



Eleanor Hirst and Noble Gladiator secure two RIHS tickets, standing second in the middleweights and reserve hunter champion before topping the ladies' line-up



"We've qualified Raffi and our other horse for the same class at Hickstead so I will have to go shopping and get my gear!"

Nicola and the five-year-old part-bred Connemara gelding gave a streamlined display to win their class and the RIHS section championship ahead of the second-placed small riding horse Zafira, a Hungarian thoroughbred produced and ridden by Magnus Nicholson for owner Heather Williams.

Taking the mini supreme honours was another home-produced partnership, Millie Croft and Welsh section A gelding Blackhill Osprey (Ozzie), owned and led by her mother Lisa.

They had originally finished second and reserve champion in the mountain and moorland (M&M) lead-rein class but jumped up the running order in the supreme after giving a mannerly performance in the buzzy atmosphere, which involved Pony Club showjumping, private driving vehicles and heavy horses.

"My supreme champion is a true child's pony who had his ears pricked throughout," said judge Sharon Thomas. "I liked the fact that the handler stood away from the pony at a consistent distance during their show, which was very calm and flowing."

Millie, who lives just 20 minutes from the showground, was due to celebrate her eighth birthday the following Monday and described her win as "the best birthday present ever".

The reserve mini supreme went to Tilly Richards, nine, and her first ridden Chaseford Charismatic (Jessie) who had booked their place at Hickstead earlier in the day before standing RIHS mini show pony champion.

Bred in the purple by Martin Davies, Jessie is by Borderland Aristocrat out of the iconic leading

Two Hickstead passes for glorious Gladiator

A versatile middleweight completes his Hickstead qualifying tally, while a Connemara books her HOYS place

Nottinghamshire County,
Newark Showground, Notts

By GILL KAPADIA

EAST ANGLIA-based rider Eleanor Hirst took two Royal International (RIHS) qualifying tickets on the bounce with her middleweight hunter Noble Gladiator (OB). The duo finished second and reserve champion behind middleweight winner and section champion Bloomfield Valhalla (Polly Coles) in the weight classes, before a quick saddle change and back into the ring to win the ladies' class and another Hickstead slot.

"We did our last side-saddle class in 2019," said a delighted

Eleanor. "I've been so busy that I only had time for a quick practice before our class. We've also got our RIHS workers ticket. I don't think there are many other horses as versatile as this one."

Eleanor has owned her 11-year-old gelding for five years and describes him as a family pet. She travelled to Newark from Royal Windsor, where the partnership finished second and reserve in the working hunter championship, before heading home to Great Yarmouth, a journey of nearly 500 miles.

"It's been a successful couple of days which makes the journey home seem shorter," she said.

"I BORROWED MY DAUGHTER'S JACKET"

AMATEUR rider Nicola Worthington is having what she describes as a midlife crisis, coming out of riding retirement to compete her small riding horse Dolphins Lawyer (Raffi) while daughter Isabella is away at university.

"I've had to borrow Isabella's jacket and boots as we only have one set between us," said Bradford-based Nicola, who works full-time as a secretary.



Above: Skaergaardens Delicious Love clinches the HOYS supreme in-hand championship. Right: the overall mini supreme accolade goes to Millie Croft and Welsh section A Blackhill Osprey



rein pony Chaseford Charisma, who was Horse of the Year Show (HOYS) mini champion in 2005.

"Tilly is only in her second first ridden season and Jessie gives her so much confidence," said her mother Emma, who leases the home-produced pony from Emma Edwards. "There was so much going on here and she never put a foot wrong. We've taken her to a children's meet and our next outing will be to the beach."

"SHE LOVES HER JOB"

ONE of the highlights of the day was the judging of The Price Family HOYS supreme in-hand championship, held in the main arena in front of a packed and enthusiastic crowd.

The eventual supreme champion, who will compete in the final at HOYS in October, was Vanessa Clark's Connemara mare Skaergaardens Delicious Love with her six-week-old filly foal at foot. She was bred in Denmark by Birgitte Gotske and is by the Connemara dressage stallion Wirtsmuhle Delaney's out of Skaergaardens Secret Love.

She had a successful career under saddle, winning at last year's RIHS ridden by Jo Jack, who was on foal-handling duty today. She was supreme M&M ridden champion at HOYS in 2017 with Kelly Jones.

Vanessa has owned the 10-year-old for two years and met up with handler Scott Dixon here

at her local county show.

"Delicious is incredibly special to use," said Vanessa. "She loves her job; the bigger the crowd, the better she goes. We had two foals from her last year by embryo transfer, but she carried this one herself and is a brilliant mum."

"My supreme champion was true to type, balanced and showed off her beautiful paces in the calmest way, considering all that was going on and given that she had a foal at foot," said supreme judge Patricia Appleby. "She was also a perfect weight considering she has recently given birth."

Reserve supreme was Kerry Wainwright's consistent home-bred Welsh section B stallion Skellorn Bronze Soldier, a former

Royal Welsh champion and HOYS in-hand finalist, finishing third and fourth on previous visits. His progeny are making their mark under saddle; his son Skellorn Royal Anniversary won at Hickstead last season for owner and rider Tori Oakes, as well as starring in the Netflix drama *Free Rein*.

Simon Reynolds took the cob championship with lightweight winner, Rowena Stevenson's Copenhagen (Teddy).

"He is such a lovely character and he would live in our bedroom if he could," said Simon, who is in his fourth season with Teddy, and has previously finished second at Hickstead and fourth at HOYS with him. **H&H**

OUT OF RETIREMENT FOR A SPECIAL HORSE

CHARLES LE MOIGNAN was enjoying a well-earned retirement until he was introduced to Peter and Kathy Bowdler's maxi cob Blarney Quercus. The five-year-old pure-bred Irish Draught gelding, by Baltydaniel Romeo out of Moyglass Colleen, was a winner in-hand at Dublin in 2017 and was purchased by the Bowdlers when he was just six months old.

He was bred by Sir Charles and Lady Caroline Colthurst at Blarney Castle in Cork, home to the world-famous Blarney Stone, which is said to give those who kiss it "the gift of the gab". He is named after the mighty oak, hundreds of which grace the Irish estate.

"Quercus was originally sent to me for four weeks, then the plan was that Kathy would take over," said Charles. "However, she is now so busy with work that she asked me if I would consider riding him. He is such a lovely horse, with a fantastic temperament, so I said yes. I will be 70 next month, so I don't want anything which is too sharp, and Quercus fits the bill perfectly."

The pair were contesting only their second show, and posted their second win on the bounce, having taken their RIHS ticket a couple of weeks previously.



Pictures by Mountain Media

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