



**T**HE past two weekends of advanced competition at Belton and Burnham Market provided brilliant sport and were triumphs of organisation. Huge effort was expended on both events; the cross-country tracks had been beefed up and, while this proved confidence-boosting for some Badminton entrants, others may now be viewing the big day in a less enthusiastic light.

The new layout worked well at Belton — it makes sense to put a show jumping arena in front of a lovely house if there's flat ground — and the combination of the surrounding tradestands and a decent gate created a buzzing atmosphere. Organiser Stuart Buntine did a great job locally on pre-event publicity and amassing sponsorship, while entries secretary Jen Caley was extremely tolerant and accommodating.

Sue Benson's advanced course was strong — it was probably of World Cup qualifier standard and asked a variety of questions, which was ideal as a pre-Badminton run. Her influential line of three fences at the end was a clever technical test that wouldn't have been out of place at a four-star — perhaps a touch mean for anyone doing their first advanced, but the errors it caused were harmless.

The show jumping courses at both events featured solid wooden poles, which I much prefer to the increasingly popular light plastic poles and flat cups. These don't



Belton's beefed-up track produced great sport... and asked testing questions

Mark Phillips's comment last week about our "mish-mash" sport. We are indeed at a confusing stage.

Mark is right that it's mad to spend four days at a CIC, which is supposed to be of a lesser status than a three-day event. My ideal would be to do dressage and cross-country on one day and show jump on the second, but I can see the logistical difficulty of getting through 40-plus horses and having the ground jury in two places at once.

Asking horses to show jump a couple of hours after doing 7.5min cross-country at 570mpm is not the easy option some people think. I would go as far as to say it is tougher on our horses. I am a fan of the Gatcombe format with the cross-country running last. Ironically now, in CICs — and under BE rules — the allowed heights are bigger than at a three-day event (or short-format), where the horse has had a night in which to recover.

#### Does size matter?

THERE are also inconsistencies in the size of courses at three-days and I was interested in Graham Fletcher's comments about the show jumping phase (7 April). I agree that the Badminton course could perhaps be more imposing and technical; and so match up to the demands of the other two phases and to other events.

However, it was probably no bad thing that the show jumping wasn't overly big last year, following the previous day's wet conditions.

# Big, bold and buzzing

get horses jumping well, but I can see that they are easier to maintain because they wipe clean and don't rot or need frequent repainting.

Burnham Market ran virtually every conceivable type of class — only the Lochore family would volunteer for such an ambitious undertaking. Running a World Cup qualifier is an added financial drain because of the not inconsiderable FEI levy and other bits and pieces, such as finding an international judge and fitting in a trot-up.

The latter is a new rule for qualifiers and a potential hassle, but it was sensibly handled at Burnham Market. Prior to the show jumping phase, riders trotted up their horses, saddled up and with

studs in, on a strip of grass in front of a vet and ground jury member. This no-nonsense approach was quick and efficient and I hope that future CICs will follow suit.

There was on-site stabling and the dressage was held in the

viewing is excellent and the new water complex, with its two linked ponds, was a great fence. It proved influential because some horses misjudged the drop from the first pond to the second, lost their balance and tumbled on landing.

## It's not the technicality or height of the show jumping track that creates spectator tension

outdoor sand school, which created atmosphere — too much for some — because the second cross-country fence was only 50m away!

Hugh Lochore had clearly given a lot of thought to his course, which had plenty of variety. Spectator

#### Solving the 'mish-mash'

HOWEVER, the changing formats of these two weekends — both ostensibly national one-day events, but one with an international class and the other (Belton) a reverse order advanced section — reflect much of

Badminton's show jumping is always surprisingly more straightforward than that at Burghley, Blenheim or Bramham, which make full use of the upper limit.

If you want to see really amazing show jumping, go to Olympia. But while I'd support a stronger show jumping track, I don't think it's the technicality or height of the course that creates spectator tension at Badminton. The real point, and that which makes eventing unique, is that spectators have been following individual riders and horses' progress over four days and they're desperate to see the outcome of arguably the toughest event in the world. That's the real tension and there's nothing like it. H&H