

AUCKLAND TEENAGER TAKES YOUNG RIDER OF THE YEAR AWARD

By Diana Dobson

Sarah Worker brought tears to the eyes of her horse's breeder as she very convincingly won the Prydes Young Rider of the Year crown at the Kelt Capital Horse of the Year Show in Hastings today (fri).

The 16-year-old from Clevedon and her 11-year-old horse Britten edged out many a fancied combination to take the prize.

Ringside to enjoy the win was Britten's breeder Merran Hain (Gisborne) who sold the horse to buy her racehorse Willie Smith – who is currently out with an injury but trained by Mark Todd.

And while Worker surprised many of her rivals, she had every confidence in her lovely bay gelding – despite both of them falling in the Lady Rider of the Year class on Thursday.

None of the 30 starters in the young rider class managed to go clear in the first round, with all in the first jump-off having four faults a-piece.

Five went through to a second round, which was whittled down to just Worker and Vicki Wilson (Whangarei) on Witheze.

Wilson went first and dropped the second of the double before sliding into a corner and taking the last rail, stopping the clock at 33.88 with the eight faults. Worker and Britten came very calmly into the arena and with style went clear in 36.74. Worker has had Britten, who is by Piper Hill, since he was eight, but has only been riding him for the past three seasons.

Last year the two headed to the United Kingdom, with one other horse, to compete in a number of shows, including young rider events at Hickstead.

"It was an amazing place to be," says Worker, who got to ride alongside many a name she had grown up with.

The idea was to leave the horses in England to sell when Worker came home, but the teenage quickly changed her mind.

"He's one in a million," she says. "I wanted him back, so home he came."

He's a horse with a big heart who always tries to help his owner through the jumps. Worker said part of the credit for her win today must go to Steven Whitaker (Great Britain), father of leading British rider Ellen Worker who will ride Briten in the Bell Tea Olympic Cup on Sunday.

"He was a huge help – that and the trust I have in Britten."

Worker attends AUT where she is studying business.

Horses have long been a part of her life.

"I love them – and I love winning. To jump a perfect jump-off round is something else – amazing."

New Zealand has taken the early lead in the showjumping phase of the Tri Nations Challenge after a tightly-contested jump-off against Australia. Katie McVean (Mystery Creek) and the newly-crowned Lady Rider of the Year Anna Trent (Auckland) – a late call-up to replace Team Thathorse Simon Wilson who fell this morning – went through to the jump-off against Australians Adam Mellers and Merrick Ubank after the two teams tied on four rails after two rounds from each of the four riders.

South Africa languished in third spot on 33 faults.

Mellers went first on Brother Brown and went clear in 42.36, followed by Trent on the large Midnight Hour, who was also clear in 41.97. Ubank and Kiwi Dance took a few long options and took a rail, finishing in 44.89 with four faults. McVean, long known as the queen of speed jump-offs, rattled the first fence, spun her way around a very tight corner, and flew home clear to stop the clock at 43.42. Triple clears in the earlier rounds gave both New Zealand and Australia a bonus point each, to add to their three and two points for first and second place.

Things were reversed in the dressage phase of the Tri Nations, with South Africa winning, Australia second and New Zealand third.

All riders are on borrowed mounts and over the next two days will all swap teams of horses so each country rides each team.

Returning Olympian Mark Todd continues to draw the crowds – he rode last night in a fun-filled Battle of the Sports, which he won on Tregonning.

Tregonning is owned by his good mate Merran Hain (Gisborne) who owned Bago, who Todd rode at the Seoul Olympics in 1988.

Last night's competition involved a light-hearted dressage test followed by a series of small jumps.

Representing dressage were Jody Hartstone (Raglan) and Vanessa Way (New Plymouth), showjumpers had Katie McVean (Mystery Creek) and Hayden Morresey (Auckland), while eventing had Todd and John Twoomey (Waikato).

Todd, last to go, rode whistles, cat calls and cheers, and on his way out jumped a picnic table – much to the delight of the thousand-strong crowd.

Described as a 'jockey from another planet' and a 'true legend', Todd showed he is every bit the star his adoring fans believe him to be.

He will ride in the eventing invitational on Saturday afternoon.

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

Results –

Young Rider of the Year: Sarah Worker (Auckland) Britten 1, Vicki Wilson (Whangarei) Witheze 2, Emma Williams (Masterton) Cricklewood Ace 3, Melanie Purcell (Whakatane) Billistic 4, Jamie Beatson (Cambridge) Jedi

Warrior 5, Olivia Baudinet (Auckland) Canouk and Jamie Beatson (Cambridge) Ombudsman =6.

Tri Nations Challenge, showjumping: New Zealand 4 points (Katie McVean, Anna Trent, Oliver Edgecombe, Robert Steele) 1, Australia 3 points (Adam Mellers, Chadd Donavan, Tim Clark, Merrick Ubank) 2, South Africa 1 point (Jonathan Clark, Lorette Knowles-Taylor, Dominey Alexander, Barry Taylor) 3. Dressage: South Africa 1, Australia 2, New Zealand 3.

Trojan Equine horse 1.25m: Melanie Purcell (Whakatane) April Reign, Vicki Wilson (Whangarei) Showtym Girl =1, Sandra Stanford (Auckland) Aero Dynamic, Mark Todd (Rangiora) Gandalf =2, Geordie Bull (Kinloch) Hunter Road, Geordie Bull (Kinloch) Rumble II =3.

Stirrups Equestrian Supplies pony championship stakes 1.3m: Luke Dee (Cambridge) Maximus 1, Jake Lambert (Matamata) He's A Boomer 2, Greta Porter (Hawke's Bay) Chobidong 3, Jake Lambert (Matamata) Once in a Blue Moon 4.