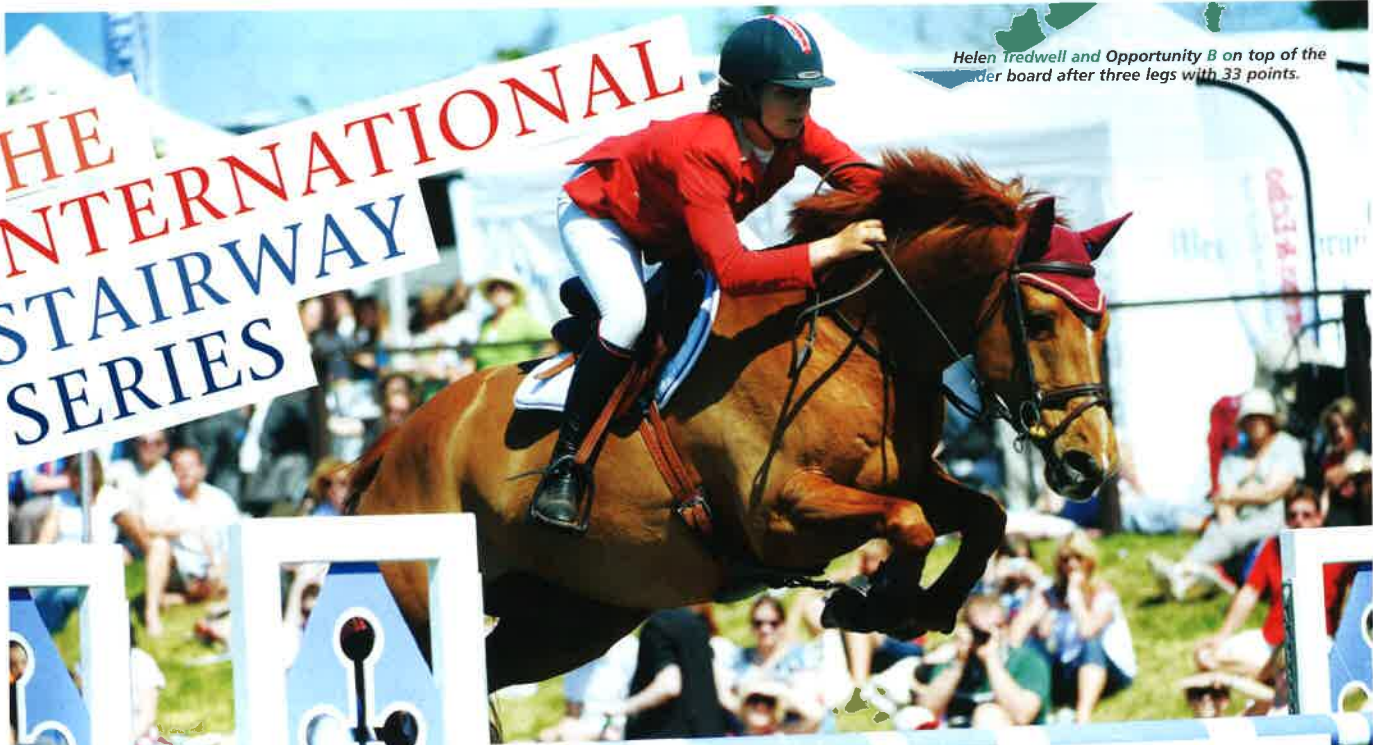


THE INTERNATIONAL STAIRWAY SERIES



Helen Tredwell and Opportunity B on top of the leader board after three legs with 33 points.

SINCE LIFTING THE CURTAIN ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAIRWAY SERIES AT DEVON COUNTY LAST SEASON THE KUDOS OF THIS COMPETITION HAS GONE FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH.

Tailored to identify international riders and combinations of the future and help in the delivery of medals for the British team, the significance of this series has been heightened by the presence of World-Class Performance Manager Rob Hoekstra, the British team selectors and technicality of the European led courses.

"It's pivotal for everyone to realise that the International Stairway series is now the biggest national competition we have," said Rob Hoekstra.

"This is a fantastic series and we're trying to develop it even further as part of the selection process for senior and young rider teams," he said.

"We envisage it becoming a viewing trial and an opportunity for the promotional and super leagues. From the promotional leagues we're giving horses the chance to make the transition to the super leagues. Our aim is to broaden the amount of horses we've got.

"There's no doubt that the county circuit plays a vital role and we're encouraging our course builders to design courses similar to those in Europe. Our aim is to gradually make the Stairway bigger to help our riders make the step up to the super league.

"In doing this and by having wild cards to the British Masters and the Horse of the Year Show attached to the series it will not only assist us in our quest to identify talent but will unify the sport as a whole."

Run on a points system with rounds at Devon County, Suffolk, South of England, Oxfordshire Area, Royal Highland, Royal Norfolk, Great Yorkshire, New Forest & Hants, Pembrokeshire and Royal Berkshire, the

series concludes with the top eight on the league table collecting valuable bonus Rider Ranking points.



Geoff Luckett & Brickfield Boy

Reflecting the ethos, Kelvin Bywater opened with a course described by British Showjumping's Senior Consultant Course Designer Jon Doney as "the biggest to be built at Devon County since the show moved to the Westpoint showground 20 years ago."



Abi Squires and Enrique equal sixth on the leader board after three legs

He added: "It was a record show jumping entry and together with the bumper crowd this has to be good news for the development of our sport."

Helen Tredwell sailed to the top of the leader board with her ever consistent mare Opportunity B jumping one of just two

first round clears from a 40-strong field.

With her eye on retaining the title, Vicky Tulloch and Soliegette secured the only other clean sheet.

"I really want experience over the bigger tracks and was pleased it was this tough," said Vicky.

"I found it fascinating watching the various riders tackling the technical problems," said Kelvin Bywater. "My course was a test of accuracy and asked particular questions on riding curved lines."

Rob Hoekstra added: "The competition really shaped up and looking at the first five or six horses in this opening leg there is definitely some potential to work with. There were some horses stepping up to this level and others with more experience. I thought Kelvin's track and the time allowed was spot on. I was extremely impressed and happy with the end result.

"This series is an opportunity for riders to test both themselves and their horses at the level required for selection. We don't expect to see many, if any, double clear rounds unless some of our established team horses are competing. After listening to the commentary and understanding the seriousness of the test the class was enthusiastically received by the crowd."

Consistency of the tracks whilst taking into consideration the ground conditions at each show is crucial to the credibility of the individual legs and communication between the course designers is vital.

"The Stairway series is a selection class and this will be reflected by the dimensions, technicality and construction of fences which are becoming far more open overseas," explained Jon Doney.

With the European model at the forefront in a move to offer our home-based riders the chance to compete over continental led tracks, international course designers, Rob Jansen from the Netherlands and Santiago Varela from Spain are working with Bob Ellis at the South of England and the Great Yorkshire Shows.

"This initiative will give an insight to our national designers, judges and officials and some of our riders who don't go abroad," said Jon Doney. "We very much hope to expand this scheme next year and hope to get some of our course-builders to go overseas as a part of the programme to work along with some of their top designers.

"Basically it's an exchange of ideas and Rob Jansen is very interested in getting ideas from our top designers."

Bob Ellis added: "It's a good thing and we can all learn a bit from this and it will be great for some of our course builders to work with foreign designers."

Junior and Young rider team chef d'equipe, Corinne Bracken travelled to the second leg at Suffolk.

"Once again we saw horses and riders up their game to compete over a strong European style course," she said. "The importance of this class in helping to produce horses to International level is essential. Older horses coming back to this level were mixed with Equine Pathway horses just starting at this level.

"There was a good presence from our young riders as this show was one of the five Stairways they had been invited to compete in as part of their viewing for selection."

Phillip Miller picked up maximum points with a flawless performance on Di and Pennie Cornish's nine-year-old stallion Univeau.

"This track seemed even bigger than Devon," said Phillip. "This series will certainly prepare our horses and riders for abroad."

Helen Tredwell and Opportunity B cemented their lead at the top of the table in second place ahead of Timothy Davies (Valentijn O), Tina Fletcher (Hello Sailor) and Anna Edwards (Unique V).

"It was a big airy track and tight for time," said Helen, who entered the third leg with a nine-point advantage ahead of Phillip and Univeau on 12 points and Anna Edwards (Unique X) on 11.

"Unique jumped the best ever at Suffolk," said Anna, who made her British debut on the winning nation's cup team in Linz.

"The Stairway is a great opportunity and it's giving everyone the chance to jump the continental type tracks," she said. "It's fantastic that we're being judged on results and that the door has opened for fresh blood to come through. Rob advised me to seek help from Laura Kraut and I was thrilled to have Nick Skelton helping me at Suffolk. You couldn't buy this opportunity."

Corinne Bracken added: "This is a series that I believe has grown in strength and must not be lost from our circuit. It is very important that riders and their horses have the exposure at the county shows and with that excellent courses and good jumping."

Helen Tredwell and Opportunity B extended their lead even further with the only double clear at the South of England where Geoff Luckett joined the party in second place with the Old Lodge's Brickfield Boy. Abbie Squires (Enrique), Joe Whitaker (Kool Kaiser) and Nicole Pavitt (Maestro de Rend Peine) made their mark with first round clears to pick up valuable points.



Phillip Miller and Univeau fifth on the leader board after three legs



Vicky Tulloch and Soliegette seventh on the leader board after three legs



Anna Edwards and Unique in equal sixth on the leader board after three legs



Tim Price, Tauwfiq Ahmed (Libian), Rob Hoekstra, Jon Doney and Kelvin Bywater

For the latest information on the Stairway leader board log on to www.britishshowjumping.co.uk