



Oliver with Andrew Cawthray's intermediate eventer ODT Arctic Fox

PROFILE

# Money matters

**Oliver Townend** is finally reaping the rewards and making a living out of his passion, Eventing. Gillian Newsum went to visit Oliver at his new yard to find out where it all began and his future plans

**O**liver Townend has come a long way in 10 years. Since leaving his Huddersfield school at the tender age of 16 ill-equipped financially (and against the advice of his parents) to pursue a career in eventing, he spent six months with Christopher Bartle, followed by three-and-a-half years as a stable jockey to Kenneth Clawson, and then set up on his own by renting a yard in Leicestershire. Five years later he had put enough money together to buy his own farm. Renowned for his cross-country riding, Oliver runs his life at a breathtaking pace. His new yard at Dudleston Heath, about 10 miles north of Shrewsbury, is →

PROFILE



Oliver with ODT Master Rose owned by Stephen Hazeldine and his daughter, Victoria Hazeldine

the sort of place many riders can only dream of owning – a nice house, two flats for the grooms, more than 40 brick stables inside converted barns, two large arenas, a horse walker, 35 acres of land and stunning views across to the Welsh mountains and all at the young age of 26. “I would have much preferred to have bought somewhere in Leicestershire, but I couldn’t find what I wanted, and anyway I couldn’t have afforded this place if it had been in Leicestershire,” he notes. As so often in Oliver’s life, it all comes down to the money. Money, combined with a strong competitive instinct, has been his driving force – not because he is greedy, but because he has an overwhelming desire to succeed, and success for him is not just about winning medals; it is about earning a living from a sport that does not provide many rich pickings. “I think one of the reasons that the

prize money isn’t good in eventing is because in the past most of the top riders came from an army background and riders didn’t have to worry about earning a living from the sport. But I need to make a proper living for myself. I’ve often sold my best horses, because they’re the ones I could get a good price for. So to stay at the top level I have had to run a big operation.” Oliver probably competes on more horses than any other event rider on the British circuit: not surprising then that he gets on well with Andrew Nicholson. The ‘big issue’ of money and the sense of being different to other event riders stems, he says, from his background. Although his parents both rode (his father, Alan, competed at Burghley), Oliver was brought up in a non-horsey, ‘tough’ area called Scapegoat Hill, overlooking Huddersfield. Most of his family have

stayed on the hill, taking jobs locally. “People there had a different mentality. They thought I was the odd one out because I left to do something else.” Going out on a limb seems to be a part of Oliver’s makeup. Oliver is delighted to have been selected for Britain’s European Championship squad for the third time (he won team gold in Pratoni, 2007). However, he believes the emphasis needs to be on performance over team building to win medals. Those Scapegoat Hill roots go deep, but there are signs of a shift. “For me to be able to carry on eventing after I left school, I had to become a person that I didn’t really want to become. I’ve had to be tough on myself and very driven and focused and by being like this I may have upset a few people on the way, which is something I’m not proud of. I think that’s partly why my relationship with Piggy [French] broke down. I was pushing so hard to get to this stage. Now I need to get back to the person I actually started as; someone who just loves riding.” Whilst Oliver is at home and when speaking and performing to the public, his business acumen would impress Alan Sugar. From riding other people’s ‘chuck-outs’ and having up to 25 owners at one time, he has progressed in five years to owning a yard of good-quality horses and having only a handful of owners. His business partnership with Andrew Cawthray has made a huge difference to Oliver’s financial footing. In the last two years they have sold over five horses with a

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£100,000 or more price tag, and by selling eight-year-old Land Vision to Mark Todd for a considerable sum last year, Oliver was able to take on the risk of a large mortgage to buy his farm. Winning the £100,000 first prize at the Express Eventing competition two weeks after taking ownership of his new home helped to reduce his loan, and persuading his parents (he is an only child) to come and live with him in Shropshire has been life-changing. His mother, Eve, runs the house and his father is in charge of the feeding and fitness of the horses, which is clearly working well. Both Flint Curtis and

Carousel Quest (the two horses selected for the European squad) were on top form for their four-star events in the spring. Following his move to Shropshire and his victory at Badminton on Flint Curtis, Oliver admits to being slightly more relaxed about life. He usually looks laid back enough, but behind the swagger there lurks a perfectionist who seems to be continuously driving in the fast lane. As for the future: “I think winning medals will be important to me eventually, but at the moment my highest priority is getting the bills paid.”



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Horses that Oliver rates highly

**Flint Curtis**, winner of Badminton 2009 and Express Eventing. Aged 13, he is still a contender for the 2012 Olympics. Owned by Edward and Robert Nicholson.

**Carousel Quest**, 8th at Lexington 4\* 2009 and reserve European team horse (aged 14). Owned by Andrew Cawthray, as are the following:

**Three Wishes**, aged 11, winner of CIC\* at Brightling 2009. Imported from USA last year.

**ODT Arctic Fox and ODT Sonas Rovatio** – two very promising seven-year-olds.

**Neo du Breuil**, eight-year-old recently purchased from France.

A full list of Oliver’s horses can be obtained by joining the members’ club on his website: [www.olivertownend.com](http://www.olivertownend.com)