

Ireland

Gravity-defying hats make spectacular return for Ladies' Day at the Dublin Horse Show

This year's Best Dressed contest was an inclusive affair, with everyone invited to take part whatever their gender or sexual orientation



Tiffany Fei from Dalkey, winner of the Best Dressed competition during Ladies' Day at the Dublin Horse Show in the RDS. Photograph: Alan Betson

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From hats that defy gravity to sustainable headpieces, and even some headwear that could double as a satellite dish, Ladies' Day contestants proved no outfit is complete without a spectacular hat.

Many embraced sustainability. Laura Hanlon of Co Roscommon made her hat using plastic rings from water and milk bottles which she then covered in purple and white ribbon.

Julie Caulfield of Wexford admits her hat, which somewhat resembles rings of Saturn, is more of a headpiece. She said the textured, perforated part was made from table mats sprayed in gold. “It can go back to being a table mat afterwards,” joked Ms Caulfield.

Close to 400 men and women competed to be crowned Very Best Dressed at Thursday’s 147th Dublin Horse Show at RDS, Ballsbridge, Dublin. The prize for the winner was a €10,000 voucher for Irish online retailer Very.

This year’s contest is inclusive, so anyone can compete for the award whatever their gender or sexual orientation. Performer and broadcaster Paul Ryder, known by his drag persona RuPaul Ryder, was co-MCing the event with television presenter Laura Woods.

“I never thought that a drag artist like me would have the chance to be in such a prestigious event,” said Mr Ryder. “But we’re changing as a country. We are inclusive. We are more diverse in all angles of life, and it is so beautiful to see.”

It wasn’t until 1919 that women were allowed to compete in the Dublin Horse Show, and then only on Thursdays. So, Thursdays became known as Ladies’ Day. Although women had been getting decked out to attend the show for years, the best-dressed competition wasn’t introduced until the 1980s.

Unlike other ladies’ days in Ireland, where judges wander the arena, selecting who they deem is best dressed, anyone can enter the Dublin Horse Show’s contest.

That’s what Ms Woods loves about the contest. “Everyone can shine. Anyone can enter to win the top prize. We want to hear their story about their beautiful outfit. If they’ve gone to the bother of getting dressed up and looking spectacular, why not have their moment to shine on stage?”

That inclusivity was one of the reasons British designer Olivia Rubin wanted to partner with Very and judge this year’s event. “Our brand is on an inclusive journey. We go up to size UK 24. We dress all genders and ages.”



Temi Animashaun from Blanchardstown, Pearle Nwaezeigwe from Grand Canal and Oyindamola Animashaun from Blanchardstown during Ladies' Day at the RDS. Photograph: Gareth Chaney/Collins



Olivia Gildea from Donabate during Ladies' Day at the RDS. Photograph: Gareth Chaney/Collins

With so many incredible outfits on show, deciding on a winner could have been difficult, but first-time judge Ms Rubin, known for her vibrant aesthetic, didn't anticipate a problem.

“I look for something creative, colourful and unique. Someone who feels comfortable in what they’re wearing as well,” she said.

A kaleidoscope of colours enlivened the day, but the most prominent colour at this year’s event was pink. Fashion included family heirlooms, vintage pieces and trendsetting ensembles.

All contestants were invited on to the stage to discuss the inspiration for their outfit.

Oyindamola Animashaun aka Zeda, of Blanchardstown, a fashion writer, paid tribute to the Irish flag with an orange off-the-shoulder dress made of recycled polyester from a sustainable designer in London. She paired it with a green lace hat and white earrings. Zeda was awarded one of the Highly Commended runner-up prizes, a Benefit Cosmetics gift card for €1,000.

But the winner of the coveted €10,000 Perx Gift Card for Very Best Dressed person was Tiffany Fei (18) from Dalkey. The inspiration for her ensemble came from watching *My Fair Lady* and admiring the wide-brim hats.

The judges fell in love with her dress and hat, which captured an ethereal quality. Ms Fei created her hat using fabric flowers and upcycled a dress she had, adding leftover flowers from the hat on to the dress.

“Because of Covid and lockdown, the Horse Show stopped, and I felt like I wanted to wear something to lighten everyone’s day,” said Ms Fei. Her sentiment was that everything can bloom again.

Ms Fei, who just finished her Leaving Cert and plans to pursue economics at university, said she plans to take her boyfriend and family out to dinner with her winnings.

Joanna Byrne of Co Kildare won the Longines Elegance Is an Attitude (Woman) award and Stuart Montgomery of Mullingar, Co Westmeath won the Longines Elegance Is an Attitude (Man) award; each received a watch.