

Event Reports



MITSUBISHI MOTORS BADMINTON HORSE TRIALS

Eagle Lion – King of Badminton!

May 6-9, 1995, Avon, England

by Lucretia Grindle

Straight from winning the individual gold medal at the Pan American Games, Bruce Davidson turned around and fulfilled the ambition of a lifetime when he became the first American to win the Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials. It was a particularly sweet, coming after five previous attempts, and on Eagle Lion, a horse he believes has the absolute potential to go to the top of the

four star level.

The two other American contenders, Karen O'Connor riding Biko, and Barry Thomason on Chase The Moon, also put in superb performances finishing third and twenty-second respectively. All three American horses jumped clear on cross-country day, with Biko and Eagle Lion making the time while Chase The Moon brought home only two time penalties. It was, in many ways, a remarkable Badminton. The uncharacteristically bright weather, with temperatures reaching into the upper seventies, seemed to prove that the sun truly did shine on the American effort.

The world's biggest Three-Day Event began with 79 horses entered from around the world. This year's waiting list totalled 104. The challenging field was deemed to be one of the strongest ever and included last year's winner Mark Todd on Just An Ace

and Bertie Blunt, 1992 winner, Mary Thomson on King William and King Kong, Burghley winners William Fox-Pitt and Chaka, Olympic champions Matt Ryan and Kibah Tic Toc, and Karen Dixon, Tina Gifford and Charlotte Bathe who, with Mary Thomson, took the team gold at the World Championships last year. This year the world's best were competing not only for the beautiful Mitsubishi Motor's trophy, but for more than £120,00, with the winning purse increased to £22,500 or roughly \$36,000.

FIRST VETERINARY INSPECTION

At 4:30 pm, Wednesday afternoon, the world's finest event horses were presented to the ground jury. Of the 76 horses presented, two were held and withdrawn and 74 went on to the dressage phase.

DRESSAGE

The first American to ride was Karen O'Connor on Prince Panache early Thursday morning. The test was not up to their usual standard and Karen withdrew the horse before the start of cross-country. It was twenty four hours later that the next American ride took place. Barry Thomason (26) from Rome, Georgia, has a proven record at the three star level with Chase The Moon, an Irish horse he bought several years ago. The pressure took its toll and Barry rode an accurate, but not very inspired test, which left him in 66th place with a score of 69.0. Karen O'Connor followed on her World Champion ride Biko. They turned in a fluid test to score 51.0 leaving them tied for 11th. The final American ride was Bruce Davidson on Eagle Lion who produced a powerful test to score 46.6 putting them in third place, only 6.2 marks behind the leader, last year's Burghley winner William Fox-Pitt and the fifteen year-old Chaka.



Eagle Lion's "powerful" test put him in 3rd place after dressage. Bob Langrish Photo

BADMINTON HORSE TRIALS May 5-7, 1995, Avon, England CCI****

Place	HORSE	Rider	1st Day		2nd Day		3rd Day		Final Total
			Dressage Score	A & C	Steplechase Jump	Time	Cross-Country Jump	Time	
1	EAGLE LION	Bruce Davidson (USA)	46.6	-	-	-	-	-	46.6
2	KIBAH TIC TOC	Matt Ryan (AUS)	42.5	-	-	-	-	5	48.3
3	BIKO	Karen Lende (USA)	51.0	-	-	-	-	-	51.0
4	JUST AN ACE	Mark Todd (NZL)	49.0	-	-	-	4.8	-	53.8
5	GENERAL JOCK	Kristina Gifford (GBR)	50.2	-	-	-	-	5	55.2
6	TRUE BLUE GIRWOOD	Phillip Dutton (AUS)	56.2	-	-	-	-	-	56.45
7	MIDNIGHT BLUE	Kristina Gifford (GBR)	51.0	-	-	-	2.0	5	58.0
8	SUMMERSONG BF	M. C. Duroy (FRA)	52.6	-	-	-	6.8	-	59.9
9	ELEKTRA SPIRITUS	Anna Hermann (SWE)	63.6	-	-	-	-	-	63.6
10	CALIBER	Ian Stark (GBR)	50.2	-	-	-	-	15	65.2
22	CHASE THE MOON	Barry Thomason (USA)	69.0	-	-	-	2.4	15	87.9

SPEED AND ENDURANCE

Five horses had been withdrawn before cross-country leaving 69 to start Phase A of the speed and endurance test. All three Americans rode late in the day which played into their favor. The weather was almost eighty degrees and Barry, Karen and Bruce would benefit from the cooler, late-afternoon temperatures.

Initial indications were that Hugh Thomas's course was not riding as smoothly as it had walked and no less than six of the

first twelve competitors were either eliminated or retired on course. It was not until Ian Stark came out on Caliber that the first clear round was ridden within the time.

It became increasingly clear throughout the day that, with one exception, no particular fence was proving to be unrideable. By halfway through the day, only one person, Aylse Clancey on Augermist, had attempted to jump the arrowhead off of the bank at the second Luckington Lane Crossing and she had been rewarded with a run out for her effort. By this time, a majority of the best event riders in the world had had their first trip around the course including Mark Todd, Mary Thomson and Andrew Nicholson, and none of them had even attempted the arrowhead. All were swinging wide to the left and taking the considerable time involved to jump

the palisade. The arrowhead, apparently, was simply deemed an automatic twenty penalties and not worth the risk. However, Marie Christine DuRoy of France set out on her wonderful little stallion, Summersong BF, and managed to break the spell. She came straight down off the bank and over the arrowhead, proving that it was possible. No one rushed to follow her example until the first American ride of the day, Barry Thomason and Chase The Moon, set out on their first four star ride.

From the start it was apparent that Barry was having the ride of his life. Chase The Moon barely looked at the maximum log pile at fence three, flew through the double corners at the Mitsubishi M and went straight across the huge angled hedges at Luckington Lane. At the second

Luckington Lane Crossing, Chase The Moon never hesitated. Proving that not only are they bold, but accurate, as they bounced the bank, put in one stride and came straight out over the arrowhead. After the initial murmur in the grandstands, they were rewarded with enthusiastic applause and cheering as they came through the Vicarage Pond and went away over the Vicarage Vee, making the corner look easy. No one else would attempt the arrowhead for the remainder of the day and Barry's clear round with only two time penalties would be good enough to move him up an astounding 47 places to 18th by the end of cross-country day!

The next American to ride was Karen O'Connor on Biko. Mr. & Mrs. Richard Thompson's 17.3 hand gelding proved

Save! Save! Save! Save!

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Facilities: 28 stall barn. 400+ acres. 250' x 140' indoor arena. 150' x 200' outdoor arena. Show jumps. No cross-country course, but farm is located in the heart of Orange County hunt country.

CORRECTION to the 1995 Coaches & Instructors Directory

The address and telephone number for ROBYN REILLY was incorrectly printed. The correct address and telephone number should be: Robyn Reilly, Kinney Hill, 96 Woodman Road, South Hampton, NH, 03827; (603) 394-7495.

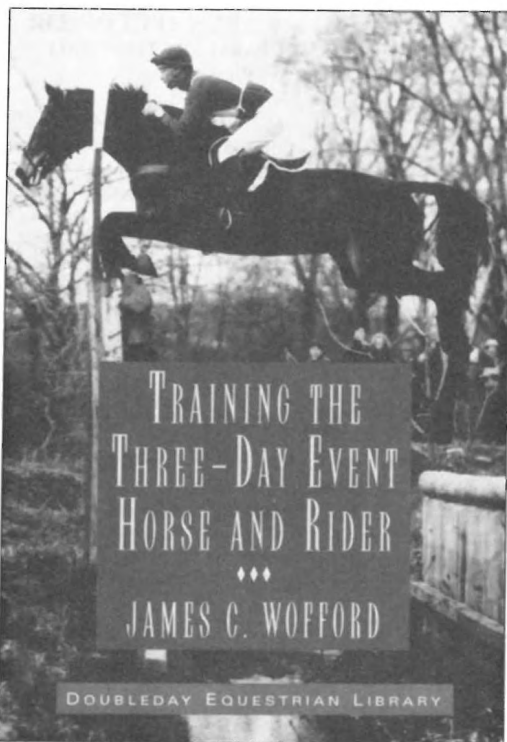


Event Reports

beyond a shadow of a doubt that he had fulfilled all of Karen's hopes. A consummate stylist as well as a very bold rider, Karen rode with her usual grace and precision to make the Badminton course look not only easy, but positively user-friendly. Her experience was especially evident in the combinations where, even with a very big, long striding horse, she was able to negotiate the kind of forward, fluid lines that save time and make the horse's job as easy as possible. Again, her wealth of experience showed when she had to endure a prolonged hold on course after negotiating The Lake. David Green of Australia had misjudged a line in The Huntsman's Hangover at fence twenty-eight A and B and had to be air lifted to hospital with a knock on the head. Both horse and rider were unhurt, and David was released from hospital the next morning. However, Karen and Biko had to wait for almost twenty minutes before they were allowed to continue with the last third of the course. In a less experienced or less composed competitor this stopping and starting might have caused a problem, but Karen never missed a beat and she and Biko warmed up, resumed their rhythm, and completed a lovely clear round without time penalties to move up into seventh place.

The best ride was saved until the last, and it was apparent from the moment that Bruce Davidson came out of the box that 1995 was a year in which he intended to win. All of his skill and concentration was focused on bringing home the Mitsubishi trophy and it was evident from the way he rode. Eagle Lion, a superb jumper, pulled out all the stops, even helping Bruce out of a potentially sticky situation at The Lake as they came out over the punt.

Bruce makes eventing history as, with *Eagle Lion*, he becomes the first American to win the sport's most prestigious competition – The Badminton Horse Trials. *Bob Langrish Photo*



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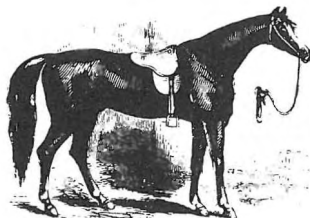
By the end of cross-country day, many extraordinary things had taken place, not least of which was Mark Todd on Bertie Blunt loosing his stirrup leather at fence fifteen and managing to complete a clear round in the time. At the end of the day, 50 horses had completed the speed and endurance phase, William Fox-Pitt was leading, followed by Matt Ryan second and Bruce Davidson in third.

The vet inspection on Sunday morning proved to have some unexpected and rather dramatic results. The first was that Chaka, the overnight leader, came up unsound and was failed. The same thing happened to Mark Todd and Bertie Blunt. While these results obviously affected the placings dramatically, it was terribly sad for William Fox-Pitt who had come so close to winning both Burghley and Badminton in a twelve-month span, and for Mark Todd who had put in such an extraordinary and brave performance on Bertie Blunt the day before. Suddenly the Americans were left with Bruce in second place without a rail between he and Matt Ryan. Karen O'Connor was in fifth place.

As show jumping began, it became rapidly apparent that the large and rather upright course, which demanded a good degree of control, was going to cause havoc with the placings right down to the end. The ground was hard, making the corners slippery under

the turf. It was difficult to make time and stay on one's feet. Barry Thomason, who had moved up to 16th after the vet inspection, pulled three rails and dropped down to finish at 22nd. Karen O'Connor jumped a clear round with Biko, putting the pressure on Tina Gifford with General Jock, a horse that likes to touch wood if he can. He did and when Ian Stark and Caliber also pulled a rail Karen found herself sitting in third place.

Eagle Lion came into the arena looking relaxed, fit and happy and proceeded to show the world what a lovely, careful jumper he is. They jumped clear and within the time. The 18-year old, Kibah Tic Toc also looked none the worse for wear as he came into the arena to jump for the Mitsubishi Motors Trophy. The tension was palpable and when he pulled just one rail to drop him back into second place, he helped make eventing history and Bruce Davidson, deservedly, became the first American ever, to win Badminton.



(More Event Reports on next page →)



GLOBAL RANKINGS

Rankings after Checkmate, Canada
May 14, 1995

- 1 **BRUCE DAVIDSON (USA)**273
1st Pan American Games, 1st Badminton, 2nd Checkmate***, 3rd Checkmate***
- 2 **ANDREW NICHOLSON (NZL)**131
2nd Saumur, 7th Saumur, 13th Badminton,
- 3 **KRISTINA GIFFORD (GBR)**120
5th Badminton, 7th Badminton
- 4 **KAREN O'CONNOR (USA)**108
3rd Badminton, 3rd Checkmate**
- 5 **IAN STARK (GBR)**89
6th Saumur, 10th Badminton
- 6= **FEDERICO CASTAING (ARG)**76
2nd Pan American Games
- 6= **MATT RYAN (AUS)**76
2nd Badminton
- 8 **ANDRE LUIS GIOVANINI (BRA)** ...72
3rd Pan American Games
- 9= **LUCIANO MIRANDA DRUBI (BRA)** .68
4th Pan American Games
- 9= **MARK TODD (NZL)**68
4th Badminton

MARK PHILLIPS TEAM TROPHY

- 1. **U.S.A.**298
- 2. Great Britain253
- 3. New Zealand239
- 4. Australia198
- 5. France157
- 6. India115

GLOBAL NEWCOMERS AWARD

- 1 Myr. Victor Rodriguez Suazo(CHI)60
- 2 **Darren M. Chiacchia (USA)**54
- 3= Emma Anderson (AUS-YR)48
- 3= Rebekah Smith (USA)48
- 5= Wing Cmdr. I. S. Lamba (IND)41
- 5= Ian Roberts (CAN)41
- 7= **Anna McWane (USA)**38
- 7= Dfr. Pushpender Singh (IND)38
- 9 Lizzie Willson (AUS)36

ZONE 5 - NORTH AMERICA

- 1 **Bruce Davidson**192
- 2 Missy Ransenhousen64
- 3= David O'Connor61
- 3= Virginia Jenkins61
- 5 Wash Bishop57
- 6 **Darren M. Chiacchia (NC)**54
- 7= Lauren Hart51
- 7= Kelli McMullen Temple51
- 9= Kerry Millikin48
- 9= Rebekah Smith (NC)48

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