

Jan Gyllensten and Lotta Östmann report

EUROPEAN SHOWJUMPING CHAMPIONSHIPS

It's hard to know where to start, with the great sport or the even bigger controversy that erupted at this year's European Showjumping Championships at Mannheim. For all the wonderful organization, for all the great competition, the lasting memory from the show will be of Hugo Simon, caught, giving his superhorse, ET FRH some kind of medicine with a syringe! Let's start with the positives...

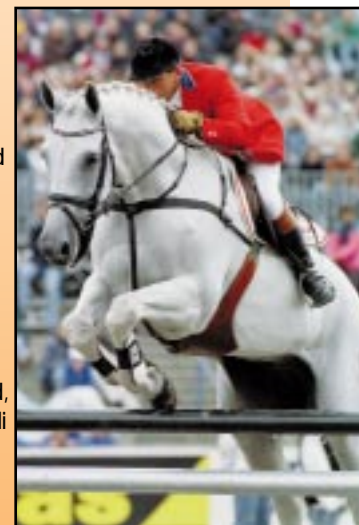
Ludger Beerbaum and his fellow German riders, gave European horselovers a feast of superlative showjumping. Ludger riding his super mare, Ratina Z, took the lead in the first Speed Leg, and stayed there until the end - something that hasn't happened since another German ace, Paul Schockemöhle, won in 1981 on Deister! After the Speed Leg, Ludger has Jan Tops and Hugo Simon just behind him. In the second day's Nations Cup second round, Tops knocked two fences and was no longer in contention for an individual medal. Hugo, however, put together a double clear and was still very much in the picture. Another rider to make a strong impression in the Nations Cup was Dutchman, Emile Hendrix and Ten Cate Finessa. With two faultless rounds he moved up into individual third going into the last day's jumping.

The Nations Cup itself was nothing but a 'show of force' by the Germans. Franke Sloothaak was unable to compete due to an injured shoulder after a fall, so the 'oldies' of the team were Ludger and Lars Nieberg. With two 'new, young and inexperienced riders' in the team, Markus Beerbaum and Markus Merschformann, some hoped that the teams competition would be an open affair. Forget it! Germany was outstanding! Especially the Beerbaum brothers who produced two clear rounds each. Mother and father Beerbaum had every right to look proud afterwards. The silver medal went to the Netherlands and Britain won the bronze.

The last day of the Europeans consists of a two round competition for the best 20 riders from the first two days. Riders go in reverse order and the first round did not change the top three placings, except that Emile knocked one fence to give Ludger and Hugo a larger safety margin.

In seventh place prior to the last round was former gold and bronze medal winner, Willi Melliger and the Swiss rider was really concentrating. He produced a perfect clear round over the mighty fences built by Olaf Petersen, who throughout the show built superb tracks. After Willi, the hopefuls came in one by one, knocked down rails and came out hanging their heads. Hendrix in third position even knocked two down, and finished ninth. Second last to go, Hugo Simon copied Willi's clear and put the pressure on Ludger.

There was space for one knock down and a quarter time fault for the gold. But on the other hand, the fences were BIG and the time allowed was short. Ludger showed what a great rider he is, carried along by the enormous support of the German crowd in the stands.



Clear and fast. What a champion! It was obvious from the way Ludger was acting, that this victory was very very important to him. Willi Melliger leapt from seventh to third, and earned his third championship medal in a row - this time riding the giant grey, Calvaro.

But after a short medal presentation, the word was out. 'Hugo Simon's horse has been given some kind of forbidden medicine between the two rounds!' Asked about this, Simon replied that he had not been in the stable, and knows nothing about all this... and leaves the press conference. Ludger's magnificent victory suddenly faded into the background. Meanwhile, the organizers promise to come back with all the facts, soon.

At the new press conference, FEI press officer, Max Ammann explained that between the two rounds, the FEI chief steward, Hansi Wallmeier found an employee of Hugo Simon, holding a syringe next to the head of ET. Asked what was going on, the syringe was dropped into the straw. The employee, and Hugo's groom, denied all knowledge of the syringe. The syringe was immediately found under the straw, with fresh blood on it. It was confiscated and ET put under strict observation.

The Ground Jury decided that Hugo was allowed to compete in the second round, with the horse under continued strict observation from officials. A blood test was taken and sent to Newmarket in the United Kingdom, together with the syringe. All legal and disciplinary action will be taken after the result from Newmarket is known.

What is clear, that some action will have to be taken. The least that will happen is that if no forbidden substances are found in the blood or the syringe, that Simon will be punished for giving his horse treatment during the competition without informing the FEI or having their authorisation. If anything forbidden is found, Hugo's silver medal will be withdrawn, and given to Willi Melliger and Lars Nieberg moves up to bronze. The long term implications for one of Europe's best loved showjumping personalities are complex and serious.