

A NOTABLE DEBUT

'I just wanted to prove myself'

ROS CANTER made a striking start to her first four-star when she scored 40.2 on the 10-year-old Allstar B, owned by British junior team coach Caroline Moore. It was good enough for 10th place at the end of dressage.

Ros said: "He's so rideable; if I get a little nervous, he doesn't react to that."

"I just wanted to prove myself and not let him down. Caroline said that if I got in the 30s, she'd buy me a case of champagne, so she's pleased we didn't quite get there!"

Caroline bought the 17.1hh from Vere Philipps as a five-year-old, and started him off.

"Then my coaching went crazy and I took over the juniors, so I handed the ride over [first to Emily Parker and then in 2013 to Ros]," she said.

"Ros is completely focused, brave and meticulous about accuracy; if she jumps an inch to the left, she makes sure she puts it right."

A run-out across country dropped them down, but a clear showjumping round with just a time-fault meant she was the best British first-timer in 37th and this was a debut of which to take note.



Hughes, for the improvement.

The surprise of Friday morning was Ringwood Sky Boy, who took a huge leap from his Badminton mark of 48.1 to bounce into fifth place on 38.7.

"He's not God's gift to dressage, but the one thing he does is improve all the time. Every day he comes out and does his best; I love horses like that," said a delighted Tim.

The final pair of the 74 starters were Oliver Townend and Paul and Diana Ridgeon's Armada. At the seven Burghleys this now-16-year-old has contested with first

Andrew Nicholson and then Oliver, his scores have covered the spectrum; 67.5 in 2009, and now his best four-star mark to date of 38.7 for equal fifth.

Oliver rode beautifully, and the judges rewarded him with the only two 10s of the competition – both from Nick Burton, for his first and last halts. It was a shame that Armada struck off on the wrong leg after the halt to rein-back, but not even clattering into the boards during a shoulder-in rocked this mercurial horse's focus.

It was interesting that the French had passed over a couple of their most experienced combinations for Blair – at which they must qualify for the Olympics – and Cedric Lyard led them with a very soft, obedient test for 39.6 and ninth place on Cadeau Du Roi.

Riders slightly disappointed after this phase included Paul Tapner, who thought Kilronan should have been better marked than his 41.7 for equal 12th with Mark Todd and Leonidas II, who didn't look quite as forward as he can be.

But consensus of opinion was that the dressage placings may become irrelevant 24 hours later, and plenty of riders – especially the less-experienced – found sleep hard to come by on Friday night ahead of the prospect of Mark Phillips' cross-country track.

COMMENT

Ruth Edge



Let's use five judges

OVER the past five or 10 years, the standard of eventing dressage has risen enormously. You rarely see a poor halt now and the balance, flow and presentation is professional. I think now that the riders have upped their game, the facilities and rules need to catch up with them.

There's a good case for saying that at four-stars and championships, there ought to be five dressage judges whose only job is to judge the dressage. The three-member ground jury would still have all their other current responsibilities, but the actual judging of the tests would be handed over to people for whom that is their sole job.

I also think that eventing ought to consider using a Judges' Supervisory Panel like in pure dressage. Everybody is human and sometimes if you blink you miss something, but riders are so professional now and every tiny thing counts. It is not fair for a judge's mistake – which is understandable and even inevitable – to influence the final result.

We were very fortunate this year that the ground conditions remained the same for all competitors, thanks in part to the excellent preparation by the Burghley team, but also to the luck that the weather was good. But this is becoming a rarity; bad weather can create an uneven playing field for the dressage.

Again, because the standard of horse and rider is so much higher we would see an improvement at the very top events if they could perform on a surface. There is only so much you can produce on a grass arena, which may not be perfectly level and doesn't give the horses the same security

underfoot. It has been well proven that organisers can put an excellent temporary all-weather arena in – perhaps this is something to look into for the future.

The introduction of half-marks has been highly beneficial, as it gives judges so much more range.

Jung's balance and flow

THE best test I saw was from Michael Jung on Fischer Rocana FST. I liked the balance and the flow. It was beautifully presented and from start to finish it showed an elegance and lightness that I feel no one else achieved.

Rosalind Canter produced a mature test for her first four-star, as proved by her being the only Brit in the top 10 after dressage apart from William Fox-Pitt and Fernhill Pimms, and she is one to watch for the future.

The Australians, coached by Gareth Hughes, are all starting to produce personal bests, and you can see that in their presentation and the horses' way of going. I enjoyed watching Paul Tapner and Kilronan; I felt Paul got every mark he could.

Happy Times looked fantastic for his age (16) and seemed to enjoy himself, which is a credit to Sam Griffiths.

Common faults included the extended walk to medium walk transition – it is obvious who manages to stay connected from the leg to the bit in the extended walk as this then follows through into the medium walk and in turn the halt and rein-back.

And the final halt – there were very few still in front of the leg at this point, which resulted in some rather abrupt, on-the-hand transitions. **H&H**



Joy: Oliver Townend scores 38.7 with Armada, as Matt Ryan interviews him