



Whitaker Makes it a Three-Peat, winning the \$75,000 Ricoh Big Ben Challenge Once Again.

It was a Grand Finale indeed to close out the International Division of The Royal Horse Show, with Dermott Lennon winning Leading International Rider and Jill Henselwood taking the Leading Canadian Rider title. The Horse Show continues Sunday with the Equine Extravaganza and Christmas At The Royal.

November 14, 2009

Toronto, ON – Once again it came down to a footrace in the Ricoh Coliseum tonight, with Great Britain's four-time Olympian, Michael Whitaker, taking the title in the **\$75,000 Ricoh Big Ben Challenge** at The Royal Horse Show. This was the third year in a row Whitaker has taken this class on the always sold-out Saturday night at The Royal.

A field of twenty-two started the evening over the imposing course set by renowned American designer Anthony D'Ambrosio, course designer for the Rolex FEI World Cup Final in Las Vegas earlier this year. Surprisingly to each of the top three riders, eight managed to conquer the first-round track to advance to the jump off. Of those eight, half were clean in the jump-off and those four finished within two seconds of one another.

Whitaker won this class on the same horse last year, Wonami Van Den Aard, a relatively young horse at just nine years of age. Opting to take a longer route between the first and second fences in the jump-off, Whitaker chose to then gallop hard down to the final oxer and the risk paid off.

"It all went according to plan," said Whitaker after the class. "Of course the plan was to win!" he laughed. "We were all surprised there were eight clean to the jump-off, we thought three, maybe four. The jump-off didn't really suit my horse because it was quite open, we're better with twisty and more turns. But I was very pleased overall."

Second-placed Kent Farrington (Chicago, IL), winner of last night's **Weston Canadian Open**, was decidedly less enthusiastic following a slip on course in the jump off, causing him to add a stride to the Greenhawk oxer halfway through the course.

"My horse did great, I am just not happy coming second." commented Farrington. "I was very pleased with him – my plan for the jump-off was just what I did, but after the double combination he slipped a little behind and I had to salvage the jump and add a stride at the last second. But I will for sure come back, for revenge!" he

finished good-naturedly.

Third went to the winner of this afternoon's **Canine / Equine Challenge**, Dermott Lennon of Ireland, who took home the Leading International Rider award. Lennon is one of the few riders this week never to have jumped courses set by D'Ambrosio, and was "shocked" at the number of clean rounds this evening.

"My horse was fantastic," he enthused. "I thought the course walked quite hard, but I was the first clean and as such, had to go quick to set the pace in the jump off. As it turned out, first and second were just a little bit faster."

Beth Underhill was the highest placed Canadian rider this evening with Top Gun, finishing in sixth, having knocked down the CN planks in the jump off. They finished on a score of four faults in 37.6 seconds. 2008 Canadian Champion Kean White slid in just behind her in seventh, having been the first to take the risk of going inside the Royal jump to get from the first to second fences in the jump off. It paid off – he finished in a competitive 37.85 seconds, but lowered the FEI jump for four faults.

Although the International Division has come to a close, Sunday is still a workday in the Horse Show and at The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, which is open from 9:00am to 6:00pm. The Equine Extravaganza begins at 1:00pm tomorrow and will feature Shorty Leggs the Rodeo Clown, barrel racing, Clay Maier's Friesian Spectacular, pole bending, an Icelandic Quadrille and a very unique dressage / reining Pas-de-Deux. Even Santa is expected to put in an appearance, as the theme of the day is "Christmas at The Royal."

This evening's events wrapped up the International Jumper Division at The Royal Horse Show. Over \$750,000 was awarded in total prize money across the Divisions, making The Royal Horse Show the most prestigious and hotly contested event of the season. For On-Demand webcasting, results and photos please visit www.royalfair.org.

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Please advise of web postings.

\$75,000 Ricoh Big Ben Challenge

Rider / Hometown / Horse / Score

1. Michael Whitaker / Nottingham, UK / Insul Tech Wonami Van Den Aard / 0.00 : 36.56
2. Kent Farrington / Chicago, IL / Up Chiqui / 0 : 37.47
3. Dermott Lennon / Ireland / Hallmark Elite / 0 : 37.97

4. Robert Smith / Warwickshire, UK / Talan / 0 : 38.22
5. McLain Ward / Brewster, NY / Phillipa / 4 : 37.46

Attached Photo: Michael Whitaker of Great Britain mastered the jump-off to win the \$75,000 Ricoh Big Ben Challenge for the third year in a row at The Royal Horse Show.

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