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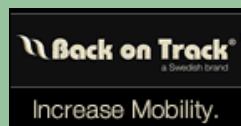
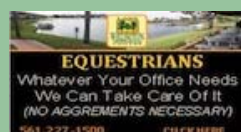
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The Royal Fair, Toronto, Ontario

Netherlands' Smolders Seizes \$75,000 Ricoh Big Ben Challenge Grand Prix

89th Royal Winter Fair draws to a close in Toronto, Canada

Karen Briggs for PhelpsSports.com

Reporting from The Royal Fair, Toronto, Ontario

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Harrie Smolders of The Netherlands and Regina Z

TORONTO, Saturday, November 12, 2011 – Harrie Smolders is taking a big cheque home to the Netherlands, thanks to a decisive victory in tonight's Ricoh Big Ben Challenge Grand Prix.

\$75,000 (CDN) was on the line tonight in the 89th Royal Agricultural Winter Fair's grand finale. The Ricoh Coliseum was standing-room only, and the atmosphere was electric.

Course designer Alan Wade (IRL) set another of his deceptively benign-looking tracks, but six



days in, no-one riding in the international division here at the Royal was fooled. Particularly problematic was a set of two black-and-white verticals set at a one-stride distance across the diagonal (11ab), with a long gallop to a final square oxer. These proved especially susceptible to the laws of gravity, though another relatively innocuous oxer-to-vertical combination (5ab) also claimed its share of victims this evening.



Lauren Hough and Quick Study finished second

The class was eight riders in before the first clear was delivered, courtesy of Smolders and his super-consistent Zangersheide mare, Regina Z, owned by Jos Verlooy. The trail having been blazed, Mario Deslauriers and Urico decided to follow suit. Then Nick Skelton piloted the handsome gray, Carlo 273, to similar results ... but picked up a heartbreaking single time fault for his conservative approach to this daunting track.

Another three clears came from Dermott Lennon and Hallmark Elite, Lauren Hough and Quick Study, and Conor Swail and Lansdowne, in quick succession. But the final two riders, Scott Brash and McLain Ward, both four-faulted to leave the total number of returning riders at five.

On the jump-off course, the one-stride combination of narrow verticals had been reduced to a single fence, with a potentially dangerous turn to it from the liverpool (#10). Another rollback turn from that narrow upright, to the wishing-well combination (one-stride, oxer to vertical) also had high-risk all over it. The course finished off with a long gallop from a white-plank vertical to a final square oxer.



Connor Swail and Landsdowne were third

When you're first in the ring in a jump-off, you can either go for the careful clear, or throw down the gauntlet. Smolders opted for the latter. His turn to the narrow vertical had the crowd gasping, but he got away with it ... and he got away with everything else too, stopping the timers in 35.20 seconds with all the rails still in their cups.

Even if his four competitors had managed to leave the rails up, which they didn't – Lennon, Hough, and Swail all had a single rail, and Deslauriers unfortunately suffered two – Smolders' time proved untouchable. Hough and Quick Study, redeeming themselves from a rather unlucky week, came closest with 35.28 seconds, and Swail and Lansdowne were a very creditable third considering the game Lansdowne is a mere eight years old.

"I didn't see the times but I think they were close," said Smolders later. "I put a bit of pressure on them to beat the time. There was a skinny high vertical off a really tight turn you lose a lot of speed and you need to balance the horse very well there. My horse is quite handy and very careful for the fences. I think that I won from (fence) 1 to 2 – I turned short; maybe on the long lines she has not the biggest stride, but in the turning she wins it."

In addition to winning this prestigious class, Smolders achieved another important objective by coming to the Royal Winter Fair. "In Europe it's difficult to get into World Cups," he explained. "For Holland, at the moment, we have only two spots for each World Cup, and there are at least 12 people who want to go. Our chef d'equipe has to divide them a little bit -- you go to that World Cup, you go to this one, till the new year, and then they see who has points. I would like to go to the World Cup Final because it's very close to my hometown this year, and I want to show for my own public. That's why we come over here – I can do two World Cups (at the Royal and at the Alltech National Horse Show) and I can take the points to Europe.

"I'm happy to come here and they are happy that I come. It's a good show. This week I brought my wife and my little kids. They have a lot of fun here with the animals."

Cup Champions



Draganette, owned by Carolyn Couenen and shown by Ronnie Davidson

Early this Saturday morning, the Royal's most celebrated pair of classes for three-year-olds filled the Ricoh Coliseum. The Governor General's Cup is a line class for Canadian-breds foaled in Canada suitable for performance careers in hunter/jumper, dressage, or eventing, and the Lieutenant Governor's Cup is an under-saddle class for the same age group.

The Governor General's Cup champion this year was Draganette, owned by Carolyn Couenen and shown by Ronnie Davidson, while the Lieutenant Governor's Cup was captured by Carbon Copy, who was second to Draganette in the Governor General's. Carbon Copy is owned by Marike Dussault and was shown by Kate MacIntyre. The Lieutenant Governor for Ontario, the Honorable David C. Onley was in attendance on Saturday evening for the presentations of these two elegant three-year-olds to the crowd immediately before the Big Ben Challenge.

Canine /Equine Challenge to Skelton



Nick Skelton and Unique

The most light-hearted class in the international jumper division at the Royal has to be the \$15,000 Canine/Equine Challenge, presented this Saturday afternoon. Each rider is paired with a dog from the SuperDogs performance troupe which gives agility demonstrations each day in the RWF trade fair. The riders jump a shortened course of eight fences for time, after which their canine partners negotiate an agility course of tunnels, teeter-totters, weaving

poles, and jumps at center ring. The combined time and faults-converted-to-time, for horse and dog, determine the winner.

This year's equine victor was Unique, piloted by Nick Skelton, and partnered with a Belgian Malinois named Vixen, who stopped the timers in 37.05 seconds. Daniel Bluman and Fatalis Fatum were second (partnered with a border collie called Kung Fu Panda), and Loughview Lou Lou and Dermott Lennon took third teamed with a mutt called Kaya.



going to the dogs.....

Show-End Awards

On the final night of the 2011 Royal, Yann Candele was named the Leading Canadian Rider, and his mount Game Ready, the Leading International Horse. McLain Ward took top honors as the Leading International Rider.

"I'm very pleased," said Candele. "It's the first time in the years I've been coming here that I have come out on top as Leading Canadian Rider. Every year it's a fierce competition in the Canadian and International divisions so it's a pleasure to come out on top.

"I think everyone was really pleased with the courses this year," he added. "(Wade) was really fair to the horses, he got the result at the end, in all the classes he got five to eight (in the jump-off) which is what we're expecting for this type of competition. I think he did a beautiful job."

"Because of the loss of Hickstead, this was a sad week both for the Canadian showjumping team and also for the horse because, in my opinion, he was one of the best of all time. It's been sad for people who are close to Eric and to Hickstead, but it's also having an impact on the horse community around the world. Everyone is touched when you have such a horse. It's difficult.

"I think now to have the Hickstead World Cup Grand Prix and the Big Ben Grand Prix which has been in place for so many years, will be fantastic. To name a class, a prestigious Grand Prix here, for him is the right thing to do. I think everyone will take pride in that and try to win it in the years coming."

RESULTS

\$75,000 RICOH BIG BEN CHALLENGE GRAND PRIX

1. Harrie Smolders / Regina Z – 0/0/35.20 seconds
2. Lauren Hough / Quick Study – 0/4/35.28
3. Conor Swail / Lansdowne – 0/4/35.36

- 4. Dermott Lennon / Hallmark Elite – 0/4/35.65
- 5. Mario Deslauriers / Urico – 0/8/36.79
- 6. Nick Skelton / Carlo 273 – 1

\$15,000 CANINE/EQUINE CHALLENGE

- 1. Nick Skelton / Unique 37.05 seconds
- 2. Daniel Bluman / Fatalis Fatum 37.72
- 3. Dermott Lennon / Loughview Lou Lou 37.83
- 4. Yann Candele / Azzaro Van'T Hagenhof 37.86
- 5. Scott Brash / Intertoy Z 38.12
- 6. Katie Dinan / Sandro 40.56

PHOTOS BY: Ben Radvanyi

More Coverage of The Royal Fair, Toronto, Ontario

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