

Oli and Piggy are in unstoppable mode

THIRLESTONE CASTLE

EVEN Scotland isn't safe from the Townsend/French winning machine, and with 14 horses between them to pilot over the weekend it wasn't surprising that Oli and Piggy cleaned up at Thirlestane.

Their winning roll took in the Davidson Chalmers Scottish Open Championship (Oliver and Flint Curtis), the Buccleuch Group CIC** (Piggy and Lemington Lets Dance), the advanced section (Oliver and Clover Curtis) and the Saffrey Chalmers intermediate (Oliver and Divine Inspiration). In fact, only the Scottish Novice Championships and the two Ols did not go the way of Oli or Piggy, and in one of the latter classes Oliver finished second to competitive rival Matthew Wright (If You Want It). The second section escaped their clutches as they weren't eligible – it was reserved exclusively for under-21 riders!

That any horse got a run at all at this Scottish event was little short of a miracle, though, as preceding rain had made the site wet – probably the wettest Thirlestane has ever been – and it even rained during the event, torrents on Saturday night.

"The ground on the cross-country wasn't too bad, but the show jumping arena and practice ring were unreal," said Lucy Wiegiersma, who finished fourth in the Scottish Open with Shaabrak. Lucy had more reason than most to know that the going was deep, for she and Shaabrak hit the deck when the gelding lost his footing



above Oliver Townend and Flint Curtis storm to a win in the Open

on turning a corner after the cross-country finish.

"I got a mouthful of mud, but at least I had a soft landing," said Lucy, who added: "They had moved heaven and earth to keep running here. I've never seen Thirlestane so wet!"

Due to the conditions, a number of fences or parts of complexes were removed from the cross-country courses. This made for tracks which had fewer technical questions than originally planned, but what they lacked in accuracy demands they made up for in a test of endurance and the increased likelihood of a tip up as opposed to a glance off.

The Scottish Open leaderboard was covered by 'Ws', indicating the heavy number of withdrawals, but also with Rs (retirements) and Es (eliminations) from the cross-country. In what was a bad day for the Irish, for whom Thirlestane was a selection trial for the Europeans, Jonty Evans retired Cregwarrior after a parting of the ways at a bounce, while Steven Smith, who knew the muddy conditions wouldn't suit Quality VH, incurred a stop at a bounce of rails going into the woods towards the end of the course. Sarah Cohen pulled up The Wexford Lady, who had slid on top of the bank fence and slammed

into the brush, while Lucy Wiegiersma hit the deck on her other ride, Beckli, who dropped a leg at the stone wall corner.

Polly Stockton added 20 penalties on two rides, Regulus and Estrada; Imperial Master also ran out for Kitty Boggis, as did Black Drum for Annabel Wigley.

At the other end of the scale, Flint Curtis and Oliver Townend stormed around in the fastest time of the day.

"He needs to run," said Oliver, who had no qualms about being competitive despite his team appearance with Flint Curtis at Praton being only weeks away.

It was Germany's Ingrid Klimke who showed the rest of the field how it should be done in the beginning, though, by notching up the only sub-30 score in the dressage arena with her good looking Butts Abraxas, whom she is 'grooming' for Beijing.

She didn't, however, hold the lead for long, and negotiating the cross-country without a watch her 10-year-old Heradic-sired mottled notched up 16.4 time penalties to slip to third going into the show jumping.

But Ingrid's loss turned into Ruth Edge's gain and her 9.2 time penalties aboard Muschamp Impala put her at the head of affairs.

It was nothing short of a miracle result for the Pau-bound 13-year-old gelding, who needed two years off after damaging a ligament at Burghley in 2005.

"He was class. I had the best cross-country ride I've ever had on him," said Ruth, who has been competing the gelding to advanced medium level in pure dressage. "I took him cross-country schooling five weeks before Thirlestane and he didn't seem to have forgotten anything."

It was to be the show jumping that brought about the pair's downfall, a pole down plus three penalties added for time leaving them in second place.

"It was a shame we went too slowly," rued Ruth.

ALL ABOUT... JESSICA MCKIE



It was almost inevitable that Jessica McKie would follow a career in horses for she grew up surrounded by them – her father is renowned horseman Ian McKie, now master of the Collee Valley, and her mother trained racehorses.

Jessica, 18, left school at 17 and began working for Caroline Powell, who trains her. She is currently contesting JRN's and is aiming her eight-year-old grey Balladeer Mooncoin at Weston Park.

Jessica has also taken part in the Pony Club Championships three times, her best individual placing being a seventh.

Denny Kerr found Balladeer Mooncoin for Jessica at a yard in Ireland. "It was the last yard we visited and I had my heart set on another horse," explained Jessica. "But I'm glad we decided to buy him. We've been learning together, but we turned a corner when we moved to Caroline's yard in March."



above dressage leaders Ingrid Klimke and Butts Abraxas, third