

Training Forum

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Horse Deals pays a visit to Oliver Townend and Geoff Billington's Champions Tour



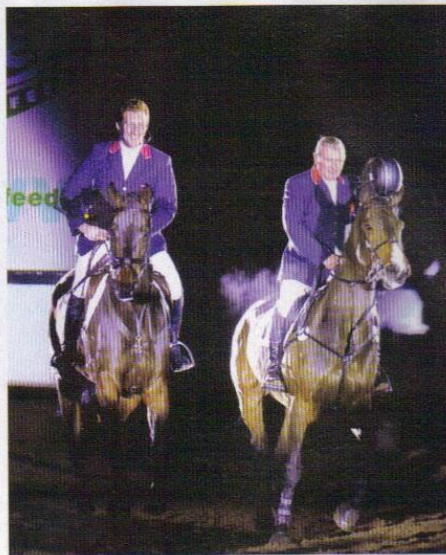
Geoff on his novice mare enjoys a joke with his trainer, Oliver

The Champions Tour series of lecture demonstrations by eventer Oliver Townend and show jumper Geoff Billington proved a huge success, attracting sell-out crowds at venues ranging from Irish, Welsh and Scottish centres to those in England's West Country.

Although the emphasis was placed mainly on entertainment, most spectators also picked up useful hints to work on at home as they watched the pair school young and experienced horses on the flat and over jumps.

At every venue both riders brought a selection of horses from their strings and kept the audience laughing, especially when Geoff came into the arena in full dressage gear and tried to produce advanced movements from one of his Nations Cup mounts, Pedro.

Geoff may be noted for his comedy routines featuring other riders, but there was a surprise at the end of the evening when Oliver turned the tables with a great impression of his show jumping friend. Oliver also kept the



members of the crowd on the edge of their seats with a display of "trick riding" when winning a bet with Geoff that he couldn't pick up a pint of beer balanced on the wing while jumping a narrow stile.

But in between was the serious stuff that showed just why Geoff has won championship medals and competed at two Olympics and how Oliver reached the top of his sport at such a young age.

The evening began with Oliver showing how he works a young horse on the flat. At the demonstration Horse Deals attended, Oliver rode an attractive five-year-old by Kannan, a sire perhaps better known for producing show jumpers.

"With a horse as young as this, I'm concentrating on keeping him as relaxed as possible and maintaining the rhythm," he explained. "I'm also thinking about my own position. I know that I sometimes sit crooked, so I'm trying to stay straight, with the same amount of weight in both stirrups."

Oliver didn't ask too much of the horse apart from simple transitions.

"When you ride youngsters, if they don't answer you straight away, give them a pat and start again. There's no point in getting cross," he said. "The horse is simply waiting for you to explain what he should do and you certainly don't need to pay someone £80 to be told that's to keep him moving forward!"

Oliver also demonstrated flatwork on a seven-year-old by Master Imp who is aimed at Chatsworth three-star this season.

"He's a cheeky horse, but my flatwork routine would be almost the same as for the novice," said Oliver. "I'm checking that his back end is connected to the front and he's working through."

"One difference is that if a more experienced horse doesn't answer your leg immediately, you shouldn't be frightened to



More than 800 people at Yorkshire's Bishop Burton College enjoy the evening