



Finishing on their dressage score: Oliver Townend and advanced winner Measure For Measure. Oliver also took first, second and fourth in the intermediate



"The most talented horse I've ever sat on": Clea Phillipps's third-placed ride, Lead The Way

Townend has measure of rivals

Oliver Townend takes home a bagful of prizes, heading the advanced and routing the intermediate section.

Judith Draper reports

FOR Oliver Townend it was a case of coming, seeing and conquering, on paying his first visit to Eglington Horse Trials at picturesque Barksimming in Ayrshire. He rode his Burgie long-format two-star runner-up Measure For Measure to victory in the advanced. This win landed him the Polly Phillipps Memorial Trophy for the highest British rider who has not represented Britain at a senior championship, and the Carlsberg (Scotland) Viking Ship for finishing closest to the optimum time. For good measure he also took



Hayden Hankey and Pebbly White Stuff, who took the long route at the water and still finished second

first, second and fourth places in the intermediate. Oliver found the cross-country course, designed by event organiser The Hon Heather Gallorath with input from Ian Stark, "pretty different". "It's an old-fashioned hunter-jumper course — lots of flapping, kicking and buckle-end riding," he commented. "Measure For Measure was a little hesitant in places, but she kept jumping."

The mare, owned by Throstle Nest Saddlery, was the only horse to finish on her dressage score. The intermediate championship at Gatcombe is now on her agenda.

Chasing Oliver home was Hayden Hankey and Pebbly White Stuff. They were second best in the dressage and clear in the show jumping, but then slipped behind slightly after picking up eight time-faults across country. This was not because of a lack of speed on "Whitey's" part, but Hayden's decision to play safe and take the slow route at the water, which last year took the slow route at the water, which last year proved influential.

Hayden has decided to sell the 11-year-old grey, so that he can concentrate on getting together a string of younger horses.

Eglington regular Clea Phillipps took third place with Lead The Way, who was placed here in the novice in 2003 and the intermediate last year.

"He is the most talented horse I have ever sat on," said Clea. "I ran him quietly in the spring at three advanced events, not really competitively against pre-Badminton horses and, although he did a lovely dressage here, I never expected him to be placed."

In fact, Clea had washed him off and changed into her jeans ready to go and watch Vere present the Memorial Trophy, only to find that she needed to change back again for the prize-giving. Happily, Judy Bernard, who owns the seven-year-old jointly with Clea and Vere, had decided to travel from Suffolk to see him run.

Clea was among those who did not risk the direct route at the water.

"I think the bounce in is good, because you need to teach your young horse to bounce into water, but I have to say that the second part is a bit of a stifle chopper," she commented. "Having a brush fence there and slightly less of a drop would be better."

The new corner at the preceding bank was generally well received and rode well.

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Oliver Townend

Sara Deary and Shiver St George took fourth spot. This pair finished third in the dressage, an achievement Sara attributes to recent training with Ian Woodhead.

"Ian has taken 20 marks off the horse's score," she said.

Sara would have been a place higher had Shiver St George, normally a very reliable show jumper (he was faultless at Badminton) not jumped too big over the first element of the final double and then found it impossible to clear the second.

The dressage leaders, Claire Phillipps and Capuchin, claimed fifth spot, ahead of Louisa Milne Home on Kings Berry, Louise Lyons with Watership Down, Avril Johnston on Susannie and Dee Kennedy with her Aske Hall Ol winner Big El.

Oliver Townend's winning ride in the intermediate was Gillian and Barrie Rubery's Irish near-Thoroughbred Haveray Park Beau, having only his second run of the season after competing in the Novice Regional Final at Aske Hall last weekend. Oliver describes the 10-year-old as a very good horse, who he plans to run in the novice championship at Gatcombe. Appropriately it was Vere Phillipps, who is not only a great supporter of Eglington, but also still very much involved in the support of event horses, who sold Haveray Park Beau to Gillian as a novice.

Oliver's runner-up, Another McQuade, jumped a double clear and was the quickest across country, picking up just 4pen compared with Haveray Park Beau's 6.4. Not to be outdone, his fourth-placed Woodhouse Ben was third fastest, only 0.8pen behind the winner.

"He is a really smart horse," Oliver said of the seven-year-old, whom he started riding this season. "He won three novices on the trot and his first intermediate at Rolleston and Novice Regional final at Milton Keynes."

Jamie Atkinson, the man who prevented Oliver from taking the top three places, has the two-star at Hartpury in mind for the eight-year-old Dontesobold, who finished 2.6pen behind Another McQuade.

"He's a very talented, but very sharp, quirky horse," said Jamie, of the ex-racehorse. "He used to blow up in the dressage phase, but he is getting there. If we can get his mind correct he will be really talented." H&H