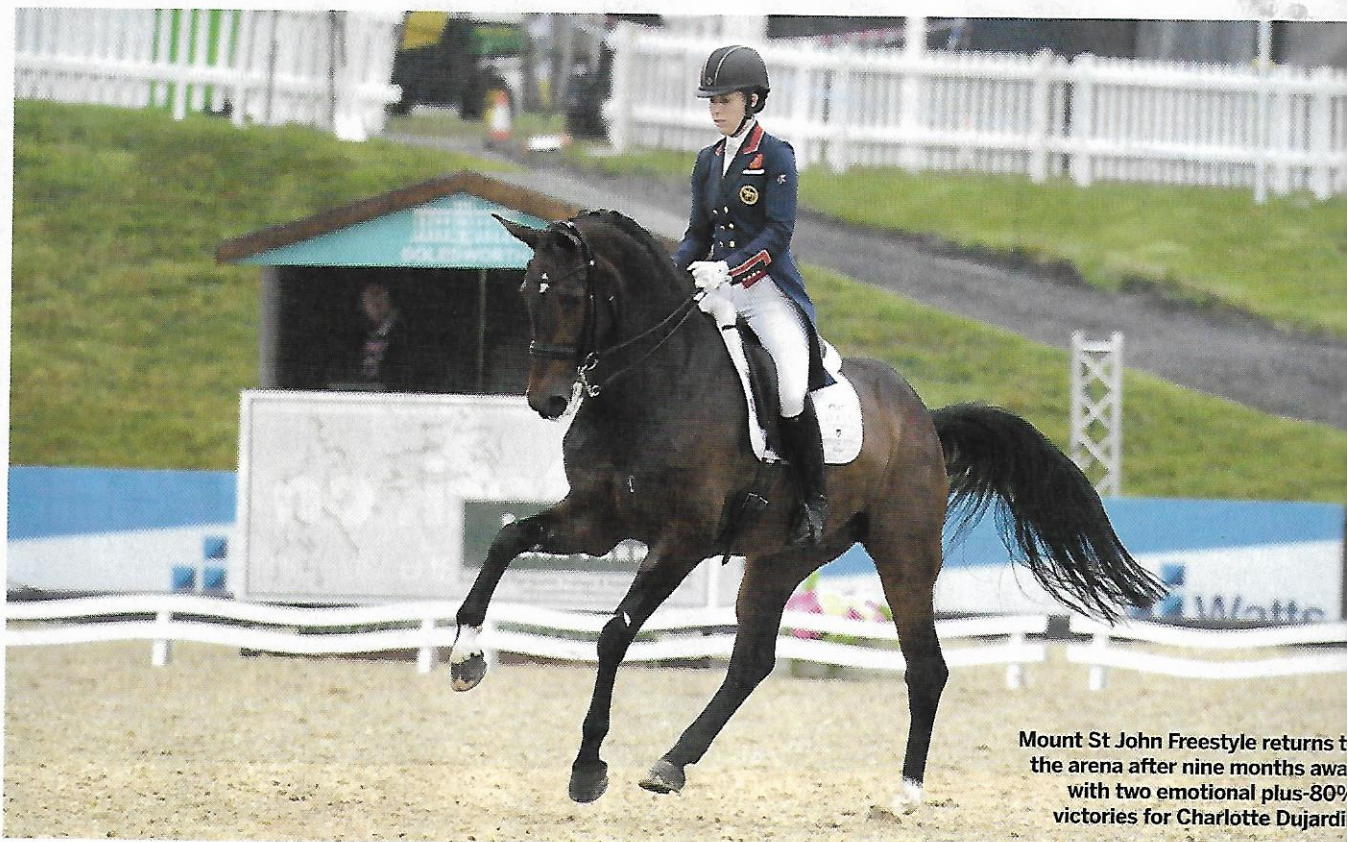


Freestyle's back in business



Mount St John Freestyle returns to the arena after nine months away with two emotional plus-80% victories for Charlotte Dujardin

Charlotte Dujardin's top horse makes a brilliant comeback while other top riders produce a flurry of impressive scores

Equerry Bolesworth CDI3*, Cheshire

By POLLY BRYAN

CHARLOTTE DUJARDIN added plenty of shine to a rather testing Bolesworth with the much anticipated return of her double bronze medallist from the World Equestrian Games (WEG). Mount St John Freestyle had a spell off at Christmas due to a virus and has been given plenty of time to regain her strength since. But here, on her first outing since WEG, she proved better than ever, producing her best-ever scores in both the grand prix and the special.

At this show last year, Charlotte was disappointed to fall just short of her 80% grand prix goal, but here she finally managed it for the first time. The test was practically faultless, but Charlotte admitted she felt uncharacteristically nervous before entering the arena on Emma and Jill Blundell's 10-year-old mare.

"I was quite disappointed with myself as a rider. I overrode her at the beginning, which meant we had a little blip in the passage when I touched her with my leg and she overreacted," said

Charlotte, who finished ahead of Gareth Hughes and Classic Briolina in second. "I gave myself a talking to after that and the canter work felt really secure. Now I feel I just need to do more tests on her — she's still quite inexperienced.

"Alan [Davies, groom for Carl and Charlotte] and I actually had a bit of a cry afterwards. It was so emotional to be back in the ring with her, and to hit our first 80%."

The following day, Charlotte was back to her usual, relaxed self and the Fidermark mare swept through the tricky special to achieve another personal best of more than 82%.

"I watched the video of our special at WEG before getting on, so I had in my head what I wanted to recreate," said Charlotte. "I still didn't go full power, but she felt fantastic. It's incredible how she can go from the passage into extended trot and back again so effortlessly. I have to be so careful not to overdo it because she's always trying to give

me more than I need.

"She feels so much stronger and more established compared to last year — I'm not having to help her so much."

Having one horse with the ability to produce 80% scores at this level is impressive enough, but this year Charlotte has a second, in the shape of Sonnar Murray-Brown's 12-year-old Latimer son Erlentanz.

This compact Trakehner

gelding is like a clockwork toy and Charlotte adores him. She admitted it will be hard when the time comes to hand back the ride to Sonnar once he is fully recovered from a broken leg.

"Erly" showed his phenomenal talent again here. His grand prix may not have been his best, with a mistake in the one-time change blighting some otherwise superb work, but he made up for it in freestyle.

Riding to the familiar strain of her *How To Train Your Dragon* music, Charlotte asked all the questions and the game little



Hawtins Delicato produces his best special to date under Carl Hester