

Schomberg's Eric Lamaze claims victory in Grand Prix of La Baule

Canadian Olympic Champion Eric Lamaze of Schomberg rode Artisan Farms LLC's Powerplay to victory in the \$200,000 Grand Prix of La Baule Sunday in France.

It was an extremely emotional win for Lamaze, who won the CSIO5* La Baule event, the highest ranking on the international show jumping calendar, on one other occasion in his career, in 2011 riding the late Hickstead.

"This is the first five-star grand prix that I've won since Hickstead," said Lamaze, who was smiling from ear to ear as tears rolled down his cheeks. "It is super exciting to win this grand prix. It's a grand prix that I've won before; I know what it feels like to win in La Baule!"

Fifty of the best horses and riders in the world competed, with nine jumping the first round clear to advance to the jump-off.

Lamaze, who was eighth to return, set off at a full gallop, skillfully encouraging Powerplay across the ground and making tight turns back to the obstacles. He raced through the timers in 35.83 seconds to easily eclipse the time of 37.53 set by Abdelkebir Ouaddar of Morocco riding Quickly de Kreisker. France's Patrice Delaveau placed third with a time of 37.6 seconds with Carinjo HDC.

Powerplay stepped into big shoes by claiming the La Baule victory. Acquired by Artisan Farms LLC last spring from Switzerland's Pius Schwizer, Lamaze has been riding the 10-year-old Holsteiner gelding for almost a full year.

"I've never asked Powerplay to do something like this and to go so fast," explained Lamaze, who in a spur of the moment display of delight, leapt off the podium during the awards presentation to spray the supportive audience with celebratory champagne. "Last year was a learning year with the horse. I've really taken my time with him and been respectful of how careful he is. He's not a super-fast horse, but sometimes when you get to know a horse, you know when you can take risks.

"Today, it felt like it was time to be competitive," he added. "It felt like the time was right for me to ask him to do this."

La Baule marked the third five-star grand prix in a row that Powerplay has jumped clear, having placed sixth in the \$300,000 CSIO5* Global Champions Tour Grand Prix in Antwerp, Belgium, with one time fault and been clear in the opening round of the \$300,000 CSIO5* Global Champions Tour Grand Prix two weeks ago in Madrid, Spain.

"We are so thankful to Carlene and Andy Ziegler of Artisan Farms for giving us this opportunity," said Lamaze, who competes alongside fellow Canadian Olympian Tiffany Foster as an Artisan Farms sponsored rider.

Earlier in the day, Foster was double clear to place fifth in the \$24,000 1.45m Prix Laiterie De Montaigu riding Melody des Hayettes Z and placed sixth Thursday behind Lamaze and Zigali P S in the \$27,500 Prix du Conseil Général with Victor. Lamaze and Foster are both based full-time with Artisan Farms in Vrasene, Belgium, and Wellington, Florida.

Next up is CSIO5* Rome, Italy (May 22 to 25), where Lamaze also won the Grand Prix in 2011 with Hickstead. Zigali P S, a 10-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding acquired by Artisan Farms in November, will start in the Grand Prix of Rome. Zigali P S was named the Ruby et Violette WEF Challenge Cup Overall Series Award as the Leading Money Winner at the highly competitive 2014 FTI Consulting Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington.

Following the CSIO5* Global Champions Tour in Hamburg, Germany (May 28 to June 1), Lamaze will return home to Canada for the Spruce Meadows Summer Series in Calgary.

Lamaze's main focus this year is the 2014 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games (WEG) in Normandy, France, at the end of August. The 2010 WEG Individual Bronze Medalist with Hickstead, Lamaze will decide between Powerplay and Zigali P S for this year's WEG competition, which will mark his sixth consecutive WEG appearance. Described by Lamaze as "a true championship horse," Powerplay has competed in Nations' Cup competition on four occasions since being acquired by Artisan Farms in May of 2013, including anchoring the victorious Canadian team in Wellington.