



# 61<sup>e</sup> CONCOURS HIPPIQUE INTERNATIONAL DE GENÈVE

7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2022

## PRESS RELEASE

### FIRST MAJOR VICTORY FOR MCLAIN WARD IN GENEVA

Wow! There are no other words. What emotions, what a spectacle! The Rolex Grand Prix more than lived up to its promise on this Sunday afternoon. The spectators held their breath until the last moment of the jump-off and experienced a dramatic abundance of twists and turns. Over a breathtaking course that demanded agility, speed and risk, in the end McLain Ward and Azur HH were more than a second faster than the 2021 winners, Martin Fuchs and Leone Jei. The American and his faithful 16-year-old mare Azur HH thus won their first Major at the Rolex Grand Slam of Show Jumping in Geneva. With 44,000 spectators and, above all, three sold-out sessions (Friday, Saturday evening and Sunday), the CHIG set a new record.

But let's start at the beginning. The eagerly awaited Rolex Grand Prix began at 2:30pm after an emotional moment of farewell for Clooney 51 – there was hardly anyone who didn't shed a tear – with 40 competitors at the start, one more determined than the other. So the challenge for course builder Gérard Lachat was to provoke a fair selection among them. A tricky task, but as always, the Jura native and his team rose above, as the course consisted of 14 obstacles with 18 efforts. The bidets double was one of the crucial challenges of the day. "I was a bit worried because the oxer that followed this double exactly should have been a bit of a selection. But the riders always surprise me, the oxer was no problem in the end!"

Other obstacles took over the role of this number 7, such as the middle jump of the triple in Rolex colours, or the last combination with verticals. In the first round, there were 13 competitors who remained faultless. Among them were also big names: Ben Maher, Daniel Deusser, Andre Thieme, McLain Ward and of course Martin Fuchs, who always outdoes himself in front of his home audience. And as is so often the case, there were outsiders who grabbed the opportunity, including an excellent and very happy Elian Baumann, who brilliantly stayed clear twice in the first 5\* GP of his 11-year-old gelding Little Lumpie E's and finished in 7<sup>th</sup> place!

Daniel Deusser, who with his fantastic Scuderia 1918 Tobago Z was chasing his third win at a Major of the Rolex Grand Slam of Show Jumping this year, completed a very good course, which already looked fast, in 42'58. But he had not reckoned with the talent of the Belgian prodigy Gilles Thomas, who had already shone in Calgary in the autumn. He took full risk and beat the other experienced champions: almost two seconds ahead!



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The 24-year-old rider showed that there were other options on the very thoughtfully designed jump-off course. First Shane Sweetnam (James Kann Cruz), who was cheered on by his entire team on the last line (40'48). Then things started to rumble in the stands. Martin Fuchs and Leone Jei entered the arena like gladiators in Roman times. "Allez!", the Swiss shouted to his formidable grey horse at the double bidets, and the whole Palexpo hall held its breath. Then the crowd carried him screaming and shrieking over the final canter jumps that might have led him to a historic third victory in this Rolex Grand Prix. The time to beat fell below the 40-second mark for the first time!

After that, only two riders remained. Daniel Bluman failed at the entry of the double, leaving only McLain Ward and Azur HH. This great mare, "a true queen", as the American calls her, has jumped seven Grand Prix this year and never dropped a single bar. The pair managed to beat the current best time again: 38:43. The victory was very emotional for the American, who was in Geneva for the first time 30 years ago. "This is something very special for me. François Mathy, who discovered Azur HH and is its owner, was here to witness this success. He is like a father to me, and I also think of mine watching me from up there (*looks to the sky*). I am very touched, Geneva is one of the tournaments I dreamed of as a child, and now I could finally prevail here. A big 'Merci' to the best audience in the world."

### The voices of today's protagonists

Martin Fuchs: "It was an incredible day. Thank you to Clooney and thank you to Leone Jei. And thank you to all of you here in Geneva, you are my favourite audience, and you made this day unforgettable. Even if it wasn't the 3<sup>rd</sup> win, but I'm still extremely happy with this Grand Prix."

McLain Ward: "I've had many adventures here, ups and downs, I have tons of memories and I love your city. My entourage always loves to come here in large numbers because they love this tournament. I am even more proud to have won this Rolex Grand Prix. Now I will enjoy my well-deserved holiday and celebrate Christmas with my two daughters with the family."

### Bram Chardon succeeds in defending title

Having succeeded in knocking Australian Boyd Exell off his throne in 2021, Dutch driver Bram Chardon defended his title this year in the FEI Driving World Cup™, presented by Swiss Radio and Television, and an event always eagerly awaited by the Geneva public.



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Michael Brauchle, who finished last in the opening competition the day before, set the pace from the start and put in a faultless and very fast round. "I had some problems yesterday", said the German. "I made some changes today and was also much more focused." Defending champion Bram Chardon had one mistake in his first run. He said, "As the previous competitors were very fast, I had to try everything! After my mistake, my sister, who was sitting next to me, reacted and through her precise action I was able to limit the damage and still enter the jump-off." The Dutch driver, who was more motivated than ever, then showed all his skills to defend his title with flying colours. "The pressure was great, but my team and I give our best in such moments."

Behind Michael Brauchle, who at the end came second, Belgium's Dries Degrieck was delighted for his part with his third place. Jérôme Voutaz from the Valais, who came fifth, said: "The course was designed in such a way that the audience got to see attractive driving sport, with very close distances between the drivers, which also shows the technical progress of our discipline."

### **Media contact**

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