



A dream come true: Henrik von Eckermann etches his name on the World Cup trophy after piloting King Edward to the top of the podium

King Edward grows his greatness

Longines FEI Jumping World Cup Final, Omaha, USA

By NANCY JAFFER

WORLD champion Henrik von Eckermann seemed destined to win the title, but two British riders also had moments when they were key players over three days of competition in Omaha, Nebraska.

Henrik, who is also number one in the world rankings, breezed around the speed test that started the competition

aboard Dufour Stables' plucky King Edward. The 13-year-old Belgian warmblood is as game as they come.

"He's a very small horse, but when he comes into the ring, it feels like he's growing five centimetres more, and that makes the difference. It's like starting an engine," Henrik explained.

Henrik von Eckermann continued world domination, while British riders put up a strong fight

The course, laid out by Portuguese designer Bernardo Costa Cabral and his team, was difficult to tackle at full speed due to the penalty of an added three seconds for each rail dropped. That meant the 40

riders in the line-up had to be wary of both the clock and the fences that came up very fast in the imposing, but tight, CHI Health Arena as their World Cup journey got under way.

Henrik's time of 59.09sec was just 0.14sec faster than Scott Brash's prompt round on Hello Jefferson, and Henrik ended the evening with 41 points on the World Cup scoring system, while Scott was right behind on 39.

Scott said he knows Lady Pauline Harris's and Lady Pauline Kirkham's 14-year-old Belgian warmblood "has all the talent you need to win big competitions" and that gave him confidence with the World Cup being his major goal for this year.

At the same time, he noted



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“He’s not a horse; he’s Pegasus”: best Brit Harry Charles finishes ninth on Balou Du Reventon

there is quite a challenge when “mixing with the best” in a star-studded field.

It was only Scott’s second World Cup Final, having first competed in the indoor championship in 2014. He found Omaha to his liking; not just the steaks for which the Midwestern city is known, but also the spectators’ and organisers’ reception for the riders and the big warm-up arena in the middle of the trade fair. The facility is uniquely all under one roof, so horses never have to go outside.

Harry Charles, like Scott a member of the British Olympic squad in Tokyo, fared less well in the first leg on Ann Thompson’s Balou Du Reventon. A knock-down added three seconds to his time of 60.21sec. Without that mishap, he would have been in good striking distance with a fifth-place finish, but the additional seconds put him 17th with 24 points.

Harry blamed the dislodged pole on himself, contesting that if he hadn’t messed up, “we’d have been winning and leading”.

“I lost a stirrup and we had the front rail,” he said, explaining the knock-down resulted from a balance issue.

“I don’t mind coming from behind,” he added.

And that’s just what he did

in the next leg, putting in a double clear to finish second in the jump-off in 35.24sec, just 0.14sec behind the winner of the class, Julius-Peter Sinnack’s United Touch S, guided by Germany’s Richard Vogel.

Harry began competing on Balou, previously piloted by American Brian Moggre, at the end of 2022.

“He’s not really a horse, he’s Pegasus,” enthused Harry, who had dreamt of riding the stallion since he saw him being

shown by Ireland’s Darragh Kenny several years ago.

“He was just absolutely incredible. He made that course feel like 1.40m, which it’s definitely not,” he said of the round two track.

“I’m really happy I was able to correct my mistake from round one and give him the round he deserves.”

Harry’s placing moved him up in the overall rankings to a tie for seventh place with the Netherlands’ Harrie

Smolders on Evergate Stables’ Monaco NOP, remarkable for his consistency.

Scott, meanwhile, had three rails down, which kept him out of the jump-off and dropped him to a three-way tie for ninth with the USA’s Devin Ryan and Norway’s Victoria Gulliksen.

But the big news out of the second round was Henrik’s knock-down that kept him out of the jump-off and put him third overall, behind Denmark’s Andreas Schou (Darc De Lux) and Pius Schwizer of Switzerland with Vancouver De Lanlore, tied at the top of the standings.

Henrik’s knock-down turned out to be a blessing in disguise, however. He realised on the final day that because King Edward had expended effort on one less trip over challenging fences than the nine horses in the round two jump-off, he was fresher when he came out for the final two-round day of competition.

“VERY CHALLENGING”

ONLY the top 30 qualified for the first round of the final day, with 20 making it through to the second round. World Cup defending champion Martin Fuchs of Switzerland, who rode Adolfo Juri’s Leone Jei, observed about the first course,



At only his second-ever World Cup Final, Scott Brash steers Hello Jefferson into 11th position

that it was a “very challenging and difficult course. Everything comes up so fast. It’s a beautifully built course.

“When we walked it, I was like, ‘Wow this is very hard,’” added Martin. “You have to be so focused from the first fence to the last. You cannot miss half a second, otherwise it doesn’t add up anymore. Once you start to struggle, all the lines are a mess. You need to be 100% focused.”

And that’s what he achieved, coming up with one of only three fault-free trips in the first round of the Saturday night finale.

“You have to be focused from the first fence”

MARTIN FUCHS

Harrie and Ireland’s Denis Lynch were the others, but Henrik had a miscalculation at the B element of the oxer-vertical-vertical triple combination that was numbered 11 of 12 fences, and added four faults to his total.

“I came in probably a little bit too far off the oxer, protecting him probably a little too much from the front bar. Then he had so much power,



The Netherlands’ Harrie Smolders rises through the rankings to come second on Monaco NOP

so it was difficult to get back to the B and he had that one. But with that rail, I was thinking maybe the chance that I had was gone,” said Henrik. He kept going anyway and “the chance kept on being there”.

All it took was for him to realise that chance was to be fault-free in the final round. He was, and then he had to wait.

Andreas had 12 faults in the first round, so he was no longer a factor, but Pius, who had a rail in the first round, finished his chances with another knock-down – and

then one more – in the second.

Harrie’s 0/4 for the evening put him second, while the USA’s Hunter Holloway went from eight faults to zero on her last trip aboard Hays Investments’ Pepita Con Spita to put her third, on the podium at a major international championship for the first time.

She was crowd favourite as her family has a farm in Kansas two hours from Omaha, where she breeds horses and is hands-on doctoring the sick calves.

Hunter was on fire throughout the competition

and was ready to give her all on the final evening. After completing the first round, she said of her 12-year-old mare: “She felt super and I knew she could do it and I could do it, so I was just really excited to come back and attack it again on home soil.”

The only rider to be double clear on the last night was Ireland’s Denis Lynch aboard Molly Ohrstrom’s Brooklyn Heights, moving up from 17th to seventh overall. Harry Charles had scores of four and eight faults to wind up ninth, while Scott Brash had a rail in each round, putting him 11th. Their results were impressive when considering that they finished ahead of such major contenders as McLain Ward, who won the 2017 World Cup in Omaha. This year, he was 23rd with Callas.

But no matter his previous achievements, Henrik’s joy at winning here was clear to see. During the presentation, Henrik kissed the trophy as he realised a dream he had since childhood.

“When I was very young I always went to the Gothenburg Horse Show in Sweden and watched the World Cup,” Henrik recounted.

“It was always a big, big goal and a dream for me to be able to have my name on that trophy. So for me, it’s very special.” **H&H**

“WE HAVE A NICE WAY OUT FOR THE HORSE”

BERNARDO COSTA CABRAL’S courses were widely praised by competitors, including Hunter Holloway (right).

“I love Bernardo’s courses, they’re super,” she said. “I thought they were well suited to many types of horses and I thought they were courses that made the rider ride every stride of the course; there were no breaks, which was good. With World Cup Finals, it should be hard.”

After the very last horse had jumped, Bernardo himself said: “I’m going to sleep great tonight.”

“It’s not easy to test these guys, and I try to be as good as them. It’s hard to create variation in rhythm. It’s one of the tools without attacking the horse.

TALKING POINT

We always have a nice way out for the horse.

“I’m going to say something



very clichéd but it’s true – not one person can produce these kinds of jumps and tracks. It takes a whole team and I have a great team behind me. Even if I trip up, they never let me fall down.

“We tried to make different tests every day. It’s hard indoors to create nice options: not too small, not too tall.”