

VALKENSWAARD

THE HEART OF SHOW JUMPING



Roger Yves Bost, France

A NEW LEG, A NEW
SHOW AND ONLY
SEVERAL LAST TROTS
AWAY FROM THE GLOBAL
CHAMPIONS TOUR FINAL.
THE GCT'S EIGHTH LEG
COULD NOT HAVE TAKEN
PLACE IN A MORE
SUITABLE SPOT OTHER
THAN VALKENSWAARD,
KNOWN AS THE "HORSE
HEAVEN", THE HEART OF
WHERE SHOW JUMPING
BEATS.

REPORT BY GHITA ZIANI

When the top 30 world-ranked riders came together to compete and show for a remarkable weekend, the Tops home gave a warm and humble welcoming hospitality to all horses, riders, sponsors, owners and guests. The Commercial Village named the "Top Gun" allowed everyone to gather under one spot to cool off. Photographers, press, managers and performers gave the horse scene a worldwide taste of the event.

The eighth leg of the GCT welcomed new faces such as Princess Charlotte of Monaco whom has been competing in the GCT 2* classes from the beginning of the season. Martina Hingis, the international tennis champion now competing in the show jumping sport, also rode in the special invitational 2* class and showed some impressive results. HRH Prince Albert and Princess Caroline of Monaco honoured Stal Tops with their presence and gave the atmosphere a royal essence during the Grand Prix.

A spectacle to watch for every person on the Valkenswaard grounds with each rider competing against their very favourite best, all were aiming at the prize money of 95,000,00 Euros. Course designer Uliano Vezzani built an impressive technical course and claimed it to be one of his most difficult set-ups and wished the riders luck. Still, there seemed to be no obstacle high enough for any of those horses and riders.



In the Grand Prix first place, came in the USA's Olympic Champion Laura Kraut riding three exquisite clear rounds with the fastest time of 36.72 seconds and of course winning the class. Cedric the "happy horse" says Laura did not deceive any of the audience; the crowd was in a magnificent cheer after his fascinating parcours.

LUDGER BEERBAUM, GERMANY:

"Well of course, I think the course itself was pretty straight forward, a nice course for the first round with 50 starters. I believe we had 12 clears, almost the same number with four faults. I think it was very well set; a little bit technical but not crazy big. My round in general was not bad and I was pleased with the way my horse rode."

On preparation: "There is no special trick to what we do or to how we perform

perform in this sport, it's all about the daily work we build, all these horses you see here are worked twice a day, ridden once and lunged once, depending on the horse. My horses are jumped once or twice a week, depending weather they'll be going to a show or not. Before a show I'll jump them only once, two or three days before. They also go to about 15 to 20 shows a year which accumulates a lot of mileage for the horse and rider. At home the horse is ridden for 45 minutes to one hour, not less. I like to come to shows and see at the end that all my effort and time at home was well spent, that is where I get my ultimate motivation. Throughout my riding career I always like to keep my mind refreshed and vivid. I enjoy watching fast younger riders like Marcus Ehning and Marco Kutscher whom also give me great motivation. It gives me a kick!"





▲ Laura Kraut, USA

▼ Judy Ann Melchior, Belgium



REPORT BY LULU KYRIACOU

On August 14th, there was no stopping Laura Kraut at Valkenswaard's GCT Grand Prix. Having already won the warm up speed class on Unique, she proceeded to cap a memorable day by jumping three clears for the second time in two weeks to clinch her second GCT Grand Prix victory in the same period! The American, who prior to Chantilly had never won a Grand Prix on the series, now has a back to back double; something that has not happened in recent GCT history, if ever. The show was also especially notable as HRH Prince Albert of Monaco was among the audience.

The first round was another Uliano Vezzani masterpiece. With nearly every fence falling at some point the bogey fences were probably the combination (vertical, two strides, oxer, one stride, and vertical) and the early line which included the open water with five strides to a double. But the course still produced 12 clear rounds from 50 starters, including Laura, GCT rankings leader Marco Kutscher (Cash) and former GCT Champion Jessica Kurten (Castle Forbes Myrtille Paulois). With a share of the million Euro bonus at stake and only the Rio de Janeiro final left to score points towards winning it, there was a lot to play for as the second round started over a changed but slightly shorter course. Pressure was put on the leaders by the first of the four faulters from the first round, Judy Ann Melchior with Levisto Z. The grey made it all look easy although Kevin Staut matched the feat on another grey, Silvana, but it was looking for a while as if a double clear would never happen. The capacity crowd groaned as Patrick McEntee (Chivas Mury Marais), Penelope Leprevost (Topinambour), Jos Lansink (Valentina Van T'Heike), Beezie Madden (Coral Reef Via Volo), Alvaro de Miranda (AD Ashleigh Drossel Dan) and Jessica Kurten all lowered one rail each leaving all of them on a total of four over two rounds. Laura was the first to go double clear and then she was joined by Christian Alhmann and Taloubet Z, Denis Lynch with Latinus and almost inevitably, Marco Kutscher.

These four were presented with another course, this time a little more twisting and every centimetre of 1.60m in height. Laura went first and set out as if she meant business from the first and crossed the line in 36.72. Christian followed and was definitely going for it, when Taloubet hit one part of what remained of the second round combination. Denis Lynch absolutely hurled Latinus round every turn and the horse couldn't have tried harder to respond throwing some spectacular leaps that drew gasps from the watchers. 37.88 was not quick enough. That time did leave the door open for Marco to win but he was



▲ Christian Ahlmann, Germany

▼ Pius Schwizer, Switzerland



already down on the clock when Cash made exactly the same error as Taloubet which left his rider fourth. Newly promoted World Number One Kevin Staut ended up top of the eight combinations with four faults to finish fifth. Marco Kutscher remains the Tour overall leader but although Marcus Ehning dropped a couple of points further behind, Jos Lansink is closing the gap and the eventual recipient of the winner's share of 1,000,000 Euros is still undecided. As the winner will collect over a quarter of a million Euros, the battle in Rio is likely to be fierce.

Although fog had shrouded Valkenwaard in the morning, the reduced visibility did not prevent Laura Kraut from seeing her way to the fastest time in the opening speed class. One of the first into the ring, Laura set a standard of 55.56 over the 12 fence course that no one else could match. Pius Schwizer (Classica LS), Denis Lynch (All Inclusive) and Lauren Hough (Casadora) were the closest but the 6,400 Euro purse was never really in danger of being won by anyone other than the American lady rider who is on a bit of a GCT roll after winning the Grand Prix in Chantilly two prior to this show. The horse, who was originally ridden by Laura, is now her partner Nick Skelton's ride and he has won several good classes on him including one at Hamburg this year. But Nick is due to have a hip operation this week which has prevented him from competing here and so he was loaned out! "And I have to say I will be sorry to give him back and I am certainly going to make the most of it until I do" laughed Laura.

GRAND PRIX PRESENTED BY VDL GROEP CLASS 3

RANK	NAME	COUNTRY	HORSE	TIME	PRIZE MONEY
1	Laura Kraut	USA	Cedric	36.72	€ 95,000
2	Denis Lynch	Ireland	Latinus	37.88	€ 57,000
3	Christian Ahlmann	Germany		37.17	€ 38,000
4	Marco Kutscher	Germany		37.52	€ 28,000

▼ Grand Prix winners



LAURA KRAUT:

"Cedric has just been unbelievable lately but this was different from Chantilly. There I was last but one to go and I knew what I had to do but here with these three behind me, I just went as fast as possible from the start. I figured one of them was bound to beat me so I had nothing to lose by giving it a good shot. Cedric is getting short break now, then we go to Madrid and then the WEG. I just hope my run continues there as I have a feeling Team USA will be in big trouble if we don't get a medal there, on home soil!"

DENNIS LYNCH:

"It is just great to have Latinus back to his best. This is only his sixth show after a long layoff due to injury, so I could not be happier with him."

CHRISTIAN ALHMANN:

"I am very lucky that the Melchior's let me ride him, he is getting better and better but I think I took a bit too many risks in the jump off! But it is great to be third." 🏆

Photos by Cymon Taylor