

Not for the first time Oliver Townend and Matthew Wright battle for the spoils, with the former

Oli triumphs over his constant



Matthew Wright and Hugginstown apply the pressure with a double jumping clear, but take the runner-up slot



above CCI winner Oliver Townend



above Victoria Mitchell and Ashdale Mischallah, sixth in the CCI**

HOUGHTON CCI**

EVEN before the overnight leaderboard had been printed after the cross-country, Oliver Townend was at the scoreboards, working out how much he had in hand over his rivals going into the show jumping. The answer was not much, with less than a fence separating the first four.

"He's perhaps not the most reliable show jumper," said Oli of his mount, Waterview, who had been in the lead throughout. "But we'll be giving it everything we've got."

And indeed they did, landing the Subaru Houghton CCI** in a nail-biting finish which gave Oli his first international three-day win.

Oli's task was made slightly easier when Terry Boon, lying second on Elaine Hack's Always Owen, dropped

five rails, but the pressure was still on with Matthew Wright moving up in to the runner-up slot with a clear over the coloured poles on Hugginstown.

With still less than a fence in hand, Oli nursed Andrew Cawthra's 10-year-old around the show jumping, not pushing him out of his rhythm, but coming very close to the optimum time, with the audience holding its breath as he came through the finish clear and with a second to spare.

"He's a good jumper, but sometimes not so good with the brakes and steering, and I didn't want him to get too quick. It's fantastic that he's delivered my first three-day win. It's about time — and it will be the first of many!"

Oli was also lying in equal 10th after the dressage with his other two rides, ODT Master Rose and Clover Curtis. Master Rose finished fifth with a smart double clear, but Oli admitted to a rare mistake when Clover Curtis ran out at the brush corner (fence 8).

Runners-up Matthew and Charlotte Cole's Hugginstown also completed their dressage score.

"He's really consistent and we came here to win. Trust that little s*** to get in our way," joked Matthew, referring to his ongoing rivalry with Oli.

the gates coming out of the wood. She was taken to Queen Elizabeth Medical Centre in Kings Lynn with concussion, but was released later.

Many horses clouted the gate as they jumped out of the dark wood into bright sunshine, but there were few serious problems throughout the two days of cross-country and riders praised Hugh Lochore's fair course.

A loop of the two-star track was taken out on Friday evening because the going was too hard, and with flat parkland and galloping stretches the time in both classes proved easy to get.

"The going was firmer than you'd have wanted it, but the track was pitched right with enough questions. It was also good that we didn't have to punish horses to get the time," said William Fox-Pitt.

The questions came at the Tumulus complex, where riders needed complete control to drop off the skiny log on the mound and make a sharp, accurate turn around a tree to a skiny brush.

Elisabeth Halliday, fourth overnight on Silken Crisp, retired here.

"I bought Hugginstown from Ireland late last year and he'd had his problems, so I spent the winter hunting him to sweeten him up. We'll now pick another two-star for him."

William Fox-Pitt, who won both CCI classes at Houghton last year, continued his good run, taking third with Catherine and Bridget Joice's Chuckleberry and fourth with Catherine Butler's Bee Animas.

"I couldn't have asked for more. They both jumped near perfect rounds," said William.

A mammoth 117 horses trotted up for the two-star in front of the Marquess of Cholmondeley's magnificent 16th century Houghton Hall in glorious sunshine which would continue until the final day.

Eight combinations recorded sub 40 dressage scores, headed by Oli's Waterview on 35.1, with Terry Boon on 35.4 in second and Georgie Spence and Skylight third on 36.

triumphing to record his first ever three-day victory

rival



riding Master Rose, fifth



above J-P Sheffield and DHI Hindle, CCI* winners



above Alex Postolowsky and Diamond Sun, eighth

Although the water claimed few scalps, it needed bold riding as the barrels and log in were under trees and rode big, as did the quarry complex, where the steps and log had to be attacked. Piggy French and Chase The Moon were fortunately unhurt when they fell up the steps.

Eighty eight horses came forward to show jump in the rain and only six of the first 68 horses jumped clear, propelling them up the leaderboard compared to those caught out by the final downhill run to the Subaru planks. But the picture changed as the top 20 horses began clocking up clears, piling the pressure on those above them.

Out of those well in the frame, only Terry Boon and Always Owen and Jodie Amos, lying ninth with Altairs Luck, dropped out of the reckoning.

Owen is in Clover

With 130 entries for the one-star CCI, Alec Lochore and his team faced the prospect of having to ballot 90 horses. But after consulting BE and Chepstov, who were also running a

CCI*, the team decided to host two sections and eventually 133 horses were accommodated.

In section A Louisa Lockwood and Wasal held a fractional first-phase lead over eventual winners Owen Moore and Danewood Clover Lad, but a problem in the quarry ended their chances.

Owen went into the show jumping with a fence in hand, but a careful clear delivered the honours to Adele and Victor Rawlinson's attractive grey Irish Draught.

"He's such a lovely horse," said Owen. "He's been with me for two seasons after being brought out by Matt Ryan and he's been beautifully produced by the owners' daughters."

"It was the first time he'd gone that far across country. He's been on a strict diet and fittering regime, but he's a super jumper and he gave me a great ride, with the exception of a wiggle to the hedge corner when he was eyeing up another fence. He's also not yet learned changes, so I wanted the show jumping round to be meticulous so he was balanced."

In second, moving up from fifth due to a clear round, was medical student Rosanna Crossley on her own Oloa.

"I got him from Cressy Clague Reading and it's his first time at this level," said Rosanna. "He learned how to gallop today, so it's very exciting."

Section B was led from pillar to post by J-P Sheffield on Jane Heerbeck's DHI Hindle, who finished on his dressage score of 40.

J-P who has only had the ride since the beginning of the season, was quietly confident.

"He's been beautifully produced, he's a good jumper and he's got a good head on him. He'll now go to Le Lion for the seven-year-old class."

William Fox-Pitt took second place on Judy and Jeremy Skinner and Margie and David Hall's Neuf Des Couers.

SNIPPETS

TOWNEND STABLE JUST CAN'T BE BEATEN
 CLEARLY a man on a mission, Oliver Townend wasn't content with merely scooping the feature CCI** class at Houghton, but he also took home the £1,000 first prize for heading the North Astor Group Invitational Events Grand Prix, a mix of show jumps and cross-country fences, aboard ODT Polar Run. Tom Crisp and Dinny Bath wound up in second place.

Oli's stable jockey Angus Smiles also notched up a one-two in the intermediate equivalent Grand Prix with Tina Sharp's It's A Jackpot, stopping the clock on 146.51 and beating staminatee Balloney by two seconds. Kate Hone was next on the leaderboard in third with Mr Rebel.

"He's a big, smart horse, but I didn't expect him to go so well at this level," said William, whose other ride, Bay Tokay, dropped him after spooking at the banner on the fence before the mushrooms. "Neuf also spooked at the banner, but I was ready that time!"

In third was last year's Pony European gold medal-winning partnership of Libby Soley and Noble Springbok, who recorded the same finishing score as William, but who stopped the cross-country clock fractionally further away from the optimum time. Libby was also fourth with Kachemire Le Beau.

"We've been doing exams at school all week and didn't arrive until Thursday night, so Mum had to trot up the horses for me," said Libby. "It's been a pretty high pressure time, but worth it!"

Helen Scott