

The CSI- W Cape Town winner Gareth Neill continued his run of good form at the 2009 Presidents Cup, this time riding Mirage 85 to victory.



**Gareth Neill and Mirage 85
Courtesy and ©H2 Photograph**

The 9th Presidents Cup was held at Maple Ridge on their 10th Birthday celebration. Maple Ridge Equestrian Farm is situated on the Cradle of Humankind World heritage Site and run by Verity Combrink. Course Designer for the show for a second consecutive year U K International Course Designer Mr Bob Ellis.

The first International competition was combined with the 1.40 class which was won in fine style by the on form Young Rider Samantha McIntosh and Alzu Oakley. The Second International competition on the Friday saw a field of 10 horses with Tossy Raynor and 1st for Women's Godfather taking first place with Shaun Neill and Gold Rush in second whilst young Ashlee Hausberger took 3rd. Saturday was a busy day. The public were given the opportunity of viewing some Warmblood classes with the presentations of the 2 and 3 year old free jumping classes as well as the judging of the foal at foot classes.

A festive ambiance was felt on the Sunday as the day opened with the 1.35 Championship being won by Barry Taylor and his young Stallion Udokes. Next was the 1.30 Junior Championships won in cracking style by Angelique Lessing and Somersby. A very technical track was built by Bob Ellis for the 1.40 Championship. 16 horses went through to the jump off. Gareth Neill putting in a Clear in 42.82 on Something Special, but unfortunately had to scratch his second ride Rombo M due to him losing a shoe. Shaun Neill put in a splendid fast clear to win the class in 39.22 leaving Lisa Williams in 2nd place on Equilibrium's Warrangal P, clear in 40.81 and coming in third Samantha McIntosh and Alzu Oakley with a clear in 41.45.

Spectators were treated to a wonderful Stallion display by some of S A 's breeding stallions. After the Pony Riders Grand Prix was won by Forrest Lovgren and Magic Merlin, it was time for the 2009 Presidents Cup. This class was to be a 2010 World Equestrian Games qualifier (subject to approval by the FEI) so tensions were high whilst the riders were walking the course. Predictably the field of 9 horses starting were all keen to get a Qualification round under their belts. Previous winners of the Presidents Cup Tossy Raynor and Barry Taylor also rode in the class, whilst thoughts were with the current title holder Nicole Sime-Nel who lost her top horse Sharp Colt in a fatal accident last month. This pair won the presidents Cup in 2007 and 2008.

Despite an early draw, Debbie Becker and Rina 77 achieved a solid clear. Govett Triggol and Elektra were next jumping a 4 fault round, and then Barry Taylor and Wincent 28 also having an unlucky 4 penalties but giving

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them qualifying rounds. The pressure for another clear was now obvious, as the next combination in was Cape Town World Cup winner Gareth Neill and Mirage 85 who rode a wonderful clear round but clocking an unfortunate time penalty. Mirja Horsthemke had a very regrettable elimination at the last vertical standing at 1m60 on her Namibian Warmblood Midgard Grannus. Tossy Raynor and 1st for Women's Godfather had the spectators on the edges of their seats to produce a clear round but like Gareth occurring the frustrating time penalty. Next the fantastic Gold Rush and Shaun Neill who are no strangers to the pressure of International classes, jumped a beautiful clear round only to tip the oxer coming out of the triple combination to give them 4 faults, but also a qualifying round. Paige Shiller and Midgard Glamour missing out on qualifying with 8 penalties. Last in was Young rider Ashlee Hausberger and her Quidam gelding Quinsey with a faultless round but taking a pole at the last fence to leave them on 4 penalties.

Three horses went through to the second round Jump off in reverse order of penalties. First to go were Gareth Neill and Mirage 85 who jumped an exemplary round in 51.56 putting the pressure on the other two. Tossy Raynor and 1st for Women's Godfather jumped a clear round but .84 seconds slower than Gareth. It was now down to the line, Debbie Becker had to jump a clear round to stay in the lead and win the class. Luck was not with her and Rina 77 leaving them in 3rd place on 8 penalties.



Tossy Raynor, Gareth Neill and Debbie Becker
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