

Young rider and gold medalist **Emily Llewellyn** fills us in on the highs and lows from the Young Rider European Championships in Belgium



I put a lot of pressure on myself for this year's Young Rider European Championships to make sure that I came home with an individual medal as well as contributing towards a team medal. It would be my seventh consecutive Championship team event and the preceding two years I had come home with an individual and team medal.

Preparations during the final weeks running up to the Championships went well! P seemed fit and healthy. Waregem (Belgium) wasn't far so we drove out together as a squad. It was lovely and hot when we arrived which was a welcoming surprise! The horses all arrived well and settled in quickly. Everything was scheduled a day late due to the Monday being a bank holiday, which was very confusing indeed! The team consisted of Harry Dennis, Emily Parker, myself and Laura Collett. I was positioned 3rd in the team, so my message was late on the first day of dressage. P had been extremely fresh since he arrived at the Championship, causing some concern for Gill Watson who watched me spinning round, bucking, taking off and farsing (not me, P) in a dressage saddle with very long stirrups and no breastplate! Fortunately all of that very exciting behaviour did stop the day before my dressage and P did a good test. It wasn't the best test he had ever done

— he got a bit tense in his center work, which meant we lost a mark on every canter movement. I scored 41.8 which I was happy with, not ecstatic, because I knew it could have been better, but happy because it also could have been a lot worse! When the dressage was completed, I was being 6th after the dressage, which I was a little disappointed with as it meant I had a lot of work to do to climb to an individual medal. Whether that happened was completely out of my control.

In true athlete style, a trip to McDonald's was in order for the night before cross country to provide us with all the vital energy for the next day. With a big party of us we managed to spend a lot and, for the first time in McDonald's, receive waitress

service... legendary! A good night's sleep with no rider illnesses thankfully, followed.

The cross-country course had lots of questions but in a very cleverly built way which meant that the problems could potentially be spread all over the course. The course was also very hilly and very twisty, which I wasn't expecting, so I was pleased that P was so fit! I had a fantastic ride, cross country, 1 rode faster than I have probably ever ridden in my life. Knowing the time was tight, it was quite a thrill riding that quickly. I felt ready to pop round the grand national afterwards — I am not joking — I really was travelling at some pace!

“I demanded that everyone called P ‘Red Rum’ for the rest of the week to respect his speed ability!”

I was spot-on on all my minute markers and finished one second inside the time (to my relief). When we got back to the yard I demanded that every one called P ‘Red Rum’ for the rest of the week to respect his speed ability! I couldn't have faulted P, he was fabulous as usual! Britain had retained their overnight lead for both the team and individual after Laura had a fantastic ride with Royal. I remained in 6th, so I knew that

I had to pull off a spotless show-jumping round to have any hope of my winning an individual medal. Even then, it was a very slim chance.

The show jumping was a nice course but with a lot of related distances, which was fine for me as I am very confident in P's jumping. P jumped a brilliant clear which put pressure on the people above me and apparently worked brilliantly, as I moved up to bronze very quickly. Laura then had a fence in hand above Aster (individual silver) and I, both Laura and Henry are very cool in the jumping and all of the Brit brigade was sure she wouldn't have any problems, which of course she didn't, she had one fence down just to tease us I think, but still held her individual gold. I was thrilled for Laura, it would have obviously been a dream come true to retain my title but I was thrilled to come home with individual Bronze and team Gold and Laura had so much bad luck the previous season it was nice to see her back getting the results that she can. The fight is on for next year though!

P is now aiming for Tokyo and, if all goes well, hopefully Badminton next year. Junior will hopefully be my young rider horse for next year. I have a lot of work to do this Winter on improving his flat work but his show jumping and cross country are faultless, as he showed at Harbury jumping double clear in the CCI2*. I really am very excited about his long-term future.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a massive thank you to everyone involved with the Young Rider Europeans this year. So much hard work, time and preparation goes into getting the Squad out there. It was fantastic and the following week seemed very lonely without you all! ➔