



## ISLEHAM CAMBS 7-8 March

By Hilary Manners

NOT for the first time, Oliver Townend and Piggy French divided the open intermediate spoils at Isleham on the opening weekend of the season.

Piggy French rode the eye-catching Seapatrik Dark Cruise to the top of the table in open intermediate section O, the fastest pair of their class, coming home seven seconds over time.

"He's a big horse who prefers softer ground so the plan is to have a busy spring and quieter summer," she said. "I brought him in earlier this year than previously so he's very fit. He's even done a few days hunting, which has really sharpened him up. He's definitely stronger on the flat and finding things easier, which in turn means that I can ask for more."



"The best horse I've sat on": Laura Collett and Pamerio 4 claim second in an OI

It was Oliver's 13th successive attendance at Isleham, and his wins there are into double figures.

This year it was ODT Ghareeb, owned by Kathleen Wilkinson and Rachel Wood, who took the top spot in section N. He was the only horse to finish on his dressage score in an intermediate section,

and the only horse to make the optimum time. The pair finished bang on the 4min 46sec allowed.

"The older he gets, the better he gets, although he can still be very spooky," said Oliver. "His work gets more and more consistent. I just need to remember to ride positively across country; it's not

that he doesn't want to do the job, but he can get distracted.

"Each time he's stepped up a level he has risen to the challenge — most notably at Bramham CC13\* last year when he was clear inside the time across country. I think we'll go back this year and try to be more competitive [the pair finished 15th in 2014].

"I come to Isleham every year because Clem [Tompsett, organiser], his family and all the team do everything they can to make sure that riders and their horses have the best time. The ground, which has been good for years, gets better, and the organising team think of everything and do a great job."

Runner-up to both Oliver and Piggy was Laura Collett. Grand Manoeuvre finished 0.2 of a penalty behind ODT Ghareeb, having posted the best dressage score of the section (23.2), to which the pair added 5.2 cross-country time penalties.

"He was a different horse today," Laura said. "We've built up a partnership over the winter and he trusts me now. Today was so exciting that I am going to have to put in my Badminton entry!"

Pamerio 4 came closest to catching Seapatrik Dark Cruise, again following the best dressage score of the section. Laura describes the seven-year-old son of Perigueux as "probably the best horse I have ever sat on".

"He was awesome last year and I didn't think he could get better — but he has," she said.

### Collett cruises ahead

THE final section of the day provided Laura with a well-deserved win; she took the straight intermediate section with a winning margin of over eight penalties.

She said: "Controe is an unbelievable showjumper; we won every time out over the winter.

"Having said that, he's a cross-country machine too, so the fact that he doesn't always find dressage the easiest is forgivable."

While Izzy Taylor and KBIS Starchaser finished third behind Oliver, and Jonelle Price on her



Oliver Townend triumphs aboard ODT Ghareeb at his 13th successive Isleham

World Equestrian Games ride Classic Moet took third behind Piggy, it was Ian Willis and Harriet Brise who claimed the remaining podium places in the intermediate.

Ian and Marli III, a reportedly "tricky" horse, led the dressage but two falls round showjumping lost them their advantage.

"Marli came to me as a four-year-old for corrective schooling, but the owners didn't want him back," explained Ian. "He's

adorable on the ground, totally trustworthy — but seriously keeps me on my toes when I'm riding him.

Harriet Brise was less than a point behind Ian.

"Cockham Clover was diagnosed with navicular last year which meant a lot of time out, but we know how to manage it now," said Harriet, who not only works full time as a housekeeper, but also runs a lively yard and prepares horses for hunting — a necessary task when



Harriet Brise finishes third in the intermediate

your mother is master of the Old Surrey & Burstow.

As always at Isleham, ongoing improvements could be seen, most notably on the intermediate track, which featured a new double of skinny triple brushes on the latter part of the course. The water and the rail-ditch remain the most influential fences, Flora Harris in particular

Pictures by Peter Nixon