



TITAN LIFTS FIRST MAJOR TITLE FOR LEVETT

SAUMUR

By Pippa Roope

BILL Levett scored a "really satisfying" win at Saumur in France where he claimed his first ever CCI*** victory.

"It's nice to be in good company with a horse you can be competitive on and do what you set out to do," said the Britain-based Australian whose mount was Clare Prentice's 10-year-old Shannondale Titan. Bill, 50, was second after the dressage on 42.6, crediting the fact that the horse's owner has helped him train with Gareth Hughes through the winter.

"Titan's flatwork is getting better and better," said Bill. "He's good in his mind, which is one of his greatest attributes."

The cross-country course contained plenty of "typical French distances but my horse has a big stride so he didn't struggle at all," added Bill.

Mistakes by others gave the Aussie pilot a show jump in hand but he didn't need it, Titan posting a faultless clear.

"Last year I had two down here [on both Hippolyte and One Two Many] which was costly. This time I was more aware of what went wrong and of doing it better," said Bill. "It was very satisfying that other riders, including Andrew Nicholson, said that I had ridden it well."



Aussie Bill Levett celebrates the first CCI*** crown of his career aboard Shannondale Titan

Bill was chased home by France's double European Champion Nicolas Touzaint on the Lignière CCI** winner Lesbos. The 14-year-old stallion, a son of Yarlands Summer Song, has

never finished out of the top eight at international competitions.

Lesbos was making his CCI*** debut, as was third-placed Quoriano ENE HN, ridden by France's Arnaud Boiteau. This nine-year-old finished fifth in Blenheim's young horse CIC*** last autumn and he moved up from 19th here by virtue of staying on his dressage score of 53.

Good Time for French

Piggy French took fourth on Michael Underwood's Tinkas Time. The 11-year-old impressed his rider across the country.

"It walked like a championship-type course but he found it easy," she said. "The distances were brave and you had to be accurate. Horses had to really want to jump and the fences were on tough angles with the questions getting serious early on."

Will Faudree fared best of the four Americans visiting on a funded trip as part of David



Arnaud Boiteau, third for France

O'Connor's new performance programme. He took fifth on Andromaque (see box, below left) but was left frustrated by the two show jumps down that cost him two places.

"It was a proper track with light rails and shallow cups," he said. "She is a careful horse and both fences were pilot error."

More Michelet 'magic'

Pierre Michelet produced one of his signature cross-country tracks with open distances leading to skinnies and angled corners which invited all but the most genuine to slip out the side door.

"I walked an early distance on a perfect three-and-a-half strides and looked at David O'Connor who said: 'Welcome to Pierre Michelet,'" smiled Will Faudree.

Among those who were caught out were Geoffrey Soulez of France, fifth after the dressage on Madran Du Liot'HN, who refused at the angled skinny hedge at fence 18. Tim Price (Wesko, fourth after the dressage) picked up 20 penalties at the first wishing well (14), while Oliver Townend faulted at the second on Neo Du Breuil.

Oliver enjoyed compensation in the form of 11th place with Black Tie despite being held on course in an unerving fashion – the fence judge was waving a red flag on the landing side of a triple brush just as Oliver jumped it.

Save of the day award went to France's Sébastien Cavaillon, seventh after the dressage, whose Only One Du Reverdy stopped at the second element of the bounce into water at fence 22, leaving his rider clinging on.

But saddest of all was the demise of the dressage leader, Kitty King had flown around the course with Zidane only for the mare to inexplicably nose dive at the final fence, cannoning Kitty over her head.

HORSE Revealed



Andromaque

ANDROMAQUE, piloted into fifth by the USA's Will Faudree (left), is a 12-year-old belonging to Jennifer Mosing. The Irish Thoroughbred is by Anshan out of a Strong Gale mare. She was bred by Patrick Hennessy and competed to two-star level by Andrea Ryan, whose father, Eamonn, sold her to Will in 2009.

"Andromaque had a chequered record but I took a chance," explained Will. "If I had to compare her to a person it would be to Meryl Streep's character in *The Devil Wears Prada* – she has a very businesslike attitude and never jokes around.

"Andromaque can get strong across country but at Saumur the first three minutes were in the woods so I was able to set the pace," said Will. "I could motor on until the last seven or eight strides before a fence so she was economical in the way she went."