



## My Boy Bobby Jumps Flawlessly To Win At The Fork

by Coree Reuter

*Buck Davidson's perfect show jumping ride seals the CIC\*\*\* win.*

Buck Davidson said he didn't feel any pressure as he walked into the ring on My Boy Bobby to contest Marc Donovan's show jumping course, although the testing track had only allowed six of the previous 47 riders a coveted double clean in the CIC\*\*\* at The Fork Horse Trials, April 2-5 in Norwood, N.C.

"I'm lucky enough to ride a lot of horses and be in this position a lot," said Davidson. "I was more nervous to ride my horses that weren't qualified than to ride the horses that were!"

Davidson and Bobby proved they belonged at the top by putting in a textbook round, sealing the win over Leslie Law on Fleeceworks Mystere du Val and Jennie Brannigan on Cooper.



The standings flip-flopped dramatically between Friday and Sunday afternoon, and most of the spectators would have predicted Clark Montgomery and Up Spirit as the winners after their dominating dressage performance. Their score of 38.9 left them 7.5 penalties ahead of the pack, but an unlucky tumble at the trakehner fence early on in the course eliminated them from the competition. Davidson and Bobby only added 3.2 time faults to their dressage score, moving them into first with a 52.2.

"The plan was to come and go really fast on him," said Davidson, who believes that the four-star distance at Rolex Kentucky will be a stretch for Carl Segal's Irish Sport Horse gelding. "It was a really good fitness work for him. He was very good and very honest, and he jumped beautifully."

Law and Mystere du Val also had a clean trip across the country, leaving them in second place going into the show jumping on Sunday morning. A rail at the second fence proved to be inconsequential, as the riders sitting in third through ninth place all had rails that dropped them down the standings.



"It was a very good show jumping track, and it sorted us out a bit, didn't it?" said Law with a laugh. "The rails don't take a lot of touching. You only have to breathe on them, and I think [Mystere du Val] just got an unlucky rail. He jumped very well. The [cross-country] course rode really well and was beautifully presented. It asked a lot of accuracy questions and

[required] some boldness."

Capt. Mark Phillips, who designed the cross-country course, was pleased with the way his track rode. While 60 pairs started the three-star event, problems on cross-country narrowed the field to 48. Two riders fell—Montgomery and India McEvoy on Jumbo's Jake—but both horses and riders walked away from their incidents. Another five riders retired for various reasons, two riders had technical eliminations and one rider was eliminated outright.

"We lucked out with the weather and the footing," Phillips said. "People who rode forward made it look very easy, and some of the others got into some trouble."

Mystere du Val had no trouble with the questions and is heading to the Jersey Fresh CCI\*\*\* (N.J.) at the beginning of May. Law believes Beatrice Rey-Herme's Selle Français-Arabian gelding needs another year at the three-star level before tackling Kentucky.

"I was absolutey delighted with him," Law said. "He held his lines [during cross-country] and took me along nicely. We jumped into the last water [a bounce in, followed three strides later by a turtle jump and a corner on the way out] a little slow and lost our momentum a bit, but we quickly jumped the option at the corner. Compared to 12 months ago there was quite a lot of improvement."

Davidson, on the other hand, is heading to Rolex Kentucky with My Boy Bobby and Ballynoe Castle RM and hopes to continue the winning streak he's had this spring, with advanced victories at Rocking Horse (Fla.) and Southern Pines (N.C.), in addition to The Fork.

"When you have horses like 'Reggie' and Bobby you do alright, and it gives you confidence on all the other ones," said Davidson. "It's been a good year so far, but it's a marathon, and we've only gone 100 yards. I'm doing all right after 100 yards, but it doesn't really matter until you get to Kentucky, or Jersey Fresh, or Bromont and your horses go the way you want them to. You re-evaluate after those events and see where you are and where you want to go."

### **Brannigan And Cooper Sneak Into Third**

"I never thought I'd move up seven spots," said Brannigan with a laugh after she was awarded third place in her first CIC\*\*\* at The Fork. "Show jumping has always been one of his strong points."

Indeed, Cooper and Brannigan were one of only seven in the CIC\*\*\* (only two accomplished the feat in the advanced) to leave all the rails in the cups and make the time over Donovan's challenging show jumping track, catapulting them into the ribbons from their 10th-placed standing after cross-country.

"I definitely was anxious and felt more pressure this weekend because I need this to go to Bramham [England]," said Brannigan. "I needed to focus and get this weekend done so we can start planning, which I'm obviously anxious about."

### **The Fork Tidbits**

- Bruce Davidson Sr. took a tumble off of his own Cruise Lion at the second-to-last fence on cross-country but later returned to pilot Jam to a clear round. He did not ride Jam on Sunday due to a broken nose and facial bones incurred by his fall but plans to ride both horses at Rolex Kentucky.

- Kelly Sult and Hollywood were 17th in the advanced division after the dressage, but their double-clean cross-country moved them into third place. She was the only advanced rider to make the cross-country time and finished the weekend in fourth after pulling two rails in the show jumping.

- Sara Dierks and Somerset II were tied for 44th in the CIC\*\*\* after dressage, but their double-clean cross-country round—the only

Brannigan received the U.S. Equestrian Team Foundation Jacqueline B. Mars International Competition and Training Grant earlier this year after her fairytale 2008 season, in which she won numerous intermediate horse trials, the CCI\*\* at the Florida Three-Day Event, and double gold in the CCI\*\* at the North American Junior and Young Rider Championships. She made the move up to advanced at Pine Top (Ga.) at the end of February.

"I think this weekend brought out my greenness in the cross-country and dressage," said Brannigan. "[Cooper] actually put in a great test considering he was off his head with the wind and everything.

"I think it was a learning experience the whole weekend," continued Brannigan. "I was really happy with his cross-country. I was worried about the rails to the skinny triple brush because I've never done that before, but he was on target. I rode the last water not very well, and he was really on track there. He was so honest to get to the C and get it done. He really showed me there that he's a champ. I've always questioned whether he's going to be brave enough, and I think that he's proved that he is, and he's proved that he has a lot of heart."

Brannigan and Cooper are heading to the new Jersey Fresh CIC\*\*\*, May 7-10, next, and then on to Bramham in early June.

"He's fantastic," Brannigan said of the 8-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding. "We're both green, so I'll continue to go slow and try to take care of my horse. The most important thing right now is keeping him sound. Obviously he's shown he's going to be a huge player in my career."

### **Brandenburg's Joshua Back In Top Form**

Coming off an intermediate win at Southern Pines two weeks earlier, Stephen Bradley and Southern Edition Farm's Brandenburg's Joshua put in another solid performance in the advanced division at The Fork in preparation for their third Rolex Kentucky Three-Day start.

"He felt great this weekend," Bradley said of the 14-year-old Thoroughbred gelding. "I was pretty pleased with him in all three phases. His dressage test didn't score as well as I hoped, but when I looked at the test it had very good comments, and I understood what [Judge Brian Ross] saw."

Bradley and Josh were sitting in seventh after dressage with a score of 34.2. Becky Holder and Rejuvenate held the top spot with a 28.8, and Davidson and Ballynoe Castle RM were in second with a 30.

However, Holder had a run-out at the big corner coming out of the third water complex and picked up a costly 20 penalties, dropping her out of the running. Davidson's clean ride moved him up to the top spot, and Phillip Dutton's fast, clear round on Connaught bumped him from 16th to fifth. Bradley and Josh also ran fast and clean, moving them into second place on Saturday afternoon.

"I think [Capt.] Mark [Phillips] did a fantastic job," Bradley said of the cross-country. "I think it was a perfect prep for Kentucky, both in size and questions asked. He made some slightly nicer distances [than in the past], and as long as you were riding forward they rode perfectly. There was nothing tricky about it."

Phillips' advanced and three-star tracks were very similar. "You had two choices in the courses: if you were prepping for Kentucky you could take one line, if you're trying to get your CIC qualification you could take another line, which took a bit longer," said Phillips.

The sunken road, for example, had options. "In the advanced you had one stride after the step up, and in the three-star you had a bounce," said Phillips. "But you didn't have to jump the bounce, you could jump the black flag

ride inside the time in the CIC\*\*\*—moved them dramatically up the rankings into 11th. A single rail and time fault put them into the ribbons, taking home eighth.

•Seven of the 48 riders in the CIC\*\*\* had double-clear show jumping rounds. They were: My Boy Bobby/Bruce Davidson, Jr., Cooper/Jennie Brannigan, Exponential/Jessica Phoenix, Pawlow/Will Faudree, Port Authority/Stephanie Rhodes-Bosch, Myrddin's Sebastian/Waylon Roberts and Gordonstown/Madeline Blackman. Two riders, Boyd Martin on Remington XXV and Missy Ranshousen on Critical Decision, jumped clean but had time faults.

•Two of the 20 advanced riders had double-clean show jumping rounds. They were: Connaught and Phillip Dutton and Havarah's Charly and Molly Rosin.

option if you were trying to get your qualification. There were two courses in one depending on what you were trying to do."

As in the CIC\*\*\*, show jumping proved to be decisive, and a rail at fence 7, a narrow vertical requiring a steady ride after a liverpool oxer, and a rail on the second fence of the following triple combination, dropped Davidson and Ballynoe Castle RM into third.

"I wanted to go and have a nice gallop around and keep him sound and happy," said Davidson of Reggie, a 9-year-old Irish Sport Horse gelding. "I think the atmosphere in Kentucky will keep us more awake."

Dutton and Connaught put in their usual double-clear show jumping round, moving them up into second after Kelly Sult on Hollywood and Laine Ashker on Anthony Patch both added 8 faults to their scores.

"The show jumping was quite big," said Bradley, who uncharacteristically dropped a rail. "This is the first rail he's had in a couple years. He's normally a very good show jumper and he just touched a rail."

After being shortlisted for the 2008 Olympic Games last summer, Bradley had an up and down fall campaign in 2008. But he and Josh are back on track and aiming for the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games in Kentucky in 2010.

Last fall, Josh was spun at the first horse inspection at Burghley (England), then headed to the FEI Eventing World Cup Final (France), where they finished 18th with a strong cross-country run.

"Burghley was a hard lesson on my part," said Bradley. "We had him in glue-on shoes, and I let myself get talked into leaving him in glue-ons. What I didn't realize and learned the hard way is that they trap moisture in the feet, and he started abscessing. That's why he didn't get to run in the final outing before Beijing, and then he abscessed the morning of the jog at Burghley. It was that simple. We went to reshoe him the following week after Burghley, and he abscessed in the other front foot."

Fully recovered from his hoof issues, Josh and Bradley spent the winter in Aiken, S.C., instead of Florida this year.

"It was very nice in Aiken," he said. "A bit of a different experience. I didn't compete until I was on the way home. Southern Pines and [The Fork] were my only preps for Kentucky."

While in Aiken, Bradley utilized the expertise of Mara Dean for his flatwork and Dutton for his jumping. "I learned a lot," he finished. "Rolex is next, but we have a few more gallops to get through first!"

*Coree Reuter*