

Townend Masters the opposition

BELTON

By Sue Polley

IF Belton was the perfect prep run for Badminton that riders felt it was, then Oliver Townend may well be on course to lift the coveted four-star title for a second time.

He won the CIC*** Grantham Cup with Ashdale Cruise Master and followed that with an advanced victory aboard Neo Du Breuil. Andrew Nicholson won the other advanced class with WEG partner Nereo, while Laura Collett and Noble Bestman pipped Emily Llewellyn and Pardon Me II to the post in the U25 advanced.

"Ashdale Cruise Master felt the best that he's ever felt and for the first time he's been the horse that I wanted him to be and the one I knew that he could be. He felt confident and strong and just awesome," said Oliver.

"I thought all the courses here were great," he reflected. "The advanced was perfect preparation for a big run. There was enough there but you could make it as difficult or as easy as you wanted."

In the final analysis just two seconds separated the CIC winner and runner-up. Emily Baldwin riding Drivetime. One of the last combinations out on the track,



Ashdale Cruise Master confidently carries Oliver Townend to victory in the CIC*** Grantham Cup

"FOR THE FIRST TIME HE'S BEEN THE HORSE THAT I KNEW HE COULD BE"

this pair could afford four cross-country time penalties to add to their score of 38.7 if they were to snatch the lead from the long-time leaders. It couldn't have been closer but

they crossed the line 11 seconds over the optimum for 4.4 time penalties, giving spectators a demonstration of accurate jumping out of a smooth rhythm along the way.

"I was really going for it and I gave it a good crack," said Emily. "I guess I'm a bit disappointed. That said, though, he gave me a brilliant ride and it was the perfect pre-Badminton performance so, looking at the big picture, I am pleased."

The pair won an advanced section here a couple of years ago and Emily admitted that the venue is a favourite for both horse and rider and acknowledged that the 15-year-old by Rolls Royce is one of the most consistent CIC*** horses in the world these days.

"This level is very much in his comfort zone as he doesn't have a weak phase. It's all systems go for Badminton now, though."



The Badminton-bound Drivetime finishes 11 seconds off the pace to secure the runner-up spot for Emily Baldwin

SNIPPETS

CRUISING TO THE TOP
AOIFE Clark's third placed CIC*** runner Master Crusee is related to the horse who beat him in the section. While Ashdale Cruise Master is by the Irish Sport Horse stallion Cruising, Master Crusee's dam was by the famous show jumping stallion.

"Master Crusee is typical of that line in that he was a very tricky youngster but I quite like cheeky horses and I've always had faith in him," said Aoife.



Laura Collett, winner of the U25 section, riding Rayef, who finished eighth

Another rider to give the track a good crack was Ireland's Aoife Clark with her Badminton-bound duo of Master Crusee and Vaguely North. Not renowned for hanging around, Aoife and Master Crusee had posted the same dressage score of 42.7 as Ashdale Cruise Master but two seconds to add for time versus Oliver's clean sheet left Aoife in third, while staminate Vaguely North finished 12th.

"Wasn't he just superb?" said Aoife of her 10-year-old son of Master Imp. "He's such a nippy little thing and he's come on so much over the last year. We're ready for our first Badminton now."

Mark Todd consolidated his early season form by taking fourth and fifth places with NZB Regent Lad and NZB Land Vision respectively.

Elsewhere, however, others didn't have such a positive day



Dressage leaders Emily Llewellyn and Pardon Me II settle for second spot in the U25 advanced

and fell foul of some of the challenges new course-designer

Mark Phillips had set. The most influential combination proved to be the Nomad Sunk Hole at number 10, a log into a sunk road followed by an angled hedge out.

Jules Stiller and Chapel Amble parted company here, while Louise Lyons with Murphy's Miracle and Mark Kyle and Just Otto ran out. Nick Gauntlett (Penguin Ice) and Brook Staples (Tova) didn't look pretty through here but they emerged unscathed, as did James Robinson and Comanche at the water where James did well to sit tight after his 18-year-old star hit the final boat element hard.

Emily Parker (Trefears) and Emily Llewellyn (Junior II) both notched up 20 jumping penalties at the final element of the Case Farnyard (fence 25), a corner followed by a log on a long stride which had the distraction of the lorry park to the left.

Lucy Wiegiersma and Woodfalls Inigo Jones suffered a parting

of the ways at fence 4, while Sam Watson had an unlucky fall from Horseware Bushman at the Pheasant Feeder at 22.

More rosettes for Townend

Oliver Townend's good form continued in the advanced sections where he not only recorded a win with his Isleham victim Neo Du Breuil but also finished third with the Lümmelshönd ODT Master Rose.

His rides were separated by Matthew Wright and If You Want II whose two show jumps down and four cross-country time faults ate into their leading dressage score of 26.4.

The up-to-height show jumping track and tight time proved extremely influential in these advanced sections with clear rounds a rarity. Andrew Nicholson and Nereo very nearly pulled one off en route to victory in section

P, leaving the poles untouched but instead notching up two time faults. Andrew then replicated Oliver's feat of first and third placings by piloting Averbury into third,

Oliver having to settle for the runner-up spot on this occasion aboard ODT Sonas Roxatio.

Laura Collett riding Noble Bestman and Emily Llewellyn with Pardon Me II were in a class of their own in the U25 advanced, taking the top two places on 37.8 and 38.1 respectively. Dressage leaders Emily and Pardon Me II enjoyed the advantage of going into the final phase after pulling off a rare show jumping clear but 10.8 cross-country time penalties left the door open for Laura and Noble Bestman, who were slightly faster to secure victory.

The Woodlands Rail and Corner, unchanged from last year and on a four- or five-stride bending line – although Ashdale Cruise Master made it look easy on three – caught out several combinations in the advanced sections and the frangible pin on the corner had to be replaced on a couple of occasions following repeated knocks (see below). Meanwhile the Log and Ditch at

5 Things you didn't know about ...

Aoife Clark

1 She is an accomplished marathon runner who has completed the London Marathon in 4 hours and 3 minutes

2 She thinks her most ridiculous purchase was Bloo, the lurcher puppy she bought for her husband Simon for Christmas. "She's a total delinquent and has cost us 10 times what I paid for her in the amount of things that she has chewed so far"

3 She believes her most annoying habit is talking too much. However, her connections disagree and are adamant that she is incredibly messy

4 Her most embarrassing eventing incident was getting reprimanded by her future father-in-law Sir



Jonathan Clark at Weston Park. "He was the BE steward and the dressage judge called him when I forgot to salute at the start of my dressage test. She was unsure whether it constituted an infringement of the rules. He wasn't impressed"

5 She is quite superstitious and refuses to use anything new at an event. She is planning to send head girl Holly out to look for a four-leafed clover at Badminton after she found one at Blenheim last year which Aoife proceeded to carry around for the whole event

17 and 18 also prompted a few run-outs and stops. The direct route comprised a log followed by a bounce to a ditch and then either a long two or a short three strides to a skinny triple brush. Some questions were raised regarding the distance between the final two elements but ultimately those who got it right made it look easy.

It was, however, the site of the worst fall of the day when Brazilian combination Marcelo Tosi and In Florida Agromix fell heavily. The horse was eventually removed from the course in the

horse ambulance and a ruptured joint ligament to her off front foreleg was later diagnosed. The mare was still in full-time veterinary care as *Eventing* went to press but Marcelo is hopeful of a full recovery.

Intermediate wins went the way of Nicola Wilson, Andrew Hoy, Piggy French, Jodie McGregor, Adrian Little and Michael Jackson with Emily Chandler taking an impressive one, two, three in the Bridge McFarland 7/8-year-old Futurity OI with Coopers Law, Douglas and Beeswing.



Jo Chipperfield's King Joules has a lucky escape when he lands on this corner and its frangible pin breaks enabling him to stay on his feet