

Eric Lamaze wins third consecutive WEF Challenge Cup in Florida

For an unprecedented third week in a row, 2008 Canadian Olympic Champion Eric Lamaze of Schomberg scored victory in the \$34,000 Ruby et Violette WEF Challenge Cup Series at the Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington, Florida.

Having won the first two events in the 12-week WEF Challenge Cup Series riding Rosana du Park, owned by Artisan Farms LLC in partnership with Lamaze's Torrey Pines Stable, he returned to the International Arena to take his third consecutive win riding Fine Lady 5 for owner Artisan Farms LLC.

With huge starting fields, a win in the WEF Challenge Cup never comes easy. For last Thursday's \$34,000 Ruby et Violette WEF Challenge Cup Round III, a total of 72 entries, the same number as the previous week's Round II, attempted to jump clear over the airy track set by two-time Olympic course designer Leopoldo Palacios of Venezuela. Only eight found their way to a clear performance, with Lamaze coming back sixth in the jump-off order.

When he entered the International Arena, Lamaze was chasing the time of 36.41 seconds set by German superstar Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum riding Fibonacci 17. Lamaze made quick work of the shortened jump-off track, using Fine Lady 5's natural speed to his advantage. When the clock flashed 35.28 seconds, Lamaze moved to the top of the leaderboard. Only two riders were still to come and although American rider Alex Granato was able to produce a clear round with Mullaghdrin Rado, his time of 35.81 seconds would see him settle for second place.

In addition to the victory, for wearing SSG Digital riding gloves on his way to victory, Lamaze was awarded another \$3,000 bonus in the SSG Gloves "Go Clean for the Green" incentive promotion, bringing his bonus money total to \$9,000 so far this winter.

"You don't expect to win three WEF's in a row, even if you feel your horses are on form, especially when there are 72 starters, including some of the best riders and best horses in the world," Lamaze commented. "It comes down to having a fast horse. Fine Lady is a class, class horse. I am really happy that the Ziegler's of Artisan Farms bought her for me. I was in need of a great speed horse when we bought her, but she is so much more than just that!"

Of the secret to his success, Lamaze, 46, explained, "It hasn't been as easy as it may look now. We took a lot of time to rebuild a good string of horses and there were a few mistakes along the way, but when you have great owners that support you and they stay with you, success will come. The Ziegler family of Artisan Farms, they did that. We invested in some young horses, and they've shown up. I have a great string of horses, Tiffany (Foster) has a great string of horses, and we are rebuilding Cait's (Ziegler) string of horses. It's been a long process. This is the pay-off. We are very lucky to have Artisan Farms behind us."