



"Isn't he pretty?": Sandman and Gareth Hughes cruise around to take the advanced medium. Inset: kisses from Rebecca Patmore, owner and Gareth's fiancée

GARETH Hughes and Korenbloem Sandman beat the invincible Damian Hallam and Spirit Freedom for the first time on British soil at the winter championships.

Gareth took the Speedi-Beet Advanced Medium with Rebecca Patmore's Sandman, despite not being at his best.

"Last year, riding this horse was like pushing a wheelbarrow uphill, but as it gets harder he gets sharper," said Gareth. "I could have ridden better today. I will tomorrow."

And he did, going on to win the Biotol Equine Gold Medium Open. By getting Sandman on the ball, Gareth produced a mistake-free test.

"We changed his warm-up on Sunday," said Gareth. "On Saturday I'd just been cruising around, thinking isn't he pretty?"

Rebecca added: "Sandman's always breathtaking and although he had some little mistakes in the advanced medium he did enough to make up for it."

Damian Hallam and Spirit Freedom were off form in the advanced medium, making small but costly mistakes. A break in the medium canter threw their concentration before a flying change.

"He was fighting off a virus in the lead up to the winters, which we thought he'd shaken off, but with hindsight we shouldn't have brought him,"

Sandman rocks

Gareth Hughes beats the unbeaten at the H&H winter championships, while Andrew Gould takes two titles after a two-year drought, Sarah Jenkins and Jo Prestwich report

said Damian. "If he underperforms, there's a reason. He's been so amazingly consistent it was obvious he wasn't himself, he didn't sparkle."

Spirit Freedom will now have a break and more blood tests before Damian concentrates on further training.

Gareth Hughes's stable jockey Sarah Turner took the Biotol Equine Gold Medium Restricted with Fiddlesticks. Sarah rides and competes some of Gareth's horses as well as training "Custard" with him.

"We've been working on more advanced

movements at home, but in the past few weeks we concentrated on these test movements, so I didn't fluff anything today," said Sarah, who is hoping to do her first prix st georges at the end of this year with the smart dun.

"He's a real character," said Sarah. "If he were human he'd be a bit of a yuppy."

Number one

"IT'S about time," was Andrew Gould's heartfelt comment after winning the NAF Prix St Georges Freestyle with Numero Uno — his first national



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Andrew Gould

Andrew Gould and Numero Uno show off the changes that earned the psg and intermediaire I freestyles

the status quo

title in two years.

"I won a novice freestyle championship what feels like ages ago and it's been a long old wait to get another title," he said.

Andrew went on to take a second championship on the same weekend, winning the Grange Hotels Intermediaire I Freestyle.

"He felt more relaxed and I was able to ask for more in the intermediaire," said Andrew, who was praised by the judges for the flying changes.

The pair worked with Stephen Clarke and Linda Zang two days before the championships at the national judges' seminar.

"Stephen's comments gave me confidence," said Andrew. "He said good things about the half-passes, which were really good tonight, and helped with the pirouettes, which needed work."

The Dutch-bred son of Wolfgang is being aimed at small tour this year, with a trip planned to Belgium in May.

"Because he's a big horse [18hh] he takes some balancing," added Andrew. "Last year he was still weak, he's much more established now."

Yes she can-can

JANE Brewin's Nadonna took the Equissage Elementary Music for Roland Tong, riding to music from *Moulin Rouge*.

"Nadonna was hot as hell. She was a little bit behind me in the warm-up, but as I came down the centre line I saw her front legs overtake her nose. At least she was in front of me!" laughed Roland, who went on to take the Equine Herbals Elementary Open.

"Because she was so hot the day before, I worked on calming her down, but I was worried I'd made the test boring," added Roland, who also thought he had blown it when at the last halt Nadonna leapt round to face the crowd.

Another chestnut mare, Pippa Prideaux's >>



Jane Kidd focuses the National, which clashed with Spirit Freedom — hence no commentator



Anna Ross-Davies (left), 33, spends the day frightening those in the next lorry with 'Wendy'. Lee Pearson and three-month-old Bleach



Anna Ross-Davies takes a break from terrorising small children — and Polly Gould — to watch with Roland Tong (left) and Gareth Hughes