

Flying Flint signals that he's on song for the big one

BURNHAM MARKET CIC***W

OLIVER Townend picked up the biggest win of his career in the CIC*** FEI World Cup qualifier at the Easco Burnham Market horse trials, but he is clearly biding his time for bigger things.

"If I do this at Badminton you might see me smile," said Oliver. "Or maybe it's just that I've had 14 rides this weekend and I'm exhausted."

Oliver, on his WEG partner Flint Curtis, lay in equal fifth after the dressage (49.6), behind such luminaries as Burghley winner Headley Britannia, World and European Champion Toytown and British Open champion Nullarbor.

Thanks to one of just five show jumping clears — and Headley Britannia's withdrawal — they set out on the reverse-order cross-country in second place and sealed the win with the second-fastest time (2.4pen).

"Flint is what he is," said Oliver, referring to a somewhat sticky negotiation of the bounce into water. "He'll always go, but you just have to sit tight and steer. He needed a run like this — Badminton blew his brain last year. He thought he was a superstar and it's taken this long to get the dressage right again."

While the likes of Toytown (12th) and Nullarbor (fifth) were to some extent being "saved" for Badminton, having lowered a show jump or two, Matt Ryan kicked on with Bonza

Puzzle to slip into second place, ahead of Rodney Powell (Langarth Darcy). It was fitting that the top three all scored elusive show jumping clears.

"Marie [his wife] put me under pressure to deliver when she show jumped clear," said Matt, who moved up to fifth from 10th at this point. "I was out to give it a go. People say I'm getting old, so I thought I'd show them."

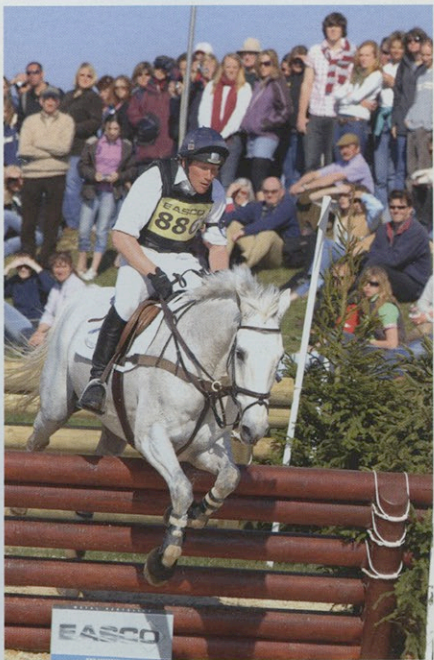
Quickest of all was Francis Whittington with the "particularly fast" Sir Percival III, who sped around for just two time penalties to finish fourth, only one point off the runner-up.

"When I'm psyching myself up, I aim to save a second at each fence," said Francis, who was ruing a wrong turn. "Either that or hitting the last show jump cost me £1,000."

The dressage leader and the last to go across country, despite having rolled a pole, was Clayton Fredericks and Nullarbor. The horse had finished third at Fontainebleau a couple of weeks before and Clayton didn't rush him. This left him with 16 time faults and fifth place, ahead of Sarah Cohen (Hide And Seek II).

The cross-country course proved straightforward for these four-star horses, although a few fell foul of either one of the massive brush corners (fences 4 and 18).

William Fox-Pitt was disappointed with a "below-par" Moon Man, whom he pulled up two-thirds of the way round the course as the horse was feeling laboured.



above Oliver Townend and Flint Curtis en route to victory



above Francis Whittington and Sir Percival III's fast round nets fourth place



above Matt Ryan and Bonza Puzzle, second in the CIC***W

gunning for her first Badminton next month. "I leave the jumping to her. I need a computer to program her. I wasn't here to win, but I wanted a decent fly-round before Badminton, and what a perfect run-up."

Tim Price was the only rider across the three-star sections to finish on his dressage score (59), and he was rewarded with third place on Keyflow.

And everyone enjoyed watching Jeannette Brakewell's grand old campaigner Over To You, 19, spin around with 16 time faults to add to retain his sixth-placed dressage score en route to Badminton.

Sarah Cohen's Preci Spark mare Trebetherick was an impressive winner of the CIC**, finishing on her second-placed dressage mark of 47.4.

Sarah has typically paced this former BYEH winner carefully, but today: "She was ready to go on today."

"She was awesome!" added Sarah. "She jumped so big into the water that she dunked right in for a cool-down. We got soaked!"

Trebetherick has an embryo transfer foal due to McGuigan, who was also competing at the event.

Figgy French (Cast Away II) lay neck-and-neck with Sarah after the first two phases, but she succumbed to second spot with 3.6 time faults,

Clean sheet clinches it

In CIC** section R Oliver Townend (Ron Brew) failed by three penalties to reel in Georgie Davies (Fachouette), who secured the second-best dressage score (44.7) and a double clear to win.

"She's so wise, but we know each other inside out," said Georgie of her Bramham winner with whom she is