

Ali Ramsay claims Caledon Cup at Equestrian Park

It took an overpowering performance Sunday combined with an impressive outing Friday night to earn Ali Ramsay of Victoria, B.C. the Caledon Cup at the Canadian Show Jumping Tournament in Palgrave.

Ramsay, 25, won the \$86,000 Grand Prix and claimed the Cup Sunday after turning in two faultless performances on Hermelien VD Hooghoeve, her ten-year-old Belgian Warmblood mare.

Site of equestrian events for the 2015 Pan American Games, the Caledon Equestrian Park was hosting its fourth and final week of International Equestrian Federation (FEI) sanctioned competition for the 2017 season.

The Caledon Cup consisted of three separate events.

The first phase was held last Thursday, and was won by 22-year-old show jumping sensation Daniel Coyle of Ireland. Held as a speed class which saw the fastest round win, the \$10,000 Caledon Cup ? Phase One attracted 32 entries. Coyle was fourth in the order and turned in a blistering fast round in a time of 67.85 riding Martha Louise, a 13-year-old Swedish Warmblood mare, that would prove to be unbeatable. Ian Millar, 70, would come the closest to catching him, clocking in at 69.65 seconds to give owners Susan and Ariel Grange, who also own Martha Louise, a one-two finish. Francois Lamontagne, 33, of St. Eustache, Quebec, was the only other rider in the field to break the 70-second barrier, clocking in at 69.86 for third place with Chanel du Calvaire, his nine-year-old Belgian Sport Horse mare.

There were 28 entries taking to the course Friday night in the \$35,000 second phase of the competition. Eight of them rode clear, setting the stage for a most exciting jump-off. Seven of those riders were clear, but Hugh Graham of Schomberg set down a time that no one was going to beat, clearing all the jumps in 41.59 seconds aboard Knock Out 3E.

Olympian Amy Millar of Perth was a little more than a second off the pace on her 2016 Rio Olympic mount, Heros, while her father Ian was third on Dixon.

Fourth place that evening went to Ramsay.

?He jumped great and he's a fast horse,? a victorious Graham declared after the ribbons were presented Friday night.

The jump-off course was tricky, with a very tight turn right after the second jump. Schomberg's Beth Underhill ran into some trouble at that point when her horse Count Me In refused. But it was a different story for Graham.

?The tight turn is where I won it,? he observed. ?I was able to negotiate tighter than anybody else.?

True to form, Graham took every risk with his an 11-year-old Canadian Sport Horse gelding owned and bred by King Ridge Stables near King City and galloped down to the final oxer as the crowd cheered him on, sailing over to move into the lead.

Ten-time Olympian Ian Millar was the last one to try and beat Graham's time. Riding his veteran partner Dixon, a 14-year-old Belgian Warmblood gelding owned by the Granges, Millar pulled out all the stops in an effort to claim the win, but crossed the timers in 42.89 seconds for a third-place finish.

Graham, a veteran of Olympic, World Championship, and Pan American Games competition, described his jump-off performance by saying, ?I just put him belly to the ground, and didn't leave much room tonight.?

?I had told the course designer that I didn't like the track because it was too much running, but if I won it, I would change my mind!?

laughed Graham, 68, who was inducted into the Jump Canada Hall of Fame in 2016. ?My horse has a big stride and can cover the ground. He's had a bunch of second and third place finishes recently and was due for a win.?

?He's been coming along, getting better and better,? Graham said of his mount. ?He won the seven and eight-year-old championship when he was eight, and he kept developing and kept showing a lot of scope and confidence. I think he likes his job as much as I like him!?

A total of 30 competitors took on Sunday's challenge set by course designer Oscar Soberon of Mexico and when 13 pairs successfully negotiated the first-round track, the heat was on for the jump-off.

Nicole Walker or Aurora, who won last Year's Caledon Cup, had a chance to repeat, making it to the jump-off on Excellent B. But they knocked down a rail on the last jump to collect four faults.

Ian Millar was the first rider to post a clear round in the jump-off, guiding Vittorio 8, a nine-year-old Hanoverian gelding owned by Future Adventures, home in a conservative time of 45.76 seconds.

Palgrave area resident Erynn Ballard, 37, quickly improved on Millar's time, stopping the clock in 45.31 to move into the lead with Royale du Rouet, a 12-year-old selle francais stallion.

Her time would be eclipsed by the next rider in the ring, 38-year-old Isabelle Lapierre of Breakeyville, Quebec, who had the crowd cheering as she raced through the finish line in a time of 41.47, shaving almost four seconds off Ballard's time to overtake top spot. Lapierre's partner was the game 10-year-old Dutch Warmblood mare owned by Ecuries de la Chaudiere.

The lead changed hands yet again when Ramsay made a daring move on course, cutting inside to a liverpool instead of taking the right-hand roll-back. The move paid off, as the scoreboard reflected the new leading time of 40.76 seconds.

Five more riders would attempt to catch Ramsay's time, although none dared to try her inside turn.

?Honestly, I don't think I could have done it that well if I had planned it!? said Ramsay of the inside turn riding Hermelien VD Hooghoeve, her partner of three years. ?She drifts so far right and when we landed inside, I saw it, and she just went for it with me.? She also said she had not expected to see so many in the jump off, although she later reflected it made sense, given the calibre of the competition.

?It was intimidating being in a field like that with all of the Millars and the other experienced riders, but I had a good feeling about today,? she said. ?Normally, I peak early; whenever I win a class it's been a Thursday or a Welcome class. When I was fourth on Friday night, I thought that maybe I was building it up right this time!?

In fact, her double-clear effort for a fourth-place finish Friday night combined with her victory Sunday, gave Ramsay a total of 33 points in the Caledon Cup standings over Ian Millar, who earned 32 points paired with Dixon.

?That was a bit of a surprise!? said Ramsay of hoisting the Cup. ?I didn't really think about it because everyone else had been so consistent. When we were all lined up waiting for them to announce who the winner was, I started to think that maybe it was a possibility. When I heard my name, it was a nice surprise.?

Ramsay was quick to credit her trainer, 2008 Canadian Olympian team silver medalist Jill Henselwood of Oxford Mills, Ontario, with her success.

?Jill is amazing,? she said. ?She works just as hard as I do with my horses, maybe harder some things, and I owe a lot of it to her.?

In addition to claiming the victory, Ramsay also won the \$1,000 Henry Equestrian Plan (HEP) Rider Bonus, presented to the highest-placed competitor sporting the HEP saddle pad presented to all FEI competitors during the FEI horse inspection.

In another special presentation held prior to the start of Sunday's Grand Prix, Alexanne Thibault of Boucherville, Quebec, was recognized as the recipient of the McKee-Pownall FEI Groom Appreciation Award. Selected during the FEI horse inspection, Thibault, who competed in all three phases of the Caledon Cup riding Chacco Prime, has the unique distinction of being her own groom.

Craig Collins of Equestrian Management Group (EMG) spoke to the success of this year's Tournament.

?It was a great week with great turn-out, and a great field of competitors with lots of good horses and riders,? he declared. ?We had a huge crowd on Friday night in the indoor arena and when the times kept getting faster and faster in the jump-off, the crowd was going crazy! It was a lot of fun. And although it was a hot week, we are fortunate that, due to the legacy of hosting the Pan American Games, we were able to provide misting fans and other amenities to take top-care of the horses.

?It was great that the Town of Caledon was so well-represented and the Mayor, His Worship Allan Thompson, did an exceptional job judging our 17 leadline entries,? Collins added. ?We were also proud and appreciative to have so many of our sponsors present, and I would like to acknowledge all of the partners that support the Caledon Equestrian Park, not just this week, but on an ongoing basis throughout the season. Also, as this is our last big tournament of the year, I would like to recognize the EMG team who, once again, did a magnificent job. As far as I'm concerned, we have the best crew anywhere in North America.?



Palgrave area resident Erynn Ballard was clear in Sunday's jump off, but her time was only good enough for third place.



Ali Ramsay received the Caledon Cup, presented by RAM Equestrian, from by Bob Northcott (right) and Ross Millar.