

Swiss sew up first jumping round

Swiss and Dutch riders have quickly made their mark on the Alltech FEI European Championship for Jumping at Windsor, dominating the first, speed, round of the competition, held under floodlight, but scores are tight enough to ensure an enthralling team competition tomorrow (Friday).

Pius Schwizer, a member of Switzerland's Olympic bronze medal team, was first to go for his side and set an unbeatable target over designer Bob Ellis's track of clear in 68.31 seconds on Ulysse. His team mate, Steve Guerdat on Jalisca Solier, was next fastest in 68.42 seconds and set the Swiss up for a slender lead of 0.3sec over The Netherlands, the reigning European and World Champions.

France and Ireland come next in third and fourth, ahead of the flamboyant Italians, fifth, now benefiting from the training of Swiss maestro Marcus Fuchs, and Germany, sixth. Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum, the defending champion, has this time chosen to ride Checkmate, her 2005 European team gold medallist, instead of Shutterfly, and is lying in 32nd place individually.

Great Britain, boosted by a stylish clear from anchorman Ben Maher on Robin Hood W, who is lying ninth individually, are in seventh place, two fences off the leaders, but certainly in touch with the medals going into the team competition, in which everything can change in a split section.

Geoff Billington, the senior member on Rosinus and back in the team after an absence of several years, is next best in 23rd, with Peter Charles, himself a European Champion (for Ireland) in 1995 and 2001, in 41st on Markas Pom d'Ami and Tim Stockdale 42nd on the game grey mare Fresh Direct Corlato.

There were 23 clear rounds – from about a third of the 77-strong field – with the penultimate over proving particularly influential. And there was drama when Belgian competitor Peter Postelmans shot over his horse's head at the water, taking the bridle with him.

There are 17 nations fielding teams, plus another six nations fielding individuals – the Estonian rider Rein Pill is particularly well placed in seventh place individually on A Big Boy - so tomorrow's competition, which will decide the team medals, and who will be the European team champions, is set to be an epic.