

Ian Millar uses speed to take jumping event

By Bill Rea

When it comes to show jumping, a lot of people might not appreciate the importance of speed.

But the clock was a major factor in last Saturday's \$75,000 RAM Equestrian Grand Prix at Caledon Pan Am Equestrian Park in Palgrave.

It looked for a while like Erynn Ballard of Palgrave had things all wrapped up, turning in a clear round in the jump-off aboard Appy Cara with a blistering time of 43.94 seconds. She was the first of seven riders in the jump-off, and while there were a couple of others who jumped clear, no one was able to come within a second of beating that time. Then Ian Millar was the last in the ring on Dixson, and he came close to shaving two seconds off Ballard's time. Captain Canada stopped the clock at 42.11 to take the win. The pair was the fastest of the 20 entries in the opening round, and the only combination to complete the course in less than 80 seconds.

Millar's other entry in the jump-off was Baranus, who was also clear, posting a time of 45.38, good for third place. But that combination barely made it to the second round. The two were clear in the opening round, but were a little casual when it came to completing the course in the 83 seconds allowed. They did it in 82.84, meaning they were a fraction of a second away from earning a time fault.

"That was close," Millar said later. "I didn't like that."

The course was designed by Leopoldo Palacios of Venezuela, and Millar said he's famous for doing tricky things with distances between jumps. "I thought I was going a little faster than I was," he said.

Fourth place went to Elizabeth Gingras from Edmonton on Zilversprings, followed in the jump-off by Vanessa Mannix from Calgary on Nirvana de Terlong, Ballard on Hera Van de Kouterhoeve and Yann Candele of Caledon riding Dominart.

Conor Swail, who's been seeing lots of success at the park so far this season, had two entries in Saturday's competition. Simba de la Roque, who he rode to victory in last Sunday's \$50,000 RAM Equestrian Grand Prix, got through the round clear, but took almost a second too long to do it. That earned him a time fault, keeping him out of the jump-off, but he got eighth place. His other mount in the competition, Viva Colombia, was faster, but knocked a rail down for four jumping faults and 11th place.

Ninth place went to Amy Millar on Heros and 10th was taken by Jordan Macpherson of Toronto, riding Aanwinst.

Susan Horn of Bolton was aboard Her Courchevel, but they collected four jumping faults to finish in 13th place.

Christian Sorensen of Caledon was riding Bobby, but they picked up one time fault and four jumping faults to leave them in 16th place.

Olympian Mac Cone of King City was entered riding Carlo, but they finished with five faults, as did Lanie Thomas of Schomberg on Charlie Brown.

"That's the way it goes," Ballard said after the event, realizing Millar was going to mean business when he came out in the jump-off.

"I don't think he was going to have it any other way."

She added Dixson is a more experienced horse than her mount, which was in its first jump-off.

Millar was quick to agree that speed helped, noting that the rider with the faster mount has an advantage.

When it comes to all the horses he's ever competed on, Millar said Dixson, an 11-year-old Belgian Warmblood, is right up there.

"He's a strong, strong charger, but not too strong," he said. "He likes his work and he likes me."

Millar added it took a while for the two to get used to each other. "If he keeps going like this, he's going to be right up there."

There's a bit of hesitation when it comes to comparisons with his iconic mount Big Ben (who died in 1999). "No one will ever replace Big Ben in my heart," he said, adding Dixson is related to Big Ben on his mother's line.

But he said Dixson seems to have it all.

"Athletes have to be lucky too," he observed, pointing out they have to peak at the right time and avoid injuries.

Things didn't go quite as well for Millar two days before in the \$35,000 Caledon National Open Welcome at the park.

The event was won by Swail on Viva Colombia, followed by Kean White of Rockwood on For Freedom Z, Macpherson on Aldine, Amy Millar on Heros, Mr. Millar on Baranus, Ballard on Hera Van de Kouterhoeve, Swail on Simba de la Roque and Kimberley Farlinger on Caprice VD Brouwershoeve.

The Equestrian Park is still picking up positive reviews from competitors as the Pan Am Games approach.

"It's pretty spectacular," Ballard declared, adding the park is almost in her backyard. "I think that we're incredibly lucky to have this venue."



Susan Horn of Bolton guided Her Courchevel from Kingsfield Farm over this jump in Saturday's event.



Ian Millar put the hammer down in the jump-off to win the \$75,000 RAM?Equestrian Grand Prix by almost two seconds.



Erynn Ballard and Appy Cara came out flying in Saturday's jump-off, almost winning the event before settling for second.