



'He worries if he doesn't get something right': Dark Legend 54 and Zoe Sleigh claim the advanced medium from first draw with a bold and consistent test

OPEN Sleigh rides into top spot

The open classes prove as hot as ever with Charlotte Dujardin showcasing an exciting new star, tricky horses staying onside for impressive victories and scores rocketing throughout the levels

A quirky horse at his first championships held his own from first draw of the Equine Construction advanced medium open championship to snatch the national title. Dark Legend 54 and Zoe Sleigh shone through the morning haze to post 71.34% and, try as they might, nobody else in the strong class that featured the likes of Alice Oppenheimer, Becky Moody and Emile Faurie could catch them.

The class proved one of the closest of the competition, with just 1.3% covering the top eight combinations. But it was the eight-year-old Dark Legend that produced an ultra-consistent test, with a super walk and bold extensions, to garner high marks.

Zoe, who trains with Michael Eilberg, wasn't overly surprised to have held on to her lead. She bought the Duino gelding as a two-year-old.

"He has been tricky and hot," she said. "It's all about trust for him, and we have a good relationship now but it has taken time. He finds everything easy and he's a clever horse to train,

but he worries if he doesn't get something right."

A 'spectacular' prospect

ONE of the standout performances of the championship came from Charlotte Dujardin on the Fidermark x Donnerhall six-year-old Mount St John Freestyle in the TopSpec medium open. The mare dazzled from start to finish with a balanced and fluid test for 77.86%, knocking previous leaders Phoebe Peters and SL Lucci into second on the multi-medalled combination's last performance together.

Charlotte's quiet riding perfectly complemented the mare's uphill, expressive paces, and the Olympic, world and European champion rider showed her delight with a big thumbs up to emotional owner Emma Blundell as she left the arena.

"I clicked with the mare straight away and she's now based with me at Carl's," said Charlotte, who is yet to be beaten aboard this horse. "She's very honest and really tries. She's also one of those horses who goes in the arena and is no



Mount St John Freestyle oozes quality to head the medium under Charlotte Dujardin

different to how she is outside, and that's hard to find.

"While I was riding, I was thinking 'this feels really good', and when I came out Emma was in tears," Charlotte added.

"I think she's going to be a spectacular grand prix horse – she can extend and collect well and is already showing signs of piaffe and passage."

From hospital to podium
JESS DUNN lay claim to a hot Dodson & Horrell novice open

class, riding her own and the Keenan family's Fyona.

It was clear while watching the five-year-old that this was a high-quality test, but as the class went on it became obvious that its consistency had given her the edge. The Dutch-bred Sorento mare ate up the ground and showed total focus.

The canter-trot-canter transitions on the track was just one of the movements that separated the men from the boys, and Jess, who runs KD Equestrian