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Apollo finds top gear

Stefano Brecciaroli and Apollo Van De Wendi Kurt Hoeve, regular members of the Italian team, win the CIC***



SPC HOLDINGS BURNHAM MARKET (1), DOCKING, NORFOLK 28-30 March

By Catherine Austen

ITALIAN rider Stefano Brecciaroli was a surprise winner of the competitive CIC*** with his regular team partner Apollo Van De Wendi Kurt Hoeve.

While Stefano and Apollo were second after dressage at both the London Olympics and the Kentucky World Equestrian Games, time-faults across country have always been the Belgian warmblood's downfall.

But the bracing Norfolk air obviously had an effect — they pulled off the second fastest time of the section, adding just 4.4 time-penalties to their 38.1 dressage mark.

Stefano is staying with Andrew Nicholson while he prepares for a possible Badminton tilt. "I am hoping to learn

something from my friend, who is the fastest in the world," joked Stefano, whose wife gave birth to their first child, Filipo, less than a month ago.

"The idea of coming over here is to do more competitions — there are not many in Italy — and to give the horse experience of a bigger atmosphere with more runners," he added.

He will decide after Belton whether or not to go to Badminton. But if this improvement in their cross-country speed continues, he and Apollo could be a serious threat to the leaders in Gloucestershire in a month's time.

Time across country played a significant part in the final order, with many riders carefully to run their top horses fairly cautiously with bigger targets in mind.

William Fox-Pitt, for example, picked up 20 time-faults or more on each of his CIC*** rides except for Olympic partner Lionheart, the highest-placed of his five in ninth

with 13.2 time-penalties. Three of his five scored below 40 in the dressage, though, with Chilli Morning leading the 83-strong section with a mark of 34.9.

The latter was better placed after dressage, scoring 36.3 to lie third behind Chilli Morning and Tiana Coudray (Ringwood Magister), with Tinkas Time on 39.5.

Both showjumped faultlessly, but she pushed Tinkas Time a little harder across country for 4.8pen than Jakata, on his second run



Piggy French flies the drop hedge on Tinkas Time, second in the CIC***

Picture by Peter Nixon



Andrew Nicholson and Calico Joe, second in the advanced section, jump the first of the brush corners

back after the injury that took him out of the Olympic team, who picked up 10.4pen.

"Tinkas Time is such a fun little horse," said Piggy. "He's only small [16hh], but he has a lot about him and he could be really smart on the flat. He's changing all the time and there's more to come."

She was delighted with Jakata. "He was beautiful today. You always worry after an injury whether they will come back to where they were, but he feels — and looks — the best he's ever done. He enjoyed himself and I didn't realise how fast I was, which says how quick and easy to ride he was," she said.

Piggy was also keen to pay credit to the team at Jakata's part-owner Michael Underwood's showing yard, where Jakata and DHI Topper W recuperated and spent the winter. Piggy's other potential Olympic partner, Topper was also injured in the run-up to the Games and, like Jakata, is owned by Michael Underwood and Piggy's father Wally.

Bill Levett and Shannondale Titan were another partnership to jump a double clear. A speedy cross-country round on the perfect going that riders and horses relished after such a dismal winter parachuted them into fourth on 44.9.

"He's got a tremendous stride length and is very good in the brain," said Bill, who plans to take the son of Limmerick to Saumur for a first CIC***. "There's a lot of improvement to come from him on the flat, which is encouraging." Francis Whittington took fifth on Easy Target with a final score of



Trearth makes a winning intermediate debut with Alex Postolowsky

Cavalier jumped a steady double clear in 20th.

Only Tina Cook and Miners Frolic were absent after a minor set-back, but remain on course for Badminton.

Persimmon redeems himself KITTY KING and Persimmon picked up their fourth CIC** win in less than a year. They led all the way, with only 5.2pen across country to add to their 40.9 dressage mark.

"He's quite tricky," admitted Kitty. "When I got on him this morning he stood up and fell over, which is a new trick, so he had to redeem himself."

"He uses anything as an excuse to spook to get out of working, although he has been easier and more on side this year."

Jane Murrett and Frank Inns' eight-year-old is clearly highly talented, however, and he will move up to advanced before being aimed at the Tattersalls CCI**.

Kitty was grateful to the

SPC Holdings Burnham Market (1)



Caroline Smith and Para Ti — which means 'For You' in Portuguese — second in the CIC**

COURSE CHAT

BILL LEVETT turned 50 on Good Friday. He arrived at the event the day before with a stinking cold and without any plans to celebrate his birthday, but on Thursday his wife Jenny turned up with their two children and on Friday two of his sisters, Sally and Connie, arrived from Australia, to Bill's complete surprise.

"They just walked into the lorry, which was rather emotional," he admitted.

Jenny had organised two surprise parties — one in Norfolk during the event and one back home in Gloucestershire — so the milestone was, in the end, well celebrated.

ZARA PHILLIPS made the save of the day when, going the long route at the double of brush corners in the advanced on Silver Lining V, the grey made a hash of the second element. Zara was clinging on to her neck, but managed to defy gravity to wriggle herself back into the plate and went on to complete a clear round.

AS well as her CIC*** placings, Piggy French was fifth in the advanced on her new ride Westwood Mariner. Formerly ridden by Polly Stockton, the Cult Hero 12-year-old has been bought by Piggy's mother Kate, Susie Wood and Susan Wighton as a horse they could enjoy watching run at the top level.

"He's a charming horse to work with and Polly's done a fab job — I've just got to get to know him and adjust to him," said Piggy.

He holds a Badminton entry, but the pair will aim for Bramham instead.

Eventing



Paul Sims and the 17.2hh Calador are quick across country for seventh place in the CIC***

organisers for fitting her in at the last minute after Somerley was cancelled.

"It's been so wet and horrible everywhere that it was great to give the horses a good run round a galloping track on amazing ground," said Kitty.

Although the CIC** horses bore the brunt of a vicious horizontal snowstorm on Saturday morning, the weather, although cold, was remarkably good. There was not a speck of mud at the venue, to everyone's astonishment.

CIC** runner-up Caroline Smith is hoping for a second shot at a place on that European Championships team in Austria in July. She and her own Para Ti competed as an individual at the 2011 championships.

The Suffolk-based 27-year-old said: "He's got the best temperament you could ever wish for and he knew today I really wanted him to go for it."

She has recently changed the son of Baloubet De Rouet's jumping bit from a snaffle to a Dutch gag.

"It's made a massive difference," she said. "He's never been strong, but at 17hh he's a big horse and it's now much easier to get him back to me."

One mark behind Caroline on a finishing score of 50.8 was



Astier Nicolas and Piaf De Breville jump into the second water en route to advanced victory

Coopers Law, owned and bred by Sally Williams and her aunt Nicola Dickson and ridden by Emily Chandler. The son of Mill Law will go advanced next at Belton.

The advanced section went to Frenchman Astier Nicolas and his 2012 Bramham under-25 CCI*** winner Piaf De Breville. They beat Andrew Nicholson and Nereo by 0.1pen and will head to their first Badminton full of confidence.

"He's a gentleman whose only aim in life is to please you," said Astier. "I wanted to take him slowly across country, but he was too fit."

Andrew was also third on the thoroughbred Calico Joe.

'He's a real lad' ALEX POSTOLOWSKY took intermediate section K on Trearh, posting a stunning dressage mark of 20.5. This gave Alex a bit of breathing space across country, where she picked up 13.2 time-penalties on this intermediate first-timer.

"They announced my dressage score when I was halfway round the showjumping and I thought they must have made a mistake," she said.

"He's a lovely, loose mover and really talented, but he needs a lot of work. He's a real lad — if he were human, he'd be down the pub every night drinking pints and eating pork scratchings — so he needs reminding that he's got a job to do."

Norfolk-based owner Val Mason bought the seven-year-old when he was two. By Catherine Liberator, he is an embryo transfer son of Erbium, whom Sarah Cohen rode at four-star.

Oliver Townend won section J on another seven-year-old, the Puisseance gelding Harthill Percy. They added a showjump down and 3.2 time-faults to their smart 23.2 dressage score to stay three marks ahead of Bill Levett and Clare Prentice's Athlet V.

It was a first intermediate run for the strawberry roan Athlet V.

"He handled it well, taking on all the difficult lines, although I did go the long way out of the sunken road," said Bill. "He's got a phenomenal jump, but it's very cheeky and loves to frolic about."

And Pippa Funnell had Jane and Jonathan Clarke's Billy Landretti back in form with an open intermediate victory. The Vectha 11-year-old won the Barbury CIC*** in 2011, but missed most of 2012 — his only run was an open novice win with Sir Mark Todd

Bill Levett and Shannondale Titan enjoy a good preparation for Saumur with fourth place in the CIC***

