



The British eventing team from left: Daisy Dick, Zara Phillips, Oliver Townend and Mary King proudly display their gold medals at Prateri last weekend

Eventers strike gold

Britain's eventing team took their seventh consecutive team gold at last week's European Championships. **CATHERINE AUSTEN** reports

BRITAIN'S eventers won a record seventh consecutive team gold medal at the 28th European Championships in Prateri del Vivaro, Italy, last weekend (13-16 September).

The team of Mary King, Zara Phillips, Daisy Dick and Oliver Townend moved up from second after the dressage into an overwhelming lead following the influential cross-country phase, one they held on to in the show jumping.

Zara Phillips could not retain the individual title she won in 2005 at Blenheim, losing it to the 2003 champion, France's Nicolas Touzaint, the only rider to finish on his dressage score. Zara and

Toytown had an unexpected stop in the show jumping, and they dropped down to sixth place.

Mary King, 46, rose to win the silver medal, and German rider Bettina Hoy took bronze.

"It's easy when you've got a good horse,"

said Mary, who rode Eddie and Sue Davies and Janette Chin's Call Again Cavalier, a horse who was produced by Vicky Brake and then ridden by Caroline Pratt until her death at Burghley in 2004.

Going into the show jumping phase, the top three, uniquely, were all European title-holders –

Nicolas, Zara and Bettina [who was champion at Burghley in 1997 on Watermill Stream].

This was also a fifth European gold medal for British performance manager Yogi Breisner, who said: "We owe a great debt to our owners.

Without them, we wouldn't have the horses to win it."

Britain has won gold at every European Championships since 1993 in Achselschwang,

where we finished out of the team medals for the first time since the competition began in 1953. This was the second British victory at Prateri del Vivaro, the Federal

Equestrian Centre created for the 1960 Rome Olympics, less than an hour south-east of Rome – Mary King was also on that 1995 winning team.

Only half the 12 participating teams finished the competition. Olympic champion France won the team silver medal – as they have done for the past three European Championships – and the Italians took the bronze. Both teams have qualified for the Olympics next year in Hong Kong – the British having done so, along with the Germans and Swedes – at the 2006 World Championships in Aachen.

The Irish team fielded only three runners, not four, and did not complete, so will not have any teams in Hong Kong.

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Mary King
individual silver