

SATURDAY 4 AUGUST

WHITTINGTON'S IN THE PURPLE

Some riders are made to be winners at the Magic Millions Festival of British Eventing and Francis Whittington's supremacy in the cross-country phase, which at Gatcombe Park is always a true test of brave, balanced riding, saw him bag the Dodson & Horrell British Novice Championship for the second time in three years.

Francis' winning partner was the eight-year-old DHI Purple Rain, owned by Beryl Chaplin, Belinda Drummond, Amy Drummond and Ro Audley.

Unlike his victory two years ago on Evento, which saw him rise through the ranks after the showjumping, this time Francis led from the start with the son of Arthos R. They secured the best dressage score (27.1), kept a clean set of heels over the coloured poles and clocked up the fifth fastest time across country for six time penalties.

"I think a lot of Purple Rain and this Championship has been the aim with him for this season," said Francis of the gelding who originally came from Ian Woodhead. "He's sensitive and that means we have to be quite careful in the way we manage him. He's not had the best showjumping record in the past — he's taken a long time to strengthen up — but we've been doing a lot of gridwork, which has improved his technique and made him more aware of his body."

Captain Mark Phillips' novice course looped back and forth below the Avening Banks and riders needed a clear plan of how to negotiate the questions that came thick and fast. These included two pond crossings, a switch-back over a large hedge, a jump back into the water and out over a double of narrow brushes.

"I love the challenge of riding at The Festival; the courses are fun, but there is a lot to think about for a novice horse," said Francis. "I would be very surprised if anyone made the time this weekend. There is only so much you can push before you have to take."

Cornwall-based Katie Hancock, who was runner-up last year in the TopSpec Challenge for The Corinthian Cup with Coddstown Pet, finished second again, this time in the Dodson & Horrell British Novice Championship.

Katie and Coddstown Pet are keen followers of the Four Burrow — a hunt with which the Hancock family is closely associated. Katie's father, Paul, was senior master of the pack for 32 years until Katie's sister, Nikki, took over the mantle three years ago.

The pair held the lead for much of the morning; their round for just 0.4 of a penalty being by far the fastest of the class.

David Doel and Joy Dawes' Galileo III jumped a quick double clear to wind up in third.

Sam Horrell, CEO of Dodson & Horrell, commented: "Yet again the Dodson & Horrell British Novice Championship provided a great showcase of the best up-and-coming event horses in the country. It is always exciting to see the next generation of horses in action and Francis Whittington and DHI Purple Rain were worthy winners. I look forward to watching their progress."

Event Director, Peter Phillips, added: "The Dodson & Horrell British Novice Championship always provides a thrilling start to the Magic Millions Festival of British Eventing. We have been blessed with fantastic weather and conditions and the competition today has certainly matched it."

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