



Oliver surprises the audience with his Billington impression

correct him with a tap from your schooling whip."

Oliver said that he thought many people became frightened by the word "dressage".

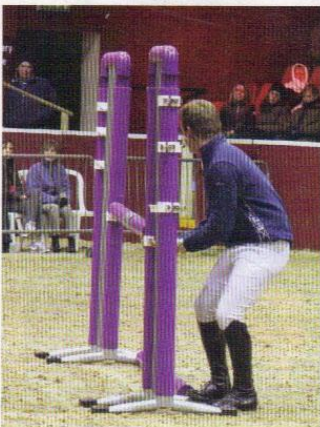
"There's no mystery at all. Just look where you're going and practice the test well and the more you do it, the more simple it becomes," he said.

Geoff's first ride was an eight-year-old British-bred mare who has just started her show jumping career after producing foals. She's certainly bred to do the job, being by the top performer Lux out of a former junior European Championship winner.

"She's quite tense, so I'm working on getting her between hand and leg," said Geoff. "She's got a naturally high head carriage, so I mustn't try to force her head down, but work with her within her natural way of going."

Geoff demonstrated how he started off over cross-poles before moving on to some sizeable bigger fences.

"I'm allowing her to make her own mistakes," he explained. "It's important that a show jumper's careful, so what we're looking for is a horse that learns from its mistakes. In this mare's case, when she hit a pole in front, she made an extra effort to clear it the next time, so



Oliver acts as arena party



If youngsters don't answer you straight away, give them a pat and start again – Oliver Townend

she's got the right attitude."

Geoff demonstrated how he had to change his style to ride Pedro, a Dutch-bred gelding whom he produced from the start and now competes at top level.

"He's incredibly sensitive and also forward going and, even now, if you touch him in the mouth he tends to go upside down. I have to be really careful not to fight him, particularly in combinations," said Geoff, who used Pedro to demonstrate how to vary the number of strides on a related distance and also jumped a sizeable course, including some fences under a spotlight.

Another highlight was when the pair paid tribute to Geoff's famous partner It's Otto, who died in July at the age of 23. A short film commemorated the career of the Dutch-bred gelding who came from dressage bloodlines but won more than £650,000 as a show jumper and represented Britain at two Olympic Games.

Spectators at every venue had the chance to meet both riders in the interval for autographs and photos with their heroes. Oliver is now looking forward to releasing a training DVD and has his eye on the Rolex Grand Slam.

"I'll definitely be aiming for Kentucky, and for those horses that perhaps aren't quite ready I'll look at Badminton and Burghley," he said, revealing that one of his prospects is showing as much talent as his Badminton winner Flint Curtis.

Geoff is also working with a string of horses he feels are among the best he has ridden. They include the 11-year-old Rosinus whom he is aiming at the World Equestrian Games and he describes as "the second best horse I've ever had".

It wasn't just fans who attended the lecture/demonstrations. Oliver's British team-mate and reigning World Champion Zara Phillips was at Hartpury, Tim Gredley watched at Towerlands Park with Geoff's son, James Billington, and Michael Whitaker travelled to Arena UK to watch and learn with his family.

"Geoff and I have been friends for longer than I care to remember! I heard great reports from everybody who saw the show, so I thought I'd bring the family along to find out what everyone was talking about. We weren't disappointed," said Michael.



The pair sign autographs for their fans