



**Brits**

**B**ritish supporters were on a high at the halfway stage of the Nations Cup which saw our squad of Ben Maher (Robin Hood W), Geoff Billington (Rosinus), Peter Charles (Murkas Pom d'Ami) and Tim Stockdale (Fresh Direct Corlato) improve dramatically on Wednesday's speed leg, moving up five places into the silver medal position.

Bob Ellis's formidable 13-fence track was a true championship test and Ben was only one of three riders to jump clear with his own and the Quainton Stud's 11-year-old bay gelding Robin Hood W.

This outstanding performance was backed up with a brilliant round from Geoff and Patricia Fraser's Rosinus who remained flawless but marginally outside the time allowed of 85 seconds for one time fault.

Peter maintained the momentum on Olga White's Murkas Pom d'Ami picking

up four faults and a time penalty, enabling Tim's eight penalties on John Bosher's Fresh Direct Corlato to be the discard score.

Fully embracing the country garden theme, Bob and his team pulled out all the stops to produce a beautifully decorated course and as in the first-leg competition on Wednesday night the open water again proved influential.

Set mid-way on the track, the water was the first element in a tricky line consisting of a double - triple-bar to vertical, followed by upright planks. And set on six strong strides from an airy vertical the penultimate treble combination with water under the first two parts also caused its fair share of problems, prompting gasps from the grandstand.

At that point, the Dutch team of Angelique Hoorn (Blauwendraad's O'Brien), Albert Zoer (Oki Doki) and Marc Houtzager (Opium VS) had taken the

lead after collecting just four faults each. The Italians were dangerously poised in third while the Swiss plunged into fourth place with their first-leg winner Plus Schwizer collecting 12 faults, leaving Daniel Etter and Clarissa Crotts four faults and Steve Guerdats eight on Jalisca Solier to count.

Going into the second round Britain were just 1.3 points behind the reigning champions the Netherlands and 1.74 points ahead of Italy.

After being out in front after Wednesday night's speed leg it looked as though the Swiss had lost their grip but they pulled themselves together and came back out with all guns blazing in round two with foot-perfect runs from Daniel Etter (Peu a Peu) and anchorman Steve Guerdat (Jalisca Solier) to seize the gold medal.

In contrast and despite a good start from Tim and Corlato who collected an unlucky four faults at the vertical preceding the combination, British hopes waned when Geoff collected 13 faults on Rosinus.

Four faults plus one time penalty recorded by Peter and Murkas Pom d'Ami left Ben and Robin Hood W with the momentous task of jumping a clear for a glimmer of a medal. After maintaining a clean sheet in the first two rounds of the competition Ben and Robin Hood W came tantalisingly close to achieving a third clear until the pair made an agonising error at the influential combination and with a time penalty added to their score the team slipped down into an eventual sixth place.

Italy's Natale Chiaudani produced the

individual performance of the day jumping the only double clear of the entire competition on Snai Seldana di Compato which helped his team to the silver while the German's grasped bronze.

"It was very close," said the British chef d'equipe and team manager Derek Ricketts. "Our team put in a tremendous effort and it very nearly worked. It was extremely disappointing but unfortunately it was one fence too many."

Reflecting on the team's performance, Tim said: "I was awake at 3 in the morning thinking about it. As a team we jumped over 200 fences and in the end it came down to one fence down. It was a very tight competition over a very tough course. It was a team effort in which everyone fought hard and now we must move on and take away the positives."

Perfectly placed to comment, Bob Ellis said: "The Brits didn't do anything wrong. It just wasn't their day."

Peter said: "This is my horse's first season in Nations Cup competition so I'm pleased but in the same breath disappointed. On the day the best team won and we didn't have the luck."

Geoff Billington shared this feeling. "Rosinus jumped great but it's also disappointing," he said. "I watched the replay and I was a bit far off the final line."

British hopes were kept alive by Ben and Robin Hood W whose outstanding performance left them in the individual silver medal position on a total score of 6.30, less than a fence behind the leader, Italy's Natale Chiaudani.



Peter Charles and Murka's Pom d'Ami

"Everyone tried their best and we were one fence from a medal," said Ben.

Tim was unlucky in his second round, and there were a couple of time faults here and there during what were two very big courses. Robin Hood was fantastic and I was delighted to be in the silver medal position going into the individual final."

Tim Stockdale and Fresh Direct Corlato also qualified for the 25-strong individual final in 24th position on a score of 17.20.

Ben pointed out how "the courses take a lot out of the horses" and this observation seemed of particular relevance to Robin Hood's performance in the individual where he plummeted out of the medals, emerging with eight faults in both rounds.

"The horse felt great on Friday but it took more out of him than I thought," said Ben. "It wasn't happening and we're going to get everything checked. It's a lot of pressure on the horses over the five days but I'm not blaming anything as it was the same for everyone and you

make your own luck. Robin Hood is a phenomenal horse and will improve even more with time."

Having collected eight faults in the first round and being out of contention, Tim and Corlato pulled out of the competition.

In a nail-biting climax it was Kevin Staut who clinched the individual gold medal with a fabulous clear on his grandparents' 11-year-old stallion Kraque Boom.

"I hope this will do good things for French breeding and that it will encourage our young riders," he said.

"France has been through some difficult times over the past few years but this summer we won the Meydan series and now I have won here so I hope this motivates everyone to keep going!"

Germany's Carsten-Otto Nagel and Corradina also produced a superb double-clear performance to take silver, but the heartbreak of the day was Albert Zoer's second-round first-fence error which cost the popular Dutchman and



Above: Geoff Billington & Alan Fazakerley  
Below: Tim Stockdale and Fresh Direct Corlato



SPRENGER

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Above: Geoff Billington &amp; Rosinus

Below: Peter Charles, Duncan Inglis and Tim Stockdale

his much-loved gelding the individual title.

Bob Ellis received wide acclaim at these championships which highlighted his outstanding talent for the job.

He said: "Every class produced good results at these championships. I was particularly pleased with my Nations Cup course. I was delighted with the good result which went to the last horse. I asked a lot of questions which were all solveable and in fact it was probably one of the most pleasing courses I've designed, with faults occurring at every fence."

Reflecting on the individual competition, Bob said: "The course was very big, but it had to be, given the way those guys were performing. The last round, I think, was the biggest course I have ever built and there was some fantastic jumping."

Bob's outstanding achievement and contribution to the International

equestrian world was recognised by The British Equestrian Federation (BEF) when he was presented with a BEF Medal of Honour at the championships.

Swedish rider Helena Lundback was ecstatic to win her first Rolex watch, when she triumphed on her mare Madick in the 44-strong Rolex Grand Prix. Helena came out on top in a two-horse jump-off against Holland's Harrie Smolders riding Exquis Walnut de Muze with the best British performance coming from Tina Fletcher in third on the fastest four-faults with her husband Graham's Promised Land.

John Whitaker opened the additional non-championship classes with a win on Mandy Hall's Casino while later that evening Guy Williams grabbed the limelight in the H&M Six Bar competition on his exciting eight-year-old grey mare Richi Rich III.

"I've only had her for a month," said Guy. "She came to me from Eric Larnen's



breeding station in Belgium. She's had three foals and I've been quietly jumping 1.20m and 1.25m tracks with her. My instinct tells me she's going to be one for the future."

Friday's Gala Night came to a tremendous climax when cousins Robert and William Whitaker went to the wire in the H&M Puissance.

William had the crowd on their feet by laying down the gauntlet with a gigantic leap over the wall on Cyber-Space II and when Robert also left the bricks in place to share the £4,700 prize pot on Svensson Anders' Draco it brought the house down.