



Sharon Hunt and novice championship runner-up Azeb, by the Irish grand prix showjumper Pairc Na Clocha

cross-country, but in the showjumping, particularly at the final fence, a set of downhill planks after an oxer with a clear sightline into the collecting ring that few left up.

Advanced sections

LOUISE SKELTON was particularly delighted to win an advanced section on Saturday with her favourite horse, Bit Of A Barney.

"I've got a very soft spot for him — he was the first foal we bred out of my Pony Club eventer, and he was born so small with wonky

He's horrible to deal with — he kicks and bites — but he knows his job

Dan Jocelyn on his advanced winner Special Advocate

front legs. Mum tried to give him away for two years!" said Louise.

She was the second fastest in the advanced classes across country — only Andrew Nicholson on Oplitas, fourth, was quicker.

"Although he's big and long he's quite nippy up and downhill because if you stop kicking him he stops going, which means that you can turn back on yourself much quicker than on a hard-pulling horse," she said.

Dan Jocelyn is enjoying a purple patch of form and he won the other section on the Criminal Law 16-year-old Special Advocate, owned and bred by Jenny Hibbert.

"He's horrible to deal with — he kicks and bites — but he knows his job," said Dan. "He's a horse you like to get on and compete, not cuddle up to at night."

Both winners head to Burghley along with their full-brothers, Partly Pickled and Special Attorney. H&H

Results

British open ch (sec E). — 1, Spring Along (D Berkeley) 32.7,0.0.8=33.5; 2, Sanskrit (J Meyer) 36.0,0=36; 3, Kings Gem (G Tattersall) 38.4,0.4=38.8. **Int ch (sec D).** — 1, Applejack II (R Edge) 26.9,4.3.2=34.1; 2, Power Of Dreams (P Sims) 32.2,0.2.4=34.6; 3, Thornfield Jones (C Powell) 34.0,2=36. **Nov ch (sec C).** — 1, Jeppers Creepers (O Townend) 30.8,0.0=30.8; 2, Azeb (S Hunt)

30.2,4.0=34.2; 3, Nothing Ventured (V Tufts) 36.1,0.0=36.1. **Adv (sec A).** — 1, Special Advocate (D Jocelyn) 36.4,0.8.4=44.8; 2, Seacookie (W Fox-Pitt) 27.5,0.19.2=46.7; 3, Major Milestone (M Todd) 33.6,0.14=47.6. **(sec B).** — 1, Bit Of A Barney (L Skelton) 36.4,0.2.8=39.2; 2, Vaguely North (A Clarke) 36.1,0.6.8=42.9; 3, Quimbo (A Nicholson) 31.3,0.11.6=42.9.

Mark Phillips Comment From Gatcombe to Kentucky



I was thrilled for Daisy Berkeley when she won her first British open title in convincing style last weekend. Years ago, I used to help Daisy a bit with her jumping. She has made great progress since then and increasingly looks a class act.

I felt before the Festival that she was extremely unlucky not to be on the British squad for the World Equestrian Games (WEG) — and feel it even more now. I'm not quite sure how much more you have to do having finished third at Badminton, then won at Barbury and now again at Gatcombe. But obviously I'm not privy to all the inside secrets of selection and, with the announcement of her pregnancy, riding at WEG would have been unlikely anyway, which perhaps explains why she is not on the list.

The other person I feel is unfortunate not to be travelling to WEG is Lucy Wieggersma. She too looked great in Luhmühlen in June.

Piggy French and Pippa Funnell must be relishing their luck. When Mike Etherington-Smith says the course in Lexington this autumn looks "flipping big", you can bet your bottom dollar that it won't be a Pony Club track and will be a far cry from what they jumped at Bramham. Only time will tell, though — it will no doubt turn out to be inspired selection.

Of the WEG squad horses, Mary King's Imperial Cavalier was the only one to run at Gatcombe. If you'll excuse the pun, he was again imperious in the dressage and looked fantastic across the country. His two fences down in the showjumping were a little unusual. The ring at Gatcombe is notoriously difficult to ride in, as none of it is flat and course-designer Jon Doney always builds senior jumper-type tracks. It is the complete opposite to the wide, open spaces of flat sand in Lexington.

While I was excited to have more than 85 horses in the intermediate championship and over 75 in the novice championship, 40 in the

British open was disappointing. I had not fully appreciated until last week how important CIC points are to riders with an eye on the prospect of being balloted at Badminton next year. Many were therefore keeping their powder dry for the CIC*** at Hartpury this weekend, where they have over 150 entries in the international classes. It does not seem quite right that CIC points at Hartpury should help you get into Badminton.

I now also understand better why Badminton director Hugh Thomas has made being in the top 25% at a CCI*** or the top 50% at a CCI**** a pre-requisite for entry. This means that most people who enter will get in, diminishing the importance of CIC points, which seems sensible.

Footing headaches

I guess anyone who has a large part to play in a major event suffers a little bit from that "morning-after feeling" once the thing is over. The Festival of British Eventing last weekend was the 26th year of horse trials at Gatcombe and our ninth Festival.

It seems every organiser complains about the weather; it's either too dry or too wet — just like in farming, it's never perfect!

The dry weather did give us a problem this year, with no water in the water jump, and when animals have poached the ground in the spring and then it dries out, it's not easy.

The footing was the major headache all week. I am so lucky to have a super team under the leadership of Tim Henson.

With the help of David Evans and his boys, the Willis brothers, Fraser Bush's troop and the British Eventing equivating equipment, we finally produced footing that, in the opinion of the riders I respect, was more than adequate. There are always some that complain — I suspect for many of those the footing is an easy excuse, for I certainly would have run my horses. Riders have said to me how well their horses come out of the event.

Everyone may have got a little wet at Gatcombe on Saturday, but sunshine on the Sunday produced a record last-day gate, which left a good taste after all the hard work.

The Gatcombe team are already working on bigger and better things for the Festival next year. Good though this year may have been, there are many areas we can improve. H&H

The showjumping ring at Gatcombe is notoriously difficult to ride in, as none of it is flat