

Jaclyn Duff scores first FEI victory at Caledon Pan Am Equestrian Park

Jaclyn Duff of Edmonton celebrated the first FEI victory of her young career by winning the \$35,000 CSI2* Sierra Excavating Enterprises Cup Saturday at the Caledon Pan Am Equestrian Park in Palgrave.

The event was the highlight of the Caledon National last week, marking the second tournament of the season held at the facility. Next year, the Park will host the equestrian events for the 2015 Pan American Games.

Palgrave area resident Chris Sorensen was second, riding Wriomf. Both he and Duff rode clear in jump-off, but the victor was a full second faster. Toronto's Jordan Macpherson had a very speedy jump-off aboard Piccobello Du Val De Geer, but she picked up four jumping faults to settle for third place.

There were 22 entries in the very tough course designed by Leopoldo Palacios of Venezuela. There were only three making it to the jump-off and several of the entries picked up time faults. Sorensen almost had two mounts in the jump-off with Recadis-B, but they took a little more than a second too long to complete the course.

An international starting field challenged Saturday's feature with riders representing Colombia, Ireland and Russia all figuring in the top 10. In the end, however, a three-way jump-off showcased top up-and-coming Canadian talent. Chris Sorensen, 31, of Caledon, ON, was the first to post a clear round over the clever track set by two-time Olympic course designer Leopoldo Palacios of Venezuela. Toronto's Jordan Macpherson, 24, followed suit and, as the last to go, Duff, 27, added her name to the jump-off list. Leading off the tie-breaker, Sorensen and Wriomf, his 11-year-old Dutch Warmblood mare, set the time to beat with a clear round in 39.39 seconds. Always fast, Macpherson bettered the time by crossing the timers in 37.06 but at the expense of a rail down with Piccobello du Val de Geer, a 15-year Belgian Warmblood mare owned by JEM Stables Inc. Duff had the advantage of being the last to go and, riding Stakkarus, left all the jumps in place in a time of 38.37 seconds to score her first victory at the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) level.

“Leopoldo designed a great track, it was very technical and time allowed was very tight,” explained Duff, a student at the University of Alberta. “I had the advantage of having already gone with my first horse, As Di Azurro, and had two rails and a time fault. I drew last in the order with Stakkarus, which is an awesome spot to be in! I was planning to jump clear and if I had a time fault, that was okay because my horse is new to this level and I'm pretty new as well. I jumped the first three jumps and he felt amazing; I managed to get in under the time allowed and jump clean!”

“My strategy for the jump-off was to go double clear,” added Duff, who has been training with Canadian Olympic team silver medalist Jill Henselwood in Oxford Mills for the past two years. “My horse is naturally quick. He jumped really well and was super amazing!”

Duff has also been partnered with Stakkarus for two years, having purchased the 10-year-old chestnut Oldenburg stallion during the 2012 Spruce Meadows Summer Series in Calgary from Brazilian rider Eduardo Menezes.

“He's very quirky,” described Duff. “He's a red head! Little things set him off and make him wired and crazy, but that's also one of his best qualities because when you go back for a jump-off, he's so game.”

“We have a world-class course designer,” Sorensen observed after Saturday's event. “I think he decided to step it up one gear today.”

The cup presentation was made by Dominic Scrivo, owner of Sierra Excavating, accompanied by his wife Denise and son Justin. Sierra built the new facilities at Caledon Equestrian Park in just 96 days, starting in February.

The equestrian park continues to draw praise as work progresses to get it ready for next year's Games.

“The facility is incredible to see,” Sorensen said. “It's incredible to see the change in progress.”

Sorensen said he almost grew up at the park, so such a world-class facility is a source of pride.

“To have it in our back yard is unbelievably exciting.

“It's beautiful; they did an amazing job with it,” Duff added. “The footing is amazing; my horses jumped great both weeks. I can't wait for the Pan Ams to be here!”

While a new face was in the winner's circle Saturday, it was Canadian Equestrian Team veteran and Caledon's own Yann Candele who led the victory gallop following Thursday's \$35,000 Alberta Premium Open Welcome. A total of 11 horses found their way to a clear round over Palacios's opening round track with six again jumping clear in the jump-off.

With a reputation for being a true speed demon, Candele skillfully guided Brooklyn Blues to the win for owner Carol Sollak of Wellington, FL. The tiny 10-year-old Oldenburg mare turned in a time of 33.43 seconds that none could touch. Ian Millar, winner of last week's \$35,000 CSI2* RAM Equestrian Grand Prix, came closest, clocking in at 35.15 seconds with Baranus while Sorensen took third and fourth with Wriomf and Recadis-B respectively. Henselwood has a star in the making with the nine-year-old stallion

Quidam Blue earning fifth position while Calgary's Vanessa Mannix, 24, rounded out the double-clear efforts with Rubens LS La Silla.



Edmonton's Jaclyn Duff accepted the top prize in the Sierra Excavating Enterprises Cup competition, aboard Stakkaru. The presentation was made by Dominic Scrivo, owner of Sierra Excavating, which built the new facilities at Caledon Equestrian Park in just 96 days, starting in February. He was accompanied by his wife Denise and son Justin.



Palgrave area resident Chris Sorensen and Wriomf were one of only three combinations to make it to the jump-off at Saturday's event.