



"The more she's wound up, the higher she goes": an exuberant Ladina B (inset) clears 7ft 1in for Ellen Whitaker to win a hair-raising puissance

Puissance

COVER STORY

While those around her fell by the wayside, Ellen Whitaker kept her cool on an unusually sharp Ladina B to win a dramatic contest

IN one of the most hair-raising puissances of recent years, Ellen Whitaker claimed the £4,500 first prize on Ladina B, the sole combination to clear the 2.16m (7ft 1in) wall in the fourth round.

Before an enthusiastic capacity crowd of 9,000, 12 riders came forward to tackle a 1.80m (5ft 11in) obstacle in the first round. All cleared it and no one imagined that a quarter of them would later fall.

With a further 15cm of blocks added, nine cleared the increasingly imposing wall. The first faller came as it rose to 2.05m (6ft 9in), when Derek Morton took a tumble after Teddy Bear ploughed through the top half of the wall.

Paul Barker became the second rider to hit the dirt when, facing 2.16m, his ride Le Marquind took off too early to make the height. He crashed through the fence and got momentarily stuck on top of the filler.

Then Ryan Prater completed the treble, catapulting out of Stefano's saddle as the stallion tried to bank the wall.

Riding in amid such drama, Ellen freely admitted to her fears. "It was scary, especially as two falls happened before I had to jump the wall," she said. "But I absolutely love this class, the crowd are just amazing. It's them that get you over the fence."

Ladina B, who is used solely for puissance and six-bar classes, gave her rider a customarily difficult ride to both the triple bar and the wall, bucking and kicking exuberantly into each. But, finally given leave to launch herself at the wall, the mare powered off the floor, clearing the 2.16m test with ease — the sole horse to do so.

"Ladina B was so sharp, but it seems the more she's wound up, the higher she goes," said Ellen of the horse with whom she has now recorded two outright puissance wins.



Falling by the wayside: Ryan Prater (Stefano) makes a dramatic exit

International classes

With the top British riders fighting for home pride against a strong international challenge, competition in the LG Arena reached fever pitch at times — but the spotlight was firmly on leading lady Ellen Whitaker

CLAIMING three classes on three different horses, Ellen Whitaker rode at the top of her game.

Despite an inauspicious start to the week with her 17-year-old gelding Kanselier, on the final afternoon he reclaimed his speed horse of the year title.

"He didn't feel right on the first day, so we had a look at him and found a slice in his foot," said Ellen. "I don't know if it was an abscess or not, but we poulticed it and now it's fine. Before that, I thought he might just have been starting to feel his age. I mentioned retirement and he must have heard. He got better in three days."

Cian O'Connor (Baloufina) had been the long-time leader having almost pirouetted a turnback to fence eight. Despite a slightly wider approach to this vertical, Ellen pinched back 0.43sec with her stalwart.

"Kanselier is fast anyway and thinks quickly," she said. "He'll never be replaced and has been a complete star for the eight years I've had him."

Shane Breen claimed the first international class for Ireland on Thursday, the Grandstand welcome stakes, with Konstantin Pysarenko's Dorado.

"I came inside to number seven — nobody else had gone in there," said Shane, who won this year's Hickstead Derby tankard and the Drammen Derby with the deceptively fast 11-year-old. "And I was in a good flowing rhythm."

While Syrian rider Ahmed Hamsho is studying in London, Billy Twomey has the rides on some of his string. And it was with one of these horses, Caesar, that he claimed Ireland's second victory in the two-phase Sky Sports trophy.

"Caesar is a very good second

It's a change having an accumulator as a Rolex world rankings class — it was well within Nemo's capabilities

Nick Skelton picks up a lucrative class with Beverley Widdowson's 10-year-old

horse," said Billy, who won two classes in Gijon with the 14-year-old son of Contender. "He's won a lot internationally and he gives me the impression that he'd jump bigger classes."

Tactics pay off for Williams

THE one-round Tagg cup was all about speed, but the twisty course caught out the first half of the 28-rider field, all of whom faulted.

Drawn third last, Guy Williams (Toronto Van De Middelstede) made a tactical manoeuvre of going wide to fence 11 and still knocked 6sec off William Funnell and Kepi D'Elle's leading time. His intention was to set a challenge for Ellen Whitaker (Equimax Ocolado) in final draw, who he perceived to be his main threat.

"I could go wide because I knew my horse was naturally quicker [than William's] and I wanted to make Ellen go inside [to fence 11], which she did and had the rail down," explained the Canterbury-based rider, who goes from strength to strength with this talented 13-year-old, known as Eric. "I have more than 20 horses at home, but I'd swap them all to have three as good as him."

Kicking off Friday's international action, the Dick Turpin stakes was won by Belgian rider Dirk Demeersman on the Darco 10-year-old Phaline K.

That evening, Kelvin Bywater's course for the HOYS.co.uk cup allowed riders



Guy Williams (Toronto VD Middelstede) lands the Tagg cup with a tactical ride

“ He had feathers and a big beard and I thought ‘What are they giving me?’ ”

Bruce Menzies' ugly duckling Sultan V turned into a dual championship-winning horse



The Sky Sports trophy goes to Irishman Billy Twomey with 'second horse' Caesar

plenty of options to save time in the table C competition.

Wild-card qualified Paul Barker found the fastest of all, without having penalties added for fences down, with his mother Lynn's Anderida Anica.

"I always thought she'd be a useful horse," said Paul, who won a puissance at Arena UK two weeks earlier with the 12-year-old. "I can use her in a variety of classes."

Rounding off the day, New Zealand's Samantha McIntosh headed the Zinc Management trophy from final draw in a seven-horse jump-off with Horst Jaggle's Loxley 38.

"It was a difficult course and this was my first indoor show this season," said Samantha, who rode the handsome 14-year-old

gelding at the World Equestrian Games in Aachen. "The jumps come up a lot quicker, but I have a strong partnership with Loxley."

Nevada is one to watch

APPRECIATIVE crowds packed the LG Arena on Saturday for puissance night (see panel, left). But they first witnessed Olga White's Murka's Nevada gain his first win for Peter Charles in the Phillip Billington memorial cup.

"I've never asked him to go quickly before," said Peter. "He's been jumping clear all week and I didn't have to go mad in there to win. He's a future top horse and, when I wanted him to go today, he did."

The accumulator, like the speed horse and leading show jumper of

the year classes, carried Rolex world rankings points and Nick Skelton claimed this competition's top allocation with a win on Beverley Widdowson's Nemo 119.

"It makes a change having an accumulator as a rankings class," said Nick. "It made it a really good competition and it was well within Nemo's capabilities."

After a week of near-misses and runner-up spots, Laura Renwick headed the line-up in the 1.45m two-phase Xerox Special Event Services cup with her eight-year-old mare Beluga II. They finished with a double clear over 1sec ahead of William Funnell (Ani Star) and John Whitaker with his exciting seven-year-old Argento.

International results

Grandstand welcome stakes. — 1, Dorada (S Breen), IRE; 2, Nemo 119 (N Skelton), GBR; 3, Pedro (G Billington), GBR. **Sky Sports trophy.** — 1, Caesar (B Twomey), IRE; 2, Utah Van Erpekom (J Whitaker), GBR; 3, CS Online (E Whitaker), GBR. **Tagg cup.** — 1, Toronto Van De Middelstede (G Williams), GBR; 2, Kepi D'Elle (W Funnell), GBR; 3, Loxley 38 (S McIntosh), NZL. **9 Oct: Dick Turpin Stakes.** — 1, Phaline K (D Demeersman), BEL; 2, Kanselier (E Whitaker); 3, Unique (L Kraut), USA. **HOYS.co.uk cup.** — 1, Anderida Anica (P Barker), GBR; 2, Beluga II (L Renwick), GBR; 3, CS Online. **Zinc Management trophy.** — 1, Loxley 38; 2, Van Schijndel's Lys Platiere (P Rajmakers), NED; 3, Carlo 273 (N Skelton), GBR. **10 Oct: Phillip Billington memorial cup.** — 1, Murka's Nevada (P Charles), GBR; 2, UDO DV (R Whitaker), GBR; 3, Pedro. **accumulator.** — 1, Nemo 119 (N Skelton); 2, Unique; 3, CS Online. **11 Oct: Xerox Special Event Services cup.** — 1, Beluga II; 2, Ani Star (W Funnell); 3, Argento (J Whitaker). **Vinopolis speed horse of the year.** — 1, Kanselier; 2, Baloufina (C O'Connor), IRE; 3, Utah Van Erpekom.



Peter Charles scores with his 'future top horse' Murka's Nevada in the Phillip Billington memorial cup

Comment

Graham Fletcher



'One of the best shows ever'

SOMEbody will claim that HOYS isn't what it used to be. I've been to more than I care to remember — and this was one of the best ever.

Packed crowds in the LG Arena, refurbished to the tune of £28million, watched with total enthusiasm as all the top British riders tried to beat a strong foreign challenge, while Sky TV took the sport to new broadcasting heights.

No wonder people have already booked their tickets for 2010.

Of the many highlights, Ellen Whitaker's hat-trick to win all three different classes on three different horses shows she's now become a class act. I'd also single out Bruce Menzies' Foxhunter-grade C double on Sultan V. No top professional could have ridden his Foxhunter jump-off round any better.

We might be short of Olympic horses, but Nick Skelton's definitely doing his best to put things right. Carlo looks to be a fantastic find, while Skelly reckons his six-year-old winner Big Star is the best he's ever had.

On a sold-out Saturday night, Geoff Billington's commentary kept spectators thoroughly entertained during an action-packed puissance. But behind the scenes, HOYS' new layout was not as good as before with a much smaller collecting ring and twisty walkway to the arena.

I was discussing this with the very attractive Sky Sports presenter Suzanne Dando, who said: "There's so little room that when I tried to interview Bruce Menzies as he came out of the ring, his horse spooked and he nearly ended up in my lap."

"Lucky devil!" I responded. "In my book, that's even better than winning the Foxhunter." H&H

“ Landing in Suzanne Dando's lap would be better than winning the Foxhunter ”