40 foals born each year – total number of Connemaras is estimated around 600 now.

Over the years there have been numerous successful performance ponies in dressage as well as in show jumping and eventing. Today's most

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Photo Jutta Koivula: Park Benjamin after winning National Championship 2010

famous Connemara in the show jumping scene is an Irish bred 13 years old gelding Park Benjamin ridden by Vera Elopuro. Park Benjamin is by Ashfield Festy out of Spanish Dancer (by Mervyn Pookhaun) and bred by Sandra Parkinson. He has been on top for several years and with more than one rider. Park Benjamin's

latest successes include winning the National Championship 2010 as well as the Pony Finals recently at the Helsinki International Horse Show.

The breeders are encouraged to bring their promising youngsters on through the quality tests and special competitions aimed for ponies of certain age. Young Finnish bred Connemara ponies did extremely well this year in the competition called Pony Breeders. The breeders enter their

ponies to the competition as foals and pay an annual fee until the pony can compete at the age of 5 and 6 years. The prize money is quite substantial as it is accumulated from entry fees over the years. There are separate classes for dressage and show jumping and the competition runs over two days. This year's winner in the 5-year old show jumping was a black roan mare The Next Best Thing (by Symphatil Hazy Becks out of Aglaya by Ardnasillagh O'Flaherty), who happens to be a great-granddaughter of the aforementioned Cocum Tiger Moth. The 6 year old dressage victory went to Streamside Beverley (by Innellan Kestrel out of Caragh Eager Eileen by Millfields Ensign) another great-granddaughter to Cocum Tiger Moth! These ponies' grand-dams happen to be full sisters and the talent goes through the family. This mare's family has also produced some of the best breeding stock in the country so "it" is in their genes.