



# ASPEN SNOW POLO

The home team battled some formidable opposition to emerge the victors in this exciting championship, report Tina and Scott Derby

The 2014 Piaget World Snow Polo Championship took place in Aspen, Colorado, where, from 17 to 20 December, with snow-capped mountains in the distance, six teams of elite players vied for the World Championship title.

Ultimately, after many exhilarating chukkas, that title went to the Piaget team, which comprised Marc Ganzi, Jeff Hall and Nic Roldan. They battled hard in the final match against the formidable US Polo Association team, which featured America's only 10-goal arena player, Tommy Biddle; rising young Canadian star Brandon Phillips; and Grant Ganzi, who captained his Casablanca team in Wellington's first 20-goal championship of the 2015 polo season.

Of the four teams that remained, Audi (Melissa Ganzi, Kris Kampsen, Juan Bollini) did a great job defeating Flexjet (Tommy Kato, Martin Pepa, Luis Escobar) and took third place. Meanwhile, Aspen Valley Polo Club (made up of Juancito Bollini, Andrea Gonzalez, Alejandro Novillo Astrada) came fifth after winning against the defending champions, St. Regis (consisting of Alejandro Gonzalez, Mariano Gracida, Roberto Gonzalez).

Following the tournament, Larry Boland, president of Piaget North America, presented the

trophy – a silver cup accented with deer antlers – to the Piaget team. For the second consecutive year, Nic Roldan was awarded Most Valuable Player while Marc Ganzi's grey mare, coincidentally named Piaget, received the Best Playing Pony award for her form on the pitch.

The final was shown on the NBC Sports network – the first time North America's only snow polo tournament has aired on television – and had more viewers than any polo match broadcast in the past two years in the United States on NBC Sports. 'The format of snow polo is extremely fan-friendly, given the smaller arena and the three-on-three action, with quicker turns and a great deal of contact,' says Aspen Valley Polo Club president Marc Ganzi. 'And Aspen is also an extremely attractive venue for viewers – the visual aspects of the event are without equal.'

For the second year in a row, the tournament was organised by Marc and Melissa Ganzi, and hosted by the Aspen Valley Polo Club, sister of the Grand Champions Polo Club, based in Wellington, Florida. The club is also a deluxe training ground, with first-class facilities, including a stick-and-ball field, premium clubhouse, wooden polo pit, exercise track, indoor school and arena, plus a livery yard,

**Above** USPA's 10-goaler Tommy Biddle chased by Piaget's Nic Roldan

stables and grooms' accommodation, with pony hire and coaches also available.

According to Marc Ganzi, plans are already underway for the 2015 tournament, which is scheduled for 17 to 19 December. It is his intention this year to get started as early as possible with organising the event, so Aspen retailers, as well as potential sponsors, can take advantage of the marketing opportunities provided by this high-end spectacle, which is expected to join the annual St Moritz Snow Polo World Cup as one of the world's top winter polo tournaments.

'This year was a great deal easier than last, and now we have the city squarely behind us for the future,' he explains. 'We went from three to six teams and that greatly enhanced the competition and competitiveness. We already have more requests for teams than we have spots, which is a good thing for the event and the sport. Melissa's and my vision is to make this the premier snow-polo event in the world. Our hope is that we can get a team from the UK to come and compete as well.'