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KELT CAPITAL HORSE OF THE YEAR ANNA TRENT LADY RIDER OF THE YEAR

By Diana Dobson

Anna Trent had twice the incentive to win the Lady Rider of the year crown at the Kelt Capital Horse of the Year Show in Hastings today.

The 22-year-old from Auckland last won the prestigious event in 2006 but was injured last year so unable to defend her title.

Today (Thursday) she headed off 45 other combinations including Great Britain's top female rider Ellen Whitaker to claim what she figured was hers to take.

Just four combinations went through to the jump-off over the Leopoldo Palacios (Venezuela) designed course. Many in the opening round struggled with the course, falling, wiping out jumps and taking many rails.

But Trent made it look easy with Cortaflex Muskateer NZPH, flying around the jump-off course with nearly three seconds to spare.

Local hope Julie Hart on Clypso was first out but tried to put an extra step into the double, taking a rail there and again a few fences later, finishing with eight faults.

Next out was Megan Stacey (Te Puke) and Shimmerman who also took a couple rails but clocked a faster time.

Claire Wilson (Waipukurau), one of New Zealand's leading riders, and Sacred Hill Answer Back were next out, going for the steady clear round, coming home in 46.27.

That left it up to Trent and Red, a Selle Francais horse who is specifically bred for showjumping by New Zealand Performance Horses.

"Usually I like to go first and sock it to them," said Trent.

She did just that, albeit at the end of the field.

"I took advantage of Red's long stride," says Trent. "He stays very well balanced with it."

She felt the class was a particularly important one to win because of the history attached and the long list of very celebrated riders on the Merrylegs Cup.

In May Trent heads to Japan to ride Lexicon NZPH, a horse she sold last year, for an invitational show.

She's rapt to have the chance to see Lexicon again, as he left while she was competing in Sweden over the winter.

Trent has her sights firmly set on riding for New Zealand at the World Equestrian Championships in Kentucky in 2008 followed by the London 2010 Olympics, and this year will have the chance to see firsthand what is required by athletes. She and boyfriend Hayden Morresey have front row tickets to all the events in Hong Kong, where the equestrian events are being held as part of the Beijing Olympics.

Earlier in the day, Taranaki won the hotly-contested Saba Sam Shield, ahead of Waikato.

In dressage, Susan Tomlin (Palmerston North) has firmly established herself at the top of the novice division. Her novice Horse of the Year title riding Domino MH comes hot on the heels of taking the national title at last week's Bates New Zealand's Championships.

Tomlin, a small animal vet, narrowly pipped Sarah Matheson-Reay (Waikato) riding Geldof MH. Both riders produced consistently accurate tests with just a few marks separating them.

As at the New Zealand Championships, the pair finished first and second, followed by Tracy Smith (Hamilton) and her stunning young horse APH Sailor.

The action hots up tomorrow (Friday) with the grand prix riders performing their first tests. Last year's winner Bill Noble (Waikato) and Vincent St James are hot favourites to retain their title but are likely to come under strong pressure from in-form former Olympian Kallista Field and Soda.

The show continues through to Sunday when the Bell Tea Olympic Cup and \$120,000 will be awarded to the showjumper of the year.

Results –

Dunstan Lady Rider of the Year: Anna Trent (Auckland) Cortaflex Muskateer NZPH 1, Claire Wilson (Waipukurau) Sacred Hill Answer Back 2, Megan Stacey (Te Puke) Shimmerman 3, Julie Hart (Hastings) Clypso 4, Sally Clark (Dannevirke) Zibbibo 5, Rachel McGregor (Auckland) Premium Kabo Benny Boy 6.

Nga Tawa School for Girls Saba Sam Shield: Taranaki (Charlotte Myers, Coruba; Ellie Muller, Our Donovan; Bailey Marshall, Spyro; Mathew Dickey, Wilful) 1, Waikato (Luke Dee, Condolezza; Michael Dee, Cheblinkers; Jake Lambert, Once in a Blue Moon; Kendyll McAuley, Murph 51) 2, Auckland (Candice Fox, Dixie Chick; Alexandra Randall, Millbrook; James Cole, Parry Queen; Jennifer Leslie, Ever So Clever) 3.