

## Record crowds lift the roof at Olympia, The London international Horse Show

Ticket sales for Olympia, The London International Horse Show have broken all records with an incredible six 'house full' performances and 80,000 visitors over the seven days.

Event Director Simon Brooks-Ward said: "The number of tickets sold has been the highest in Olympia's 38 year history. Out of 12 performances, five were 95% full and six were classed as 'house full', meaning all tickets, including limited view seats had been sold.

He added: "I still can't quite believe it. We are delighted that Olympia has attracted such a huge audience, and that the crowds have created the most electric atmosphere at each and every performance. They have been fantastic and we couldn't have wished for a better Olympia."

While the Olympia Hilton Scottish-themed Christmas Gathering and displays including Lorenzo and The King's Troop were voted the best yet, competitive highlights of the week started with Dutch National Champions Adelinde Cornelissen and Parzival taking victory in the FEI World Cup Dressage on Wednesday evening.

British Riders then made a cracking start in the jumping, with Geoff Luckett on Brickfield Boy winning the Welcome Speed Stakes and Robert Whitaker with Rusedski II taking the KBIS Christmas Pudding Stakes. Ellen Whitaker also made it a third GB victory of the day winning the AmTrust Equine Mini Major with her Pony Club partner Holly Jones.

Friday's Accenture Puissance certainly didn't disappoint and the crowd brought the house down after Ellen and William Whitaker shared the honours after clearing the infamous big red wall at the height of 7ft 2in.

Reigning French Ladies Champion Penelope Leprovost charmed everyone when she triumphed in a ladies-only jump-off with Ellen Whitaker to take the prestigious Renault Christmas Masters on Saturday, and the French continued their winning ways with France's Phillippe Rozier winning Saturday evening's Tom Hudson Eraser Stakes.

H&M Sunday also saw a nail-biting contest when Edwina Alexandra made history as the first Australian winner of Olympia's Rolex FEI World Cup qualifier at Olympia, on the smallest horse in the competition, Isovlav Itot du Chateau.

And, on the last day, Ellen Whitaker's run of success continued on Ladina B as she shared joint first place with Phillippe Rozier on Ideal de Prissey in the Bic Six Bar. The final four fences stood at 6ft 10ins and seemed no hindrance for the talented pair as they left the crowd to roaring applause.

Then the show climaxed with a truly thrilling Olympia Grand Prix, as US Olympic gold medallist Laura Kraut, making her Olympia debut, overhauled Britain's Ben Maher by the tiniest of margins.

The crowd would have loved a British winner, but such is the Olympia audience's generosity, that they cheered Laura to the rooftops, while saluting the immaculate horsemanship of Ben Maher, who took the H & M Leading Rider of the Show award. It is surely only a matter of time before his name is etched on the major prizes.

But this family show's appeal is perhaps best summed up by 19-year-old William Whitaker, the youngest rider in the show, who said: "I don't know any other way to start Christmas, other than Olympia."

The dates for next year's show are 15<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> December 2009.