

winner



confident double clear.

Austin O'Connor was giving his World Equestrian Games (WEG) partner, Ringwood Mississippi, a fitness run, and decided to take his foot off the brake because the ground was so good.

The duo were of only a handful to have had a happy ride around Badminton, and this was their first run back since finishing 15th there.

"I stayed open-minded about whether to take him quick or not across country, but I was very pleased when the rain came last night," said Austin. "He needed a sharp run today as he is a laid-back horse, and this was great preparation for WEG."

The Tetsworth-based rider also took third in section H, the Dasset Eventing-sponsored eight- and nine-year old class, riding Kilpatrick Knight, who Austin describes as a "typical Irish horse and still improving".

Topping this section, which was bursting with young equine talent, was the Shearwater Insurance-owned Shearwater Touchingwood, partnered by Oliver Townend.

They posted a dressage score of 30.9 and followed it up with the fastest cross-country round in the section, adding just 3.2 time-penalties.

"He is green and can be a bit backward, but he's still growing and I think next year he will be

more mature," said Oliver, adding: "This is a great event, with great prize money. The ground needed the rain but credit to Nigel Taylor and his team; they did all they could to get it perfect."

Gemma Tattersall was another double prize-winner. She rode her own and her mother Marcelle Tattersall's Dinky Inky into the runner-up spot behind Oliver in section H, adding 8.4 time-penalties to a 28.6 dressage.

"She has only just stepped up to advanced level this year, but she has been really consistent," said Gemma of the bold-jumping mare. "She's a typical lady and can be feisty, especially in the showjumping warm-up, but she's such a trier and always digs deep."

Gemma's other "cross-country machine" Arctic Soul provided his rider with a "serious buzz" across country. The pair completed on a double clear to take third in section I with a 32.5 dressage.

Silky smooth

BILL LEVETT piloted his Badminton ride Silk Stone to victory in section I. They capitalised on their first-phase score of 30.

This was a confidence-boosting trip for Francis Birks' gelding after being eliminated at Badminton.

"I felt he lost confidence at Badminton and his biting was all wrong — he needed more in his mouth. He's not strong but he can run against the hand and at Badminton I just felt we were meeting fences on the wrong distances," explained Bill.

"Today I rode him in a Pelham and he felt better. He's got the

COURSE CHAT

SEVERAL British WEG-bound combinations were spotted on advanced day.

Oliver Townend and Black Tie II took the opportunity for a dressage outing, scoring a 26.4 and withdrawing before the showjumping, while Pippa Funnell ran Billy Beware — his first outing since finishing sixth at Badminton. They took it easy across country to finish 12th.

"He felt really happy to be out again; he was very full of himself in the showjumping and I had no intention of running him fast across country," said Pippa. "I pushed him a bit in the dressage, especially in the extended trot, just to test him and I was pleased with the mark [26.3]."

ability and on a good day he can jump anything and is now established on the flat. I want to regain his confidence and aim him at another four-star."

Matthew Heath secured two top-10 placings in section J, finishing second with The Lion and sixth with Marseille.

The Lion, who was purchased from Exmoor Eventing, completed Burghley last year.

"He's been a little quirky along the way but now everything is piecing together," said Matthew. "He did have an issue with running out to the left, so I rang Andrew Nicholson and asked him for a favour; he agreed to give me a jumping session and things have improved."

Tom McEwen claimed the advanced under-25 section with the ex-racehorse Dry Old Party (see box, p44). They followed a solid dressage with a double clear. Millie Dumas (Artistiek) took second, while Laura Collett and Pamerio 4 finished third.

The riders were full of praise for organiser Nigel Taylor and his hard-working team. Having suffered a dry spell followed by heavy thunderstorms, they pulled out all the stops to prepare the course.

The new all-weather area, installed over the winter, went down a treat with competitors, who relished having somewhere flat and surfaced to do their dressage tests.

Nigel said: "We were lucky that the rain came just in time, but we have still been watering and aerating in the run-up."

"The advanced course was slightly less technical than



The in-form Oliver Townend takes the 8/9yo class on the 'still green' Shearwater Touchingwood