

Ian Millar claims \$50,000 CSI2* Jumper Classic in Caledon

Ten-time Canadian Olympian Ian Millar of Perth opened the Canadian international show jumping season with a win in the \$50,000 CSI2* Jumper Classic, presented by Horseware, Sunday during the CSI2* Caledon National in Palgrave.

The clear rounds just kept coming for Millar and his mount Dixon throughout the five-day tournament. Having jumped double-clear in Friday's \$35,000 CSI2* Open Welcome for a fifth-place finish, the pair turned up the heat in Sunday's Jumper Classic. With the advantage of being the final challenger in an eight-horse jump-off, Millar knew exactly what he had to do to catch the leading time of 34.82 seconds set by Ireland's Conor Swail and Flower, a new acquisition owned in partnership with Canada's Vanessa Mannix. With decades of experience under his belt, Millar sliced and diced his way around the jump-off track, meeting every distance with trademark precision. As he cleared the final obstacle and galloped through the timers, the new winning time of 34.09 seconds flashed on the scoreboard. Daniel Coyle, also from Ireland, was third on Cita. They were less than a quarter second off the pace Swail and Flower set.

"Today's ride was tough," Millar said at the end. "The two Irishmen really put it on."

"Conor pushed me really hard, he was fast, but Dixon was right on his game!" said Millar, 70, of the 14-year-old Belgian Warmblood gelding owned by Susan and Ariel Grange of Cheltenham. "There was a turn to the pair of verticals where we happened to catch the correct distance and shaved the time off."

"I know Dixon well, and he knows me, too," he added. "He knows what I'm about to do it almost before I know I'm going to do it. We're like a married couple."

Millar had two mounts in the jump-off, after he guided Vittorio 8 to a clear round on the first-round track set by two-time Olympic course designer Leopoldo Palacios of Venezuela. They were clear in the jump-off too, in a time of 36.25, and that was a benefit. It gave him a feel for the course before he went in with Dixon.

Millar and Dixon celebrated their victory in the same arena where they had helped Canada claim the Team Gold medal two years ago during the 2015 Pan American Games. As the host of equestrian events, the Caledon Equestrian Park now serves as an important legacy to horse sport.

Dixon and Millar had been in line to compete in last year's Olympics in Rio. Alas, a recurring sinus problem sidelined the horse, and Millar was just a spectator. He added Dixon had been battling this problem for about four or five years, but the vets are confident they've solved it.

"He's a way happier horse now," he said.

"Dixon is starting his Canadian season here at the Caledon Equestrian Park," said Millar, who spent the winter competing at the 12-week Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington, Florida. "He'll enjoy a rest next week, and then we're off to Langley, B.C., where he's on the Nations' Cup team for Canada. Then it's over the mountains to Spruce Meadows for the summer series."

Millar has been riding Vittorio 8 for owner Future Adventures for the past year.

"I'm looking forward to seeing what the Spruce Meadows tour will do for him," said Millar of the nine-year-old Hanoverian gelding. "He has the technique, power, he's careful, modern. He would be a Games horse. He's just nine now and if he takes the next step over the next year, he is there."

While Millar dominated Sunday's proceedings followed closely by Swail, another Irishman settled for third. Daniel Coyle, 22, guided Cita, an 11-year-old Holsteiner mare to a third place finish for owners Susan and Ariel Grange, giving the mother-and-daughter team both the win as well as a third place finish. Erynn Ballard of Palgrave took fourth place following a clear jump-off performance in a time of 35.24 seconds riding Carimba B, a nine-year-old Hanoverian mare owned by her family's Looking Back Farm.

While Swail may have settled for second in Sunday's event, it was he who stood alone in the winner's circle following Friday's \$35,000 CSI2* Open Welcome. The times were close but, in the end, Swail's time of 39.49 seconds gave him the edge over Coyle, who had stopped the clock in 39.62 riding Cita.

Swail said the 12-year-old Belgian mare had a very successful time in Wellington, and was coming off a six-week break.

"She's very, very fast," he said.

Canadians filled the next three spots in the placings with Kean White of Rockwood turning in a time of 41.10 to take third with Carrera van het Westleven Z, Canadian Olympian Beth Underhill of Schomberg placing fourth with a time of 41.47 riding Count Me In, and Millar and Dixon rounding out the top five in 42.30 seconds.



Ian Millar rode Dixson to victory Sunday in the \$50,000 FEI Jumper Classic.



Palgrave area resident Erynn Ballard was fast in Sunday's jump-off on Carimba B, but not fast enough to take the win. They ended up in fourth place. Photos by Bill Rea



Susan Horn of Bolton made it to Friday's jump-off on Balinfore, finishing in eighth position.