

Festival fever – three titles, three champions



Top: Andrew Nicholson with the British Eventing Open Trophy and a bottle of champagne. Above: Oliver Townend wins the Dodson & Horrell sponsored Novice Championship in 2011



Last year's **Festival of British Eventing, Gatcombe Park, presented by BETA**, was the biggest and best yet. Record entries, mammoth crowds and new cross country challenges ensured sporting action of the highest calibre

Everybody says that to win at Gatcombe Park you need special skills and a special horse. The park's unique twists, turns, hummocks and hills present a cross country challenge like no other. The optimum time is almost impossible to achieve – riders need skill, speed and a dash of daredevil. Between them, our current champions have notched up a eight national titles at Gatcombe. They have all three of these things in abundance.

"There's no other Event like it"
Not content with winning the British Eventing Open Championship with Deborah Sellar's Nereo, Andrew Nicholson also finished second for good measure aboard Rosemary Barlow's Avebury in 2011. Ironically, for the British National Championship, last year the first four places were occupied by Kiwis. Pippa Funnell and Mirage d'Elle were the highest placed British combination and therefore won the title of British National Champion for 2011.

Andrew's winning ride, Nereo, has an impeccable Festival record. He was fifth in the Novice Championship in 2006, fourth in the Intermediate in 2007, third in an Advanced class in 2008 and ninth in the British Open in 2009. "You do need a specific sort of horse to go well at Gatcombe Park," says Andrew. "They have to be fast and accurate, but also very manoeuvrable. You won't get a fast time here on something that pulls."

Nereo is heading Andrew's London 2012 string. "He's a very good horse who's reliable in all three phases," says Andrew, who last won the Open title in 2002 aboard Mallard's Treat. "Gatcombe's one of my favourite Events," he continues. "The atmosphere is pretty unique and Captain Mark Phillips always builds interesting courses that make you sit up and think. "The Festival is a fantastic Event for owners too. There is always so much going on and spectators feel like they are really involved in the action. As a

"The optimum time is almost impossible to achieve. Riders need skill, speed and a dash of daredevil"



Joss Dalrymple and Penelope Lang from Smith & Williamson, winning owner Mrs Charlotte Straker, Angus Smales and HRH The Princess Royal

rider it's an amazing feeling to have the crowd so close when you are going across country. There's no other Event like it."

"It took two months to sink in"
Last year a new face graced the podium in the Smith & Williamson British Eventing Intermediate Championship. Angus Smales piloted the Irish-bred Clover Hero to victory ahead of his former employer Oliver Townend and Arctic Mouse.

Clover Hero was originally bought out of a field in Ireland for Angus to ride and subsequently bought by his present owner Charlotte Straker soon after Angus first sat on him. "Charlotte has supported me from day one, so to win with her horse at Gatcombe was very special. Clover Hero was the first horse I'd actually chosen for myself to ride," explains Angus, who admitted that it was "a good two months" until his achievement sunk in. "I kept looking at the names of previous winners on

"As a rider it's an amazing feeling to have the crowd so close when you are going across country"

the trophy – riders like Mark Todd, Andrew Nicholson, Oliver Townend – and the horses that had won the title, like [William Fox-Pitt's] Tamarillo and [Mark Todd's Badminton winner] NZB Land Vision. I couldn't believe that my name was going to be added to that list," he says. "But Clover Hero is definitely a horse for the future and I hope he'll go all the way to the top." Bramham is pencilled in for the 11-year-old gelding, while Angus is planning to return to the Festival to defend his title.

"I've got a couple of horses qualified for the Intermediate Championship, so I'll definitely be back to give it another crack," he says. "Gatcombe is a fantastic Event. I'd always dreamed of winning there and now that I've done it once I want to go back and do it again!"
"You can't come to Gatcombe Park and not be competitive"
Oliver Townend is in possession of a fine collection of Gatcombe titles – two Intermediates and three Novices. He has made the Dodson & Horrell



Oliver Townend, John Horrell from Dodson & Horrell and HRH The Princess Royal

"The Festival of British Eventing will take place slightly earlier than usual due to the Olympics"

British Eventing Novice Championship his own in recent years. He first won the title in 2005 aboard Best Of Spirits and won it back to back in 2010 with Jeepers Creepers and 2011 with Brucester Rooster. The latter only started Eventing at the beginning of last season, but finished in the top two six times and went on to be runner-up in the CG11* at Blair Castle shortly after The Festival. "He's a horse who is reliable in all three phases. When I first saw him I didn't really think he looked like an Eventing type, but he's got a good brain and he loves the job. He's got plenty of blood and a good gallop in

him," says Oliver, whose determination and verve across the country always makes him a bookies' favourite at Gatcombe, whatever he's sat on. "The cross country time is always really influential and Gatcombe's not the sort of course that you can come and not be competitive at. If you want to win you've got to go for it." The Festival of British Eventing will take place slightly earlier than usual (13-15 July 2012) due to the London 2012. To find out who is on form going to Greenwich Park and whether Andrew, Angus and Oliver can defend their titles, put the date in your diary and come and find out. ✨

Stay in touch!

For more information and tickets: www.gatcombe-horse.co.uk
Keep up to date with all the news and final preparations by following Festival Director Tim Henson's blog on <http://www.gatcombe-horse.co.uk/news/blog/>
Facebook fans can keep up to date with the Official Festival of British Eventing Facebook page: www.facebook.com/GatcombeHorse

Free ticket giveaway

We have three family season tickets to give away for a weekend the whole family can enjoy, including the dog!
We are offering three family season tickets to our *British Eventing Life* readers, which includes admission and parking for all three days, together with entry for a family of four (admits two adults and two children between the ages of 12-18 years). All you have to do is simply answer the following question...
What was the name of Andrew Nicholson's winning ride in 2011?
Please post your answer to Joanne Sindall, Archant Dialogue Ltd, Rouen Road, Norwich, NR1 1RE. Closing date: 21 May 2012