



FEATURE

It's a wrap

The second stage of the FEI World Championships has drawn to a close. **JESSICA MORTON** was on the ground at Pretoni, and reports on the highlights.

The FEI Eventing and Driving World Championships brought spectators to the edge of their seats last month in a dramatic and exhilarating two weeks of sport. With medals and Olympic qualifications at stake, the competition was always going to be exciting, but the final phases of both events developed into real thrillers.

The Australian Team – Andrew Hoy with Vassily de Lassos, Shane Rose and Virgil, Kevin McNab with Scuderia

1918 Don Quidam, and Hazel Shannon aboard WillingaPark Clifford – finished 10th overall, while debutante Shenae Lowings and Bold Venture placed 29th as individuals.

Sixty-eight of the 90 combinations who qualified to compete managed to finish the four-day event, with Germany winning team gold, the USA taking silver and New Zealand snatching bronze with a 0.2 point advantage over Great Britain who placed 4th.

All was not lost for the Brits thanks to the brilliant 25-year-old Yasmin Ingham, who finished 1st overall on 11-year-old Banzai Du Loir, while reigning individual Olympic champion Julia Krajewski and Amande de B'Neville brought home individual silver, and Kiwi Tim Price with Falco took bronze.

A volcanic venue

Known by locals as Rome's green lung because of its pristine location in the Castelli Romani Regional Park, Praton del Vivaro lies on a grassy plateau between three extinct volcanoes in the Municipality of Rocca di Papa. The federal equestrian centre at Praton was originally built for the 1960 Olympic Games but fell into a state of disrepair after years of neglect.

Thanks to Italy's successful bid to host the championships, the municipality and the Italian Equestrian Sports Federation restored the centre to its former glory, constructing new competition and warm-up areas, stables, veterinary clinic facilities and groom accommodation. World-class course designers Giuseppe della Chiesa, Uliano Vezzani and

German Josef Middendorf were employed to create challenging and highly technical cross country, show jumping and driving marathon phases.

Much has been written about the red volcanic dust stirred up during the event, but the unique mix of volcanic ash and tuffaceous clay is part of what makes Praton ideally suited for equestrian events. The soil drains quickly even after heavy rain, and doesn't become sticky, slippery, or compact underfoot – which makes it perfect for competition, no matter what the weather. According to Giuseppe della Chiesa, Praton's Sport Manager, "the horses just love it."

Eventing

The weather at the start of the eventing phase was moody and threatening, but by the fourth day had improved to end on a brilliantly sunny note.

The Australian Team was strong in the dressage phase, placing 5th overall at the end of Day Two. Kevin McNab and Scuderia 1918 Don Quidam produced a personal dressage best, but acquired 28.8 time penalties and 20 penalties due to a freak equipment failure on the course. "My rein broke between an A and B element, and I had to reach down and get it while not crossing my tracks. I won't tell you what words were going through my mind! When it broke I was a couple of seconds up on time. It took me a minute to mend the reins and I finished a minute over the time. It is so frustrating and unfortunate for the horse because he went beautifully."

Spanish rider Carlos Diaz Fernandez and Frenchman Nicolas Touzaint both suffered falls during the cross country phase, but luckily neither was badly injured. Belgian rider Karin Donckers and her wonderful Fietcha were held up for almost twenty minutes on the course while the ambulance took away Touzaint, but finished without further disruption.

Susanna Bordone, the Italian rider who heroically got herself back in the



saddle after a nasty rotational fall in July resulted in a broken collarbone and fractured pelvis, was sadly eliminated during the cross country when her horse Imperial Van De Holtackers refused a jump three times.

Andrew Hoy and his golden unicorn Vassily De Lassos had a particularly tough day on the cross country, accruing 40 penalties for two errors and 14.8 time penalties. This left the combination ranked 63rd with a score of 82.9. Andrew accepted things as they were: "It wasn't meant to be today. It just shows that horses aren't machines. My horse was superb everywhere except for those two fences, and that was costly."

The USA was the only country to ride five clear rounds in the cross country, leaving them in a particularly strong position for the show jumping on Day Three. But the final phase of the event changed the team standings multiple times, making for a wild finale. The course turned out to be trickier than it looked, and in the end only 12 riders rode a clear round.

Things got really exciting when the last horses had their turn in the ring. Tim Price and the extraordinary Falco produced a perfect round, as did his wife Jonelle abroad McClaren who "jumped his socks off." Julia Krajewski, who was ranked 5th went clear with Amande de B'Neville, while Oliver Townsend dropped out of contention when Ballaghmor Class clipped four rails and fell to 16th spot, moving his team into 4th place and the Kiwi team into 3rd. Boyd Martin and Tsetserleg were unlucky, dropping four rails to fall into 21st place, before teammate Tamie Smith and Mai Baum lost their individual bronze ranking, pushing Tim Price up the scoreboard.

Micheal Jung was the last rider to enter the arena, and the crowd fell

FACING PAGE: Kevin McNab and Scuderia 1918 Don Quidam produced a personal best in their dressage test (Image © Australian Equestrian Team/Libby Law).

ABOVE: Hazel Shannon and Thoroughbred WillingaPark Clifford raising Praton's red dust (Image © Australian Equestrian Team/Kirsty Pasto).



With an equipment failure mid-course, Kevin McNab had the presence of mind to tie his broken rein to the bit ring (Image by Chiara Castellini).



Boyd Exell successfully defended his 2018 Tryon championship title to win a 6th gold medal (Image by Michelle Terlato Photography).

silent waiting for a performance that would determine both the team and individual medal results. When Jung and Chipmunk picked up eight faults for hitting the double combination and the final fence, he unexpectedly dropped to 5th place, making Yasmin Ingham the new World Champion. The look on her face when she realised she had just won a gold medal was one of sheer joy.

As an interesting aside, four ex-acehorses from Australia and New Zealand – Bold Venture, Just Kidding, Artist and WillingaPark Clifford – competed in the event with excellent results. Pedigree data company Breed.Ride.Compete reported that the average for Thoroughbred blood in horses in this year's competition was 59%, a fair indication of the importance of that bloodline for eventers.

Driving

Held the week after the eventing, 16 countries, 37 athletes and 185 horses competed in the World Driving Championships. Holland, Hungary and Germany presented themselves as the most probable candidates for team medals, and in the end, the Dutch took gold, the Germans silver, and Belgium swooped up the ranks to snap up team bronze.

Boyd Exell, who has just turned 50, defended his 2018 Tryon championship title, to bring home an amazing 6th gold medal on a final score of 156.06.

Boyd led the competition from the start with strong dressage, marathon and cones results. He set off last at the cones with complete focus despite thick rain, and his horses delivered a copybook performance that drove his supporters wild! Hot on his heels was 61-year-old rival Ijsbrand Chardon of the Netherlands, who took the silver medal on 159.82 points, while German driver Michael Brauchle finished on a competitive 163.89 points.

Boyd was understandably elated: "I'm really pleased for my horses. I'm thrilled for them because they deserved it," adding that he might open a bottle of Champagne or two. ☺



Things didn't go to plan for Andrew Hoy and Vassily de Lassos (Image © Australian Equestrian Team/Kirsty Pasto).



Shane Rose and long-time partner Virgil (Image © Australian Equestrian Team/Libby Law).