



Friday 25th November 2011

Global Champions Tour Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates-Day 1

The CSI2* classes commenced the program of events at the Al Forsan International Sports Resort on Thursday 24th November.

CSI2* 1.25m

The Global Champions Tour kicked-off with the CSI2*1.25m two-phase competition.

Italian course designer Uliano Vezzani had transformed the arena to a colourful spectacle. For the initial event of the program the two-phase track was welcoming with the first phase respectfully encouraging good jumping as 16 of the 43 starters successfully negotiated the first phase.

The class showcased the Middle Eastern region's best horse and rider combinations along with expatriates in the region. Internationals Charlotte Casiraghi from Monaco and Russian Ekatarina Rybolovleva, who had travelled to the event, mixed it with the gulf riders.

Nathalie Christodoulou (GBR) set a good pace from her mid field start that eventually saw her third place with the KWPN Nakich Double Dutch (24.21 seconds)

Rashid Al Rumaithi (UAE) celebrated the win riding Icard des Bois, a gelding by Ariel Du Bois. He put pressure on his rivals by posting a quick round of 23.08 seconds.

Sheikh Shakhboot Bin Nahyan Al Nahyan, (UAE) on course in the last few of the draw, attempted to catch Al Rumaithi's time with Urgent III but just fell short finishing in (23.75 seconds) to finish in 2nd place.

CSI2* 1.40m

Ahmed Ali Saeed Al Junaibi claimed victory having beaten 26 combinations that jumped this qualifying competition for the CSI2* Grand Prix. Ahmed came through the flags with Picobello Wodiena in a time of 59.51, a clear 3 seconds ahead of Khalid Ali Al Junaibi's time of 62.56. The latter was clear and fast with the Land Force Stable's Selle Francais stallion Justes Desfi.

Penultimate competitor UAE lady rider Nadia Abdul Aziz Taryam searched for the winning answer with the German bred Calawo. The gallant effort looked set for the win but two wider turns saw her completed time at 63.41 seconds putting them 3rd in the final line up.

CSI5* 1.45m

Pius Schwizer Takes out the Opposition

Swiss rider Pius Schwizer and Ulysee blitzed the field in the opening 5* class this evening.

The opening day 5* classes always provide plenty of firsts for riders, horses and the course designer. All are mindful of the new conditions in terms of footing, fences and jumping.

The arena under lights looked spectacular showcasing the fabulous array of fences not seen on tour this season. Many riders elected to use the class as a familiarisation session.

Italian course designer Uliano Vezzani had set a less technical track offset by a fairly tight time on the course. He told us his vision for the class “I expect some to take speed in this one round class, however for me it is a test of the ground, fences and the quality of the horses. We will see, as today is the testing time for me. The fences are very beautiful in construction, colour and visual. It is all new for the horses.”

The Swiss duo was one of eleven combinations from the 42 starters jump clear as over 80% of the field collected time faults. They tracked a time of 64.27 seconds as on course fifth from last. Knowing that he had fancy combinations to follow Schwizer minimised the track taking a very short turn to the Etihad vertical at fence 9, a tighter turn to the second last fence before a quick ride to the last big oxer.

Second-placed Sergio Alvaro Moya (ESP) and Sirius (65.01) were a second behind the winning time, but only a smidgen ahead of third placed Penelope Leprevost (FRA) Oscar des Fontaines. (65.04).

UAE rider Sheikh Shakhboot Bin Nahyan Al Nahyan provided his home crown spectators with a great clear round with the lovely grey mare Vitesse Greenfield much to their delight.

With the GCT 2011 title battle between Ludger Beerbaum (GER) and Edwina Tops-Alexander (AUS) on everyone's mind, spectators were keen to see their performance this evening. Ludger started Chaman today in this class. Looking a picture of health Chaman jumped a very smooth clear round but collected a few time faults.

CSI5* 1.50/1.55m

Treasured Abu Dhabi win for Van Asten

The three day show at the Al Forsan International Sports Resort has already attracted good audience numbers who are keen to see the best riders in the world compete.

The 1.50m one round directly against the clock, saw the VDL Groep sponsored Dutch riders Leopold van Asten and Maikel van der Vleuten dominate in the final standings.

Early on German Daniel Deusser set a cracking pace with the recently acquired ride on the Australian horse CP Aprilla (68.81). This combination eventually relegated to 5th placing.

The French master Michel Robert decided to cut for the chase with his experienced mare Kellemoi de Pepita posting a clear round in 67.17 seconds that would eventually see them take third place. "It was a good round and she felt good," said Robert after the class. "Tomorrow I will rest her and hopefully all will be ready for the Grand Prix."

Zeta De Hus ridden by Robert's fellow countryman Kevin Staut proved good enough for 4th place after a very efficient round in 68.69 seconds.

But it was the VDL rider Leopold van Asten who outwitted the field and could draw upon his horse's strength to turn up tight and have enough scope to pull off the task without error. 66.13 seconds was the time set with VDL Groep Quinara that was never bettered.

Last to go Maikel van der Vleuten jumped a quality fast round with the stallion VDL Groep Verdi to settle for second place proving that they are ready for the final Grand Prix of Abu Dhabi that will take place on Saturday evening.

Maikel enjoyed the ride on course. "The horse was quite fresh in the warm up and a little bit to the hand. On the arena though he jumped quite loose and I was very happy. I hope he will stay in shape for Saturday's Grand Prix. He will have no jumping tomorrow, just some dressage."

VDL Groep sponsor Wim van der Leegte was in Abu Dhabi to witness his great team riding efforts and Leopold was happy for the moment "It was very good to have the win today with my boss here as he doesn't come to the shows that often. We made good results today and the mare develops more now after every show. She is a quality horse, is careful and super to ride."

Edwina Tops-Alexander started Cevo Itot du Chateau happily jumping a clear steady round taking on one time penalty. Neither her nor Ludger seemed phased collecting time penalties today as they are fully focused for the Grand Prix on Saturday. Both horses and riders looked very relaxed and ready for the big play out.

Competitions begin today Friday 26th November at 14h30 (Abu Dhabi Time) 11h30 (CET) starting with the CSI2* 1.30m. This will be followed with the CSI2* 1.45m Grand Prix at 17h15 (Abu Dhabi Time) 14h15 (CET) and the 30,000 euro CSI5* 1.45m at 20h00 (Abu Dhabi Time) 17h00 (CET).