

EVENTING – SAUMUR - France CCI3* MAY 2010

Some members of the South African squad travelled to Saumur in the Loire Valley south west of Paris, to compete in the well known CCI3* event from 20 to 23 May 2010.

The horses were stabled in wooden boxes in a shaded area and seemed very relaxed and quite at home alongside other horses belonging to the likes of Pippa Funnell, Andrew Nicholson, Clayton Fredericks and Ian Stark!

From the cold wet weather of a few days before, the sun shone bringing hot days and cool nights making life a lot easier for Kirsten Winn and Murray Pote the two grooms who do such a good job of looking after the horses.

The first horse inspection went well and this was followed by two days of dressage which took place in a big grass show jumping arena surrounded by grandstands and white tents – quite intimidating. Some tests were better than others, but on the whole we did not disgrace and everyone was looking forward to the cross country.

The cross country course was big and technical, Patricia Clifton who came over from the UK to support our riders said there this was definitely a strong 3* course with some 4* questions – Pippa Funnell's comment was.... "a meaty course"! The obstacles were well constructed with good use of fillers and decoration, but there was no question that this was a big test for our riders and horses. The course was 5800m long at 570mpm with some long uphill pulls and testing water complexes!

Paul and Harry were the pathfinders and set out at a good pace jumping well until No.17 which was a triple combination on a downhill slope, first over an oxer, then a floating log and then a skinny brush on a curve to the left. The striding had to be foot (or hoof) perfect and the last obstacle caused the problem not only for Paul, but also Graham and Martyn.

The next obstacle was one of water jumps – a large upturned wooden boat followed by another boat on a right hand curve into water followed by a skinny in the water. Paul and Martyn jumped the second boat really big and Paul had to circle the skinny (20 penalties) after which Harry romped home in good style. Martyn retired here having completed what would have been a good CIC3* course in distance, saying that he was not going to get a QR and so rather save Kardinal for another day, especially as he had done so well up to that point. Douglas had a superb clear for jumping cross country round, but as he said he nearly came short at the same No. 17 and also the last water complex which had a huge drop down into the water then on to a bounce up out of the water over a wood pile. Heidi and Quantum Leap (known affectionately as Cutie) also had a fantastic round until he did such a jump into the water that Heidi did not have the time to get him together to make the bounce out. She went immediately to the option, only to jump outside the flags which unfortunately resulted in elimination! Zorba also experienced a problem at No. 17 but otherwise came home in style.

Without exception everyone was pleased with the way the riders coped with such a huge course, in fact Jean Philippe was called to the Ground Jury who congratulated him on the presentation of the SA riders – in their opinion they rode intelligently and were a credit to SA!

Next day was the last horse inspection for Harry, Zorba and King – all passed without any problems. The show jumping took place in the main grass arena with what seemed to be

thousands of spectators, there was not a seat to be had anywhere! Paul and Harry had two poles, Douglas and King took six and Graham and Zorba flew over the jumps and had one of only seven clear rounds in the class!

The French made much of prize giving and even though it was not an official team competition, the riders from each country represented were called into the arena and when the three South Africans who completed the competition (only 32 of 48 completed) entered the arena the twenty plus South African spectators erupted into clapping, cheering and flag waving – real lump in the throat stuff! Watch out for the photos that Blake and Tamara from TB Images took, they had great press accreditation and were everywhere taking photos and interviewing.

Our riders did us proud once again against stiff competition from top international riders. Each time they compete they gain experience and confidence – we must do everything we can to support and encourage them to stay the course leading to WEG in Kentucky.

Well done to all the riders. Good Luck to Martyn who travels to the CCI Bramham in the UK where fellow squad member Alex Peternell is based. Alex Peternell had a wonderful performance at Badminton recently.



Douglas Welsh and Kings Courier going through the finish



Hayley Parker and Brandenburg Lysander at the Vet Inspection



Paul Hart and Heartbreak Hill during the Showjumping