

Amazing Graciah goes to the top of her classes

23 September, 2018 | Show Reports



EMMA HOBBS' musical outings scored high notes from judges and wrapped up Graciah's Novice and Elementary freestyle qualifications in one 'amazing' weekend



The day before at The Croft, Emma and her Royal Doruto x Rohdiamant seven-year-old won the silver Novice freestyle on 78.05% and was second at the higher level on 71.15%

Judge Fiona Wilson who judged both their tests at Merrist awarded them 73.61% and 74.03% respectively — the two highest scores of the day. Fiona commented: "The clarity and rhythm of the paces stood out for me. They were well presented without being manufactured and she did some very nice balanced simple changes. I only gave her 6.5 for her Novice music as it was a bit monotonous and 'background'. Her performance in the second test was good as well but she had more interesting music and I commented that the work was all linked together in a creative way."

Emma is now based at Matt Hicks' yard since her old friend Anna Ross moved from Altogether Equestrian in Wiltshire down to

Devon. She said: “I have trained with Anna for many, many years and still train with her when she is in the Wiltshire area. Matt has given me the odd lesson in between and everyone at Hurstbourne Priors has made me very welcome. Gracie is pretty fit with all the hill work we’ve done since I went to Matt’s.

“Gracie’s been competing for less than a year, because she had a foal and was just backed when I got her. She has a fantastic temperament and is not at all spooky and I’m able to travel her to shows by myself. I was very pleased that she went into two venues new to her and just settled down and got on with it.”

First to go in the Novice freestyle, and securing second place with 71.36%, was **Myles Graham**, 11, and his eight-year-old Connemara pony mare Harnells Erasmus. Myles had professional help in the warm-up from his mum Caron Roberts, a BHSE(E&T) and UKCC3 trainer based at Royal Wootton Bassetts, Wiltshire. Once in the ring he became a young professional — after an initial incorrect turn, he kept a cool head and carried on. He said: I meant to turn left but turned right instead, so I just flipped my test round. ‘Nellie’ knew I was meant to turn left but she just went with the change of plan.”

“I was very pleased with how she went throughout. She didn’t spook at any banners and she was as good as gold. She’s a very cheeky, sometimes opinionated mare and we’ve had our moments in the past, but we’ve pushed through that and she’s become a darling.”

Although Myles enjoys jumping and cross-country, he is hoping his equestrian future will lie in dressage. He explained: “I like all the little tricks in dressage and I can’t wait to do half-pass and piaffe.”



Myles was second in the Novice freestyle at the Winter Championships this year riding his other pony Heavenly High Jinks.

At the recent Pony Viewing Day, Myles and Nellie were selected for the British Dressage Pony Progress squad

Ponies just want to have fun (and win hands down if they can)

Piling on the wow factor

Another equine star of the show of quite different dimensions was **Mandy Brown’s** Keystone Rumour who won the Advanced Medium freestyle with

70.16%. Judge Pat Watts' slightly under-played it when she commented, "You have a packed full choreography". Mandy said: "It takes your breath away, doesn't it? I've had a lot of help getting that wow factor and it has built-in longevity to be developed for PSG. We come in to canter and immediately go into canter half-passes with flying changes, and then do changes on the circles, then extended, flying change and repeat. There are so many flying changes happening so rapidly there are too many for the person at C to judge them. And Tia's very good at them!"

The generously-built 17hh, 11-year-old Rhondeo x Weltmeyer mare has recently come into her own — and with self-carriage gained elegance. The pair scored over 67% for a PSG test recently. Mandy continued: "I love riding to the trot music which is *It's Raining Men, Hallelujah!* It suits her so well and I've built it so that it mirrors the canter pattern and she had super marks for her extended trot. There's no downtime in the routine at all."

Mandy at 5ft 3in has been having training help and inspiration from someone of similar height Sarah Millis, who famously rides large horses successfully at international level. Mandy said: "Tia is big, but she doesn't ride big and my training has been aimed at making her rideable for a person my size. She has to be able to do a change or pirouette for herself from my aids. I have lessons with Sarah every two weeks and Tia goes to Sarah every couple of months for a few days for Sarah to ride. She puts her leg on her in the same place I do."

Another small lady rider who trains with Sarah Millis is **Olivia Moriano**. Olivia, 19, 5ft 1in rode 16.3hh Worldly Wise in the Young Rider classes at the Hickstead international this summer wearing the Italian flag. At Merrist Wood Olivia and 'Wills' scored 65.87% to head the small PSG freestyle class. She commented: "This is only the second time I've ridden my PSG freestyle, but you can practise a



Mandy and Tia, top and above: "Her canter gets the big marks, but she's just started to sit and get more cadence in the trot."

"The trot has taken longer to develop. I've been patient with her. I've had big horses before and I know that if you rush it you're not going to get a quality result."

"I've also changed to one of these Stride Free saddles which free up the shoulder: I can't believe the difference it's made"



floorplan as much as you want, it always depends on how your horse is going on the day if you're going to hit the markers with your music. Wills can go a bit flat in the PSG test and won't pay attention when I try to pick him up. He tells me, 'no, I know what I'm doing'.

“This time Wills stayed with me, stayed collected and kept his more expressive trot which is what we've been working on. He's found his legs and he seems to be growing bigger and bigger and that is the best feeling in the world”

“His pirouettes weren't as good as they are in training but I think that was me thinking so much about the music that I didn't ride them as well as I could have, but we got lots of 7s and 7.5s and it was solid, clean test.

“Wills has turned a corner massively since I've been training with Sarah once a month. She gives me so much to work on. We've been doing the PSG test for nearly two years now and he knows it off by heart, so I felt I needed to move on to Inter I. We've focused on that in training. His way of going and collection have improved and he's enjoyed being pushed that little bit more. He's 17 but very low mileage.”



Altogether Endeavour looked beautiful in the contact for rider **Patrick Troddyn**. The combination have judge-pleasing ways and they won the Medium Silver at the Merrist regionals in February. Since then they have produced a 68% Advanced 105 to qualify them for PSG. Competing in the advanced medium freestyle this visit to Merrist they came in second just behind Mandy and Keystone

Rumour with 70%. Patrick said: “That was our first attempt at music. I freestyled a bit on the floor plan that Roland Tong gave me, but we did what we needed to do and the horse stayed quite cool about the music — I thought it might blow his mind.

“On a good day his changes can be quite special, but they depend on how rideable he is. He can get tight in the back. He wouldn’t be everybody’s ride. You can’t push and shove him around. He likes the fact that I’m a bit of pony-patter at heart. Pat Watts loved the music, which is all Cold Play, and she gave us eight for that, and 8.5 for the choreography — and marked my trot work handsomely, too. I shall now do one more music, then we’ll be all-qualified and move up to PSG.”

Sarah Colborn and Furstfugger seven-year-old Furst Love I, third in the Advanced Medium, won the Medium freestyle overall on 68.66%. First Love is a very elegantly built mare and Sarah showed that off in her floorplan.

She commented: “Darcy’s’ very supple so I combined 10m circles with a change of bend and go into half-pass on the other rein. We also do simple changes into counter-canter which adds to the degree of difficulty. She has very good extensions, too. She finds most things easy. Whatever you ask of her, she says, ‘yes, I’ll give it a go’. We need a bit more power in everything — a bit more wowee — but she is still young so it will take time.”



Both Sarah Royce-Hoare and Sue Brougham were on plus 67% in the Medium freestyle with Sarah and Such A Jarma just ahead in second. Sarah has a seven-month-old baby daughter who is often parked in her pushchair just in front of ‘PJ’s’ box. She describes PJ as her ‘First Born’ as she bred him herself. He is by Showmaker out of her Casanova mare Jariska. She said: “He is so good with her. You don’t get many competition horses who will let a baby sit on them or pull their whiskers! When she wakes up he puts his nose in to make

sure she’s all right.”

Sarah’s music, appropriately enough, is from the Hans Zimmer soundtrack to *The Boss Baby* and was compiled by musician Nick Reeve. Commenting on her

freestyle, Sarah said: “Pat Watts liked his extensions and his paces and liked his trot music especially, but I struggle with the lateral movements because that’s all new to me. I’ve been working hard on that with my trainer Caroline Sparks and I was thrilled with our marks.

“It is only our second time out at Medium and we only decided to do the music a couple of weeks ago. I haven’t had an opportunity to run through it before the competition, so I was kind of winging it and simplified the floorplan. There’s so much more we can work on and improve. Extensions are PJ’s highlight and I wanted the music to accentuate that aspect of him but, to be honest, we both just thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. That’s why we did it!”

Sue Brougham was at the show supported and assisted by her grown-up daughter, Caroline. Caroline designed their floor plan and the Phil Collins compilation which has a strong beat to emphasise changes of paces and gears. Sue bought Narramore Musicman this Spring but they have quickly gelled as a partnership.



Come back James Bond!

Debby Lush, who won the gold section Medium on Ivor An Idea, went very retro with her music in using James Bond, often considered too cliché. But Bond always defies his critics and spooky adversaries, and always ends up looking rather ...self-satisfied.

Debby defended him: “All James Bond music is dynamic, has a good beat and evokes emotion in people which I think is important for freestyles.

“To be absolutely honest, the CD is about 10 or 12 years old — three horses ago for me — it just so happens that ‘Alfie’ has much the same tempo as La Diva, who I last competed in 2004!

“My last horse was sound sensitive so I put acoustic ears on Alfie just in case. Now I know he can cope with music I will get him his own CD.”

The List 1 judge added: “I’ve been so busy with judging commitments that I only cobbled the programme together on Tuesday and practised it just once.

Unsurprisingly I didn’t get it right on the day and lost my nerve and turned onto the final centreline too soon.”

Despite that, Debby had a rueful twinkle in her eye as she exited the arena to a quiet reprise of, ‘Nobody does it better...’