

Armada show

Armada 'eats the ground' under Oliver Townend, finishing on 37.3 — the only horse in the advanced to duck under 40 penalties



OWEN PUGH BURGHAM (1), NORTHUMBERLAND 29-30 March

By Lisa Burn

WHILE southern England basked in warm spring sunshine, Northumberland remained in the grip of winter, with the weather at Burgham decidedly chilly.

However, the fog and drizzle didn't dampen the spirits of the 520 entrants to the venue's first trials of the year and made for pretty good going.

Oliver Townend took the advanced crown with Armada, boasting a score of 37.3.

"I'm absolutely thrilled with how he has come out this season," said Oliver. "He's an unbelievable horse — I don't think I will ever ride a horse like him cross-country again, one who can eat the ground like he can.

"He can be hot and feisty; he has a huge amount of feel and ability for cross-country, which makes him a little more difficult in the other two phases, but as long as I have him quiet he does his job."

With a clear round in the cross-country, a dressage score of 30.5 — the best in the advanced — and just four showjumping penalties, Armada is well set up for Badminton, his 14th four-star.

Burgham was also a chance for

Isabella Innes Ker flies round the open intermediate on Rosses Captain



Oliver to put youngsters through their paces, with three other rides in the advanced and one in the open intermediate.

In the open novice, he posted first and second with his Red Andes Fanfare and Power Drive.

"It's perfect ground to prepare horses from a fitness point of view," he added. "We had a mixed bunch, some just stepping up to advanced and they made baby mistakes, but it was lovely to ride them without too much pressure."

'He'll have fun at three-star'

NICOLA WILSON and Opposition Buzz came second in the advanced class, the horse's first run of the season.

"He did a lovely dressage and he

always loves the cross-country," said Nicola. "I've been very impressed by the courses I've ridden here — they were inviting but challenging and the ground was perfect."

According to his rider of 11 years, Opposition Buzz is still in fine fettle, but she and owner Rosemary Search have decided he will not go to Badminton.

"He's so special to us and he's done so much. He can still have a lot of fun doing CIC three-stars," added Nicola.

Nicola's open intermediate ride Ngong Hills also put in a strong performance, coming fourth — good preparation for his first advanced at Weston Park in April.

In the advanced, Wills Oakden