

Rolled poles thwart myriad raiders

ASTON-LE-WALLS (2)

By Sue Polley

ROLLED show jumps proved costly at a bumper Aston-le-Walls (2) which saw more than 400 competitors contest six OI and seven intermediate sections in addition to two full days of novice and BE100 classes.

"Nigel [Taylor] always makes a huge effort with the ground and it was excellent again this time," said intermediate section B winner Aaron Miller who could have made it a hat-trick of wins had Isle Valley and Albert VI not lowered a pole apiece. "Nigel's courses are always horse-friendly, flowing and educational and I guess people vote with their feet which is why entries here are always so high."

Aaron's section B victor was Irene Broome and Nicola Steele's home-bred 10-year-old Leonardo VIII who, like many horses enjoying a run at Washbrook Farm, was bound for either Tattersalls or Houghton two-star.

Nick Gauntlett and The Court Jester were another combination to see potential victory disappear from their grasp as a coloured pole hit the ground in OI section L and, in so doing, left the door open for a pair of Kings to rule the leaderboard. On form Chris King wore the winner's crown courtesy of a dressage score completion of 29.1 aboard Billy Bounce, an eight-year-old who he described as "potentially the best horse I've ever had", while Mary King took second with MHS King Juleus.

Not content with that, Chris netted first and second places in OI section K aboard Idol Hero and GI Master Caster, completing a great day for his long-time owner Esther Lewis who has a part-share in all three horses.

"Two wins and a second is more than I expected and I'm so



Aaron Miller clinches an intermediate victory with Leonardo VIII

pleased for Esther," said Chris. "She's been with me for more than 10 years now and we've had our share of ups and downs, particularly with Idol Hero who is a bit of a law unto himself. He can go in and out of form at the drop of a hat."

Third place in section L went to Suffolk-based Caroline Smith and Para Ti, yet another combination left ruing four faults in the jumping that cost them the victor's sash.

"It was that pesky final fence," said Caroline. "I knew the ring was tight but I didn't realise how tight the last turn actually was."

Kiwis to the fore

Mark Todd (see box, below) stamped his authority on OI section F with a win, fellow Kiwi Lucy Jackson becoming his closest challenger with the Sprout Syndicate and her own "little dream machine" Kilcoltrim Ambassador.

"I call him sprout as he has sprouty hair and he looks like a hairy pony in the stable," laughed Lucy. "However, he's like a magic carpet across country."

Lucy also headed OI section C aboard Willy Do who showed that he was back firing on all cylinders by completing on his first-phase score of 27.7. He was withdrawn from Badminton following the dressage phase as he wasn't feeling quite right.

"We'll now go to Lühmühlen with all guns blazing," said Lucy.

Millie Dumas and Artistiek headed OIU21 section H, one of two competitive sections that saw several riders, including Daniel Scott, Tom Grant, Alfie Bradstock and Laura Ritchie-Bland, pick up penalties for riding too fast across country. Alfie and Viking notted second in section G behind Sophie How, with Dani Evans making her presence felt at prize-giving by taking third with Smart Time, fourth with Kai De Laer and seventh with Herbst Golden Eclipse.

"I know I'm lucky to have so many nice horses," she said. "It makes me want to work harder."

Millie Dumas and Artistiek's victory from Danielle Dunn and Zocarla BLH came courtesy of a convincing seven penalties.

"I've waited a long time for a horse like this," said Millie. "I'm glad that dressage lessons with Angela Tucker appear to be paying off. She's really got me to push myself more to get a better outline from him."

Andrew James took the honours in intermediate section D with Guy and Katie McAllan's Alexandria II. The mare hasn't always allowed Andrew to ride her as forward as he would like but lessons with Nick Turner have helped with this.

HORSE Revealed



Para Ti

CAROLINE Smith bought her consistent intermediate ride Para Ti as an unbroken four-year-old from Holland.

"He's a very laid back chap with lovely paces," said the rider who runs a breaking and competition yard in Suffolk.

Caroline's goal this year with the 16.3hh son of Padarco is to make the European CIC** Championships team — the pair finished 10th at the 2011 contest when competing as individuals, which the rider described as their "career highlight" to date.

Para Ti, meanwhile, is very obedient but he can be spooky in the dressage. He has also sometimes failed to make the cross-country time, Caroline putting his new speedy persona at Aston-le-Walls down to changing to a Dutch Gag.

"It gave me the confidence not to pull back so much and, to be honest, the excellent going helped too. He went like a rocket."

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MARK Todd (far right) had a good day at the office, winning intermediate section E with Marcio Jorge's Lissy Mac Wayer, previously the ride of Lucinda Fredericks, and OI section F on NZB Regent Lad. Fellow Antipodean **Bill Levett** (left) piloted Athlete V to victory in intermediate section A. Reigning Junior European Champions **Sophie How** (below) and Pebbly Aga Khan, meanwhile, continued their challenge for inclusion in this year's young rider squad with a win in OIU21 section G.