



November 15, 2008

Whitaker Wins the Night, Lamaze Overall Leading Rider at the Royal Horse Show

Toronto, ON - Michael Whitaker of Great Britain may have won tonight's \$75,000 Ricoh Big Ben International Challenge, but it was Olympic Champion Eric Lamaze that won the hearts of the crowd at this year's Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

First into the ring in a four-way jump-off, 2002 winner and defending champion Whitaker and his horse Insul Tech Wonami Van Den Aard knew they had to go fast and clean to pull forced errors from fellow Brit Nick Skelton on Transmission, Lamaze on Take off and Dutch rider Harrie Smolders on Exquis Oliver Q. Whitaker did what he needed to do, putting in a fault-free performance and stopping the clock in 36.50 seconds.

"It's difficult being first to go in the jump off, so I basically went as fast as I could, without doing anything really stupid," remarked Whitaker following the win. "I just really wanted to put the pressure on the others, to force them to make a mistake, which they did."

Skelton followed with one rail down for four faults, in a time of 38.63 seconds. Lamaze, who won the class in 1999 and 2001 also had a rail but would have had the time, stopping the clock at 36.38 seconds to finish third. Smolders, last to ride, opted for the safe clean round, leaving the jumps up but in a slower time of 38.65 for the reserve.

Tonight's \$75,000 Ricoh Big Ben Challenge was immediately followed by the closing presentations of the International Division: Leading Canadian Rider, Leading International Rider and Leading Horse. Only one person needed attend: the reigning Individual Gold Medalist Eric Lamaze.

Earlier in the night Lamaze, and the entire Silver medal team was recognized in the horse show to a standing ovation from the sold-out crowd. They were behind him all the way cheering him home in the jump-off, and they cheered him again as he received his three awards, including that for the horse he rode tonight, Take Off, owned by Artisan Farms of Milwaukee, WI.

Although the International Division has come to a close, tomorrow is still a workday in the horse show and at The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. The equine extravaganza begins at 1:00pm tomorrow and will feature everything from cowgirls and pole bending to trick riders and relays. Even Santa is expected to put in an appearance, as the theme of the day is "Christmas at The Royal." For ticket information and live web casting, please visit www.royalfair.org.

\$75,000 Ricoh Big Ben Challenge for International Jumpers
Rider / Hometown / Horse / Score:Time

1. Michael Whitaker (GBR) / Insul Tech Wonami Van Den Aard / Nottingham, UK / 0.00 : 36.500
2. Harrie Smolders (NED) / Exquis Oliver Q / Netherlands / 0.00 : 38.650
3. Eric Lamaze (CAN) / Take Off / Schomberg, ON / 4 : 36.380
4. Nick Skelton (GBR) / Transmission / Warwickshire, UK / 4 : 38.630
5. Todd Minikus (USA) / Pavarotti / Wellington, FL / 4 : 74.300

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Attached Photo: Michael Whitaker and Insul Tech Wonami Van Den Aard of Great Britain took top prize in the \$75,000 Ricoh Big Ben Challenge to close out the International Division of The Royal Horse Show in Toronto, Canada. Photo Credit © Michelle C. Dunn.