



Life at the top

Winner of The Land Rover Burghley Horse Trials 2009,
Oliver Townend, talks about growing up with Burghley...

34

OLIVER
TOWNEND
Burghley Life

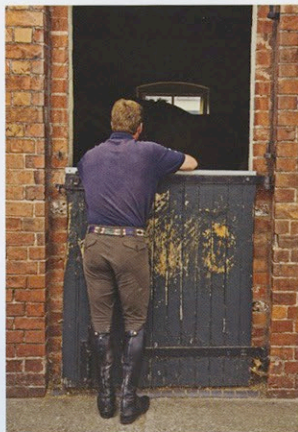
British rider Oliver Townend's 2009 Land Rover Burghley Horse Trials was the first Burghley victory for the 27-year-old. A memorable occasion for the young and successful rider, Oliver remembers watching his father Alan compete at Burghley in 1984. "I wasn't very old so I didn't know what was going on, but I remember it was exciting," says Townend who, since he started competing, lists Burghley as a favourite. "I have always enjoyed going there – it has such a great atmosphere and unique setting as well as an extremely challenging cross-country course. Until last year I never had much luck there so it is even more of a favourite now."

The win was the second major victory of the 2009 season for Oliver who also took the top accolade at the Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials. The accomplishment meant his name could be added to the elite club of riders that have won back-to-back Badminton and Burghley titles. The win also helped him secure the lucrative, end-of-season HSBC FEI Classics™. It also gave him a stab at winning the Rolex Grand Slam at this year's Kentucky Three-Day Event in Lexington – a \$350,000 bonus to the rider who can win all three of the four-star events of Badminton, Burghley and Kentucky consecutively. So far, this feat has been achieved by just one person, British rider Pippa Funnell, who captured this unique accomplishment in 2003 after winning at Burghley with Primmors's Pride.

There was no such fairytale ending for Oliver. He set off for America with Ashdale Cruise Master, a new ride taken on at the beginning of the year. The event in Kentucky ended with a painful and much-publicised fall for horse and rider which resulted in Oliver being airlifted to hospital with a broken shoulder, collarbone, sternum and four broken ribs. The result was several weeks out of the saddle.

Sheer determination saw the Yorkshireman bounce back, and just five weeks after the fall Oliver and Ashdale Cruise Master took on the best and won, heading the important HSBC FEI World Cup™ Eventing qualifier at Tattersalls in Ireland. "It was what we came to do and hopefully that'll be the end of the fall talk," he said after his win.

Oliver inherited his love of horses from his parents. His father, Alan, a milkman in Huddersfield, competed in three-day eventing, while mum, Eve, showed side-saddle at county level. Oliver began riding when he was seven years old. His first major success came at the Horse of the Year Show when he was 11, and two years later he represented Britain on the pony eventing team at the European Championships. He quickly moved up the



A SPECIAL PLACE
THE LAND ROVER
BURGHLEY HORSE
TRIALS HOLDS
MANY SPECIAL
MEMORIES FOR
OLIVER, WHO
ENJOYED HIS FIRST
VICTORY IN 2009

ranks and for three years was stable jockey to British team trainer Kenneth Clawson in Leicestershire. At the end of last season he finished top of the British Eventing rider rankings for the first time – relegating British team mate and former British number one, William Fox-Pitt, to second place.

Oliver's 46-stable yard in Shropshire, bought in 2008, is run with help from his parents and nine staff who are kept busy preparing horses all season. Oliver typically begins competing at the first event in the first week of March and finishes at the final one of the year in the last week of October. The tour takes in around 45 different venues and includes over 200 competitive rides.

The 'two old greys', 2009 Badminton winner Flint Curtis (14) – the horse who gave him his British senior team debut and first gold medal (European team gold) in 2007 – and last year's Burghley winner, Carousel Quest (15), are among those worked each day. "They are both in good form," says Oliver, who hopes to take Carousel Quest back to Burghley this autumn. "He is a fragile horse in every way but I am sure he has got another Burghley in him. He seems to love the place as much as I do so it could well be worth the wait." ●

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