After Cross-Country
Nicolas Touzaint and Hidalgo de L'Ile from France clear the HSBC Hexagon Hedge on the way to taking over the lead at the second leg of the HSBC FEI Classic series at the Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials today.

It's Vive la France as Touzaint takes over at the top......

The dressage leaderboard was shot to pieces during the cross-country phase of the second leg of the HSBC FEI Classics at the Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials this afternoon when reigning European Champion, Nicolas Touzaint from France, rocketed up from overnight ninth to take pole position.

The notorious Badminton track took a heavy toll on the leading pack and advantage-holder, Australia's Andrew Hoy, crashed out with Moonfleet at the Huntsman's Close complex, a mistake that would be replicated by many others as the top British fixture produced yet another thrilling afternoon of eventing action.

Lucy Wiegersma improved from third to second position following an excellent run with Shaabrek who added only 8.4 time penalties to his dressage mark, but fellow-Briton Polly Stockton rose all the way from 23rd spot and lies third going into tomorrow's final show jumping phase after recording one of only two clear rounds. The other was registered by Georgie Davies, a member of Britain's 2007 European Championship squad, whose meteoric rise was even more impressive. In 33rd before her fault-free tour of the track with Fachoudette she is now in serious contention in fifth place, just over a point behind fourth-placed British star William Fox-Pitt and Ballincoola.

Less than a single show jumping fence separates the top four and less than two separate the top 10 so the tension will be palpable as the closing stages get underway tomorrow.
The statistics tell the story - there were just two eliminations but a total of 18 retired including first-day dressage leader Clayton Fredericks from Australia who hit the floor when Nullabor ground to a halt at the HSBC Hexagon Hedge at 15, the daunting first fence in a sequence crossing the famous Vicarage Ditch. This brought a number of horses to a stop but problems were spread all around the track and despite the difficulties encountered there was high praise for Hugh Thomas' newly-presented course. "Not huge - but relentless" was Lucy Wiegersma's verdict at the end of the day. And sticky ground conditions proved energy-sapping for some.

Stockton's Tom Quigley got the best of the going when sixth to set off however and the Irish-bred horse finished strongly, one second inside the time, but Zara Phillips' Glenbuck was tiring at the end and although she moved up from 18th to 13th with this horse the World Champion will be hoping to have something left in the tank for tomorrow's final test. New Zealand's Andrew Nicholson is a veteran of the Badminton course but had no luck with either of his rides, retiring with both Armada who had a run-out at both the corner-hedge in Huntsman's Close and the Roundtops complex at fence 12, and Silbury Hill who he pulled up further on the track. That was surprising enough, but paled into insignificance compared with the surprises that would come later.

With the leading group really falling apart it seemed that it should be only a matter of course for Andrew Hoy and Moonfleet to consolidate their dressage advantage but a long stand-off at the Huntsman's hedge corner proved too much of a stretch for the horse who crashed-landed and sent his rider into a nose-dive. And then, as if that wasn't enough excitement, three-time Badminton champion Pippa Funnell did an almost perfect imitation when following two horses later with Ensign. This British star might be feeling a bit jinxed by the Badminton track having taken a tumble from the same horse here two years ago.

There was no jinx on Touzaint and his 13 year old French-bred gelding however. The 27 year old rider set off with grim determination and attacked that three-stride distance in Huntsman's Close like his life depended on it. "I saw some of the other riders there but I had made my plan and I stuck to it" he said afterwards. He admitted that he had ridden conservatively toward the end of the track - "I knew my horse needed to breathe so I let him go steadier there" he explained.

With a Frenchman out in front there was all the more reason for the late-running British to try to over-take him. After all his 4.8 time penalties might prove expensive if tenth-placed Oliver Townend and equal-eleventh-placed Mary King and William Fox-Pitt could keep a clean slate. Townend's Coup de Coeur was impressive but collected 9.6 time penalties and then, to the dismay of the home supporters, both King and Fox-Pitt ran into trouble. King was enjoying her second great ride of the day, having steered Apache Sauce to a brilliant tour of the track earlier in the morning and was almost home, at the penultimate Rolex Crossing, when disaster struck with Imperial Cavalier. The horse caught the second big log and tipped his rider out of the saddle with the finishing line almost in sight. The 48 year old quickly remounted and completed however and she still had a grin on her face as she crossed the finishing line - she knows she has something special in this talented 11 year old.

The hard-pulling Tamarillo meanwhile didn't make it easy for Fox-Pitt and it was a run-out at the Lancer Village, a series of fences on the tail-end of the course, that put paid to their chances.

Touzaint is now focused on adding the Badminton title to his tally tomorrow but he knows the game has yet to play itself out. "I'm in very high spirits after today" he said, "but tomorrow is another day. Now I must look after my horse and make sure he is alright. There is no reason why it shouldn't work out for me tomorrow" he added.
If it does work out for him he will be the first European rider to take the prestigious Badminton title in 57 years - Switzerland's Capt Hans Schwarzenbach being the last one to do it back in 1951. So there may be history in the making as the show jumping phase gets underway.....

RESULT AFTER CROSS-COUNTRY:
1, Hildago de L'Ile (Nicolas Touzaint) Fra 44.4; 2, Shaabrak (Lucy Wiegersma) GBR 45.8; 3, Tom Quigley (Polly Stockton) GBR 46.7; 4, Ballincoola (William Fox-Pitt) GBR 48.1; 5, Fachoudette (Georgie Davies) GBR 49.6; 6, Coup de Coeur (Oliver Townend) GBR 49.6; 7, Lenamore (Caroline Powell) NZL 52.8; 8, Tankers Town (Sharon Hunt) GBR 54.9; 9, Opposition Buzz (Nicola Wilson) GBR 55.8; 10, Bonza Puzzle (Matt Ryan) Aus 56.3; 11, Apache Sauce (Mary King) GBR 56.5; 12, BlackDrum (Annabel Wigley) NZL 56.7; 13, Glenbuck (Zara Phillips) GBR 57.2; 14, Hope Street (Daisy Dick) GBR 57.3; 15, Midnight Dazzler (Harry Meade) GBR 58.2; 16, FRH Little Lemon (Andreas Dibowski) Ger 54.7; 17, Running Brook (Georgie Spence) GBR 67.6; 18, Ease on Fire (Joe Meyer) NZL 67.9; 19, Zin Zan (Rodney Powell) GBR 68.4; 20, Fairfax (Rodolphe Scherer) Fra 70.3; 21, Ardford Magic Star (Zara Phillips) GBR 70.8; 22, Tamarillo (William Fox-Pitt) GBR 70.9; 23, Barry's Best (Rosie Thomas) GBR 75.5; 24, Birthday Night (Harry Meade) GBR 79.4; 25, Mac Macdonald (Caroline Powell) GBR 80.6; 26, Inonothing (Paul Tapner) GBR 80.7; 27, Silence (Dan Jocelyn) NZL 81.0; 28, Harry (Bruno Bouvier) Fra 83.8; 29, Special Attorney (Dan Jocelyn) NZL 85.1; 30, Monarch's Rock (Beanie Sturgis) GBR 85.6; 31, Drivetime (Emily Baldwin) GBR 87.3; 32, Old Road (Michael Ryan) Irl 87.4; 33, Little Tiger (Phoebe Buckley) GBR 88.0; 34, Connigar Bay (Sam Griffiths) Aus 88.9; 35, Ira d'Islea (Pierre Marie Dubois) Fra 89.9; 36, Looks Like Fun (Vicky Brake) GBR 91.4; 37, Black Andy (Joe Meyer) NZL 96.0; 38, Hunters Legend (Dominic Ruane) GBR 99.2; 39, Spring Along (Daisy Dick) GBR 101.1; 40, Valdemar (Hannah Bate) GBR 101.9; 41, Crown Alliance (Emily Galbraith) GBR 105.2; 42, Little Beau (Charlotte Agnew) GBR 105.8; 43, King Bob (Michael Owen) Irl 105.8; 44, Master Blaster (Jade Lazenby) GBR 110.8; 45, Teveri (Amanda Ratcliffe) GBR 118.5; 46, Bit of a Barney (Louise Skelton) GBR 123.7; 47, What If (Neil Fox) GBR 125.7; 48, Art Attack (Jayne Doherty) Irl 127.4; 49, Kincluny (Sarah Wardell) Irl 130.4; 50, Imperial Cavalier (M King) GBR 132.3; 51, Fox on the Run (Richard Jones) GBR 141.3; 52, Park Pageboy (Clare Lewis) GBR 144.0; 53, Ava (Susanna Bordone) Ita 148.8; 54, Highleadon (Tor Brewer) GBR 153.1; 55, Hobby du Mee (Austin O’Connor) Irl 159.7; 56, Southern Ben (Emily Butcher) NZL 169.0; 57, Patris Filius (Olivia Haddow) GBR 190.5; 58, The Biz (Heidi Woodhead) GBR 203.4.

The HSBC FEI CLASSICS is a new FEI series linking the five 4-Star Eventing competitions currently on the international calendar.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2008:
1, Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event (USA) 24-27 April; 2, Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials (GBR) 1-4 May; 3, Luhmuhlen CCI**** presented by EON (Ger) 12-15 June; 4, Land Rover Burghley Horse Trials (GBR) 4-7 September; 5, FINAL - Les Etoiles de Pau (FRA) 22-26 October.

POINTS SYSTEM:
Points will be awarded to the top ten riders at each event as follows:
1st: 15 points
2nd: 12 points
3rd: 10 points
4th: 8 points
5th: 6 points
6th: 5 points
7th: 4 points
8th: 3 points
9th: 2 points
10th: 1 point

PRIZE MONEY
HSBC will contribute US$1million to the series over the next three years. At the end of each season, the five riders with the greatest number of points will be awarded PRIZE-MONEY as follows:

Series Champion - US$ 150,000; 2nd - US$ 75,000; 3rd - US$ 50,000; 4th - US$ 33,333; 5th - US$ 25,000.

This represents the biggest prize pot on offer in the sport of eventing on an annual basis.

USEFUL INFORMATION
For further information on the Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event 2008 go to WEBSITE www.rk3de.org or contact Press Officer Marty Baumann at Tel: +(859) 357 8936 or Email info@classic-communications.com.

The second leg of the HSBC FEI Classics takes place at the Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trails from 30 April to 4 May - for further details check out WEBSITE www.badminton-horse.co.uk. Badminton Press Officer, Julian Seaman, can be contacted at Tel: +44 207 3850591, Fax: +44 207 3889820 or Email j.seaman2@sky.com

PHOTO CATALOGUE - Photographs of the winning riders in high and low resolution can be downloaded from the FEI online catalogue. To access it, please visit www.fei.org >Media >Photo Catalogue (direct link http://www.feiworldcup.org/s_d_gallery.html). There is no reproduction fee, but please credit photographer (photographer's name will appear under each photo)/FEI. Usage is strictly for editorial purposes.

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