

British strength

It's not only Charlotte Dujardin who makes her case for team selection as numerous pairs impress at Bolesworth

Equerry Bolesworth, Cheshire

BRITAIN'S World Equestrian Games (WEG) medal hopes had a healthy boost at Bolesworth, with Charlotte Dujardin and Mount St John Freestyle's star continuing to rise amid exciting performances from other team contenders.

Charlotte and the nine-year-old Fidermark mare showed a marked improvement since their last competition appearance at Windsor in May, and their 79.65% winning grand prix was well-deserved. Emma Blundell's mare, who was bred in Germany by Stephan Kurz, is beguiling to watch, with astounding maturity for her nine years and exceptional power.

At Windsor, she showed greenness in her piaffe-passage transitions but here, just some five weeks later, she glided in and out of her piaffe without any loss of balance and rhythm.

"At Windsor she surprised me a bit because she went green on me in the arena," said Charlotte. "We worked on those transitions at home and I rode them more positively here. You'd never look at Freestyle and think that was just her fourth grand prix."

You certainly would not. Only a missed one-time change marred an otherwise faultless performance, although Charlotte was a touch frustrated not to have broken the 80% barrier for the first time in international company.

"As I was riding the ones, I was thinking how great they felt — really off the floor — and then I had the mistake. But every time I take her into the arena she feels better, and it's just little things holding us back now — once I get through those, we'll be



Charlotte Dujardin and the Fidermark mare Mount St John Freestyle follow up their winning grand prix with a plus-80% special debut

By POLLY BRYAN

flying. She's just such a trier, and I know she'll always perform — she's never spooky or silly."

Charlotte may have been just shy of the elusive 80% grand prix — although Carl was spotted

first-pumping the air when two of the judges' scores did come in over the threshold — but she did not have long to wait. The following day, Freestyle pulled out all the stops to earn 80.36% in her first ever grand prix special. Charlotte admitted to having winged it — the last time she rode the

special was on Valegro at the Rio Olympics nearly two years ago, and she hadn't even practised it at home with Freestyle.

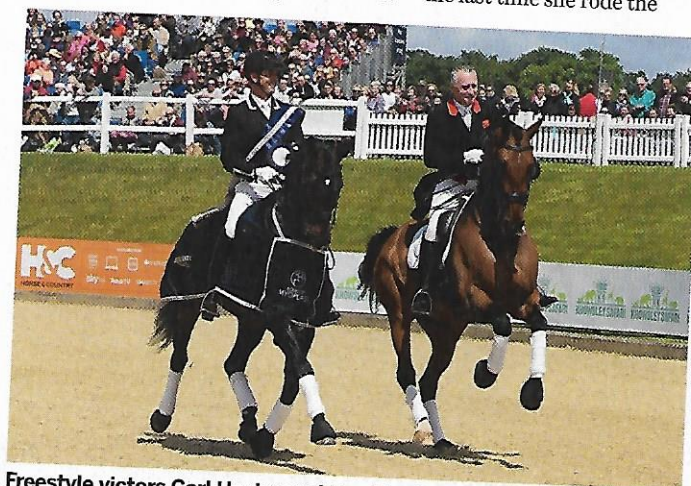
"Sometimes I think it's better to wing it — you don't think too much about it then," she laughed.

There were a few blips: Freestyle lost a little balance in the transition from passage to canter, a late two-time change dropped their marks for that movement to fours and fives and the gale-force winds in the international arena contributed to a loss of rhythm on their final centre line.

"The wind was blowing so badly, it made me almost lose my own balance," explained Charlotte. "I overrode the passage and got in a bit of a muddle."

Nonetheless, the overall quality was fantastic, with Freestyle punching her way down the arena in her final extended trot — which earned a 10 — almost as though she knew she had nailed it.

'HE FELT SO GORGEOUS'
BUT it wasn't just Freestyle



Freestyle victors Carl Hester and Hawtins Delicato share their lap of honour with Richard Davison (Bubblingh), who took a close second