

A champion evening



On a cold winter's evening, Towerlands Arena in Essex was brought to life in fine style by two equestrian greats – Geoff Billington and Oliver Townend. **Angela Stagg** was in the audience

GEOFF Billington is a showjumping legend, whose career dates right back to 1974. His favourite and most memorable mount was It's Otto. Winning the Hickstead Derby and receiving two Olympics bronze medals are just some of his proudest moments to date. Oliver Townend is one of our newest eventing stars. Last year, his greys Flint Curtis and Carousel Quest helped him win both Badminton and Burghley, a rare and impressive achievement. He also took the £100,000 prize at the first ever Express Eventing. Geoff and Ollie had come to Essex as part of their Champions 'Big Night Out' Tour, a demonstration evening which included plenty of knowledge with some good old fashioned humour thrown in.

They brought with them some of their younger horses who showed what stars they were as they behaved impeccably in front of the lights, cameras and cheering crowds. Dramatic lighting and music invited the audience to catch a glimpse of what was to come as Geoff and Ollie showed us a few of their highly talented moves. Ollie focused more on dressage. He talked us through how he works with his youngsters, warming them up and getting them to listen to what is asked. Then all seriousness went out of the window as Geoff joined the show. He did his own version of 'dressage', much to everyone's amusement. The two of them connected really well together to make the learning fun. The evening continued in this very relaxed way, with



Ollie teaches us some dressage moves
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amusing stories aplenty. Geoff then followed Ollie's high standards, by bringing out the jumps – and what a fantastic jumper he is, clearing the highest of poles with such ease. He taught us the rights and wrongs of single jumps and more difficult courses, whilst constantly making us laugh. He then went on to prove that he could clear the poles whilst carrying a pint of beer in one hand, followed by Ollie picking up a pint mid jump. A lot of thought had gone into the planning of this tour and we all came away with plenty of inspiration from the experts. We also took away Geoff's wise words: "The modern day showjumper has to be as careful as a nudist over a barbed wire fence." Thank you to all concerned for a fascinating and very enjoyable evening.



Above and below, Geoff and his horse Jennifer show us why they are champions

