

# Young contenders

This year's British Eventing trophy winners show that there is plenty of talent coming up through the ranks. They talk to **LIS CLEGG**

Points ahead: Oliver Townend and State Occasion II, one of the horses which helped him win the Edy Goldman Trophy



## Oliver's deal

OLIVER Townend won this year's Edy Goldman Trophy for the under-21 rider who gained the most BE points (157) during the season.

The 18-year-old from Huddersfield has been stable jockey to jumping trainer Kenneth Clawson for almost a year and is making the most of the opportunity.

"My dad Alan, who rode round Burghley in his time, is now a full-time dealer so I had been working with him and riding all sorts of different horses since I left school at 16," says Oliver.

"I was trained by Dad, along with Peter Farrelly for flatwork. But the good youngsters were always sold, so when the chance came up to work for Ken I was really keen as it seemed a great opportunity to take my eventing further."

Competing at Windsor at the age of 14 and being on the pony European Championships squad are some of the

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**Oliver Townend**

achievements that mean a lot to Oliver, but he is particularly pleased with this season's second place in the advanced section at Thriestane on Brother Dennis — describing the fact that the only pair to beat him was Blyth Tait and Welton Envoy as “brilliant” — and winning the young rider final trial at Hartpury.

He was also ninth in the Hartpury College Young Rider Championship at Windsor on State Occasion II.

Although he is also an accomplished show jumper — having won on ponies at HOYS and been part of the English gold medal-winning team at Muirmill in 1996 — Oliver's ambitions lie firmly in eventing.

"This has been a rather bitzy year but I've still managed to event about eight horses. I'll have lots of nice youngsters to ride next season if Dad doesn't sell them first, and I'm riding novices for other people. Most of our horses are ultimately for sale but Dennis is the one we call 'ours', and he's only 10, so he has plenty left in him.

"It's so encouraging to have your name on a trophy alongside such previous winners as Lucinda Prior-Palmer and Pippa Nolan [Funnell], and I would love to do Badminton and Burghley, but I suppose everyone says that!

"Realistically, I'd like to have a good crack at Bramham next year on Dennis and I definitely want to event full-time."

## Efforts rewarded

PIGGY French — real name Georgina, but "my sisters called me Piggy when I was a baby because they thought I looked like one!" — can count among this year's achievements a second place in the Hartpury College Young Rider

Championship at Windsor on Libby Ellis's Done To Order, as well as team gold and the individual fourth place in the European



Piggy French and Flintlock II, who helped her to a great result at Waregem

Championships at Waregem on Flintlock II, which earned her the Sir John Burder Trophy.

Piggy, 21, left school at 16 and has recently set up a yard in Norfolk with her sister Nini, who worked as Pippa Funnell's groom for five years. They have just added a school and some new stables to the original eight-box yard and take horses for breaking and schooling, as well as having their own to ride.

"The trophy means a great deal," she says, "especially as Flintlock tries so hard — he is not the most naturally talented horse, but he always gives his best. Also, this is my last year in young riders, so I wanted to do the best I could."

Owned by Prudy and Rebecca Finch, the 13-year-old gelding was originally bought for Rebecca to do Pony Club and novice events, but Piggy has brought him up to advanced in the space of two years.

"He has gone on and done everything we have asked of him, which is far more than we expected," she says.

Other horses she plans to compete next

season include her own 17th Burning Ambition, a seven-year-old whom she has brought on herself and "has taken forever to mature, but I think a lot of him".

There is also Tom Brown, a horse owned by Poppet Boone and formerly competed by Lizzie Purbrick, with whom Piggy hopes to do Windsor next year, and another belonging to Anne Kerrison who has recently upgraded to intermediate.

"The young rider European Championships was my best result to date," says Piggy, who trains with Jamie Foyers and Ruth McMullen. "I would have been so excited to even be in the top 10, so to be fourth and part of a gold medal-winning team was fantastic."

Now her ultimate aim is to compete at Badminton, Burghley and the Olympics, but she is under no illusions about the hard work needed to achieve it.

"I don't have time for other hobbies and I had hoped for a break this winter, but the yard is full so that's not likely to happen. We'll have 10 horses in soon, which is quite enough for the two of us."