



Oliver Townend wins the advanced intermediate on Edward Nicholson's Badminton-bound Flint Curtis



Owen Moore scores his first intermediate win for four years on "serious trier" Woodfalls Thatcher

# Flint Curtis leads his stable-mates home

A mere glance at the entry list was enough to tell even the most casual eventing follower that the main intermediate classes at Poplar Park Horse Trials were likely to turn into an Oliver Townend/Piggy French benefit.

And so it proved, with Oliver taking the spoils in the advanced intermediate with new ride Flint Curtis, and Piggy turning the tables on her boyfriend in the open intermediate with victory for the second weekend running on Chicago II.

When asked whether the rivalry between the pair has increased since they began sharing a yard recently, Piggy replied: "There's a lot of jokes such as 'I beat you', and we do like to see who can win, but it can't get too competitive between us or it wouldn't work."

It didn't stop with first places, though, for the names French and Townend littered the top of both leaderboards. Piggy finished second in the advanced intermediate with Boherdeel Champion and Oliver piloted Waterbeck Basil into third in this section, which boasted just 11 starters.

In the open intermediate, Oliver occupied the bridesmaid's slot with Jungle Diva Blue, while Piggy's great old campaigner Done To Order notched up the fastest time but was anchored by a dressage score in the 30s, which left him in third.

Oliver's winning advanced intermediate ride, Edward Nicholson's Badminton-bound Flint Curtis — who is now on his third jockey in as many years, having previously been partnered by Alex Postolowsky and Izzy Taylor — tackled the

largely unaltered 20-fence intermediate course with panache. Powering around the track, the grey came home within a whisker of the 5min 20sec optimum, adding just 2.8 time-faults to a dressage score Oliver took issue with.

"It was harshly marked," he said. "I never know what the judges see through their windscreens."

When questioned which of his myriad rides over the weekend Oliver rated the best, he replied: "Flint Curtis. He's a seriously classy horse."

For Piggy, her open intermediate victor Chicago II, who had won just seven days earlier at Isleham, appears to have a new zest for the job this season, although he remains a "fun horse".

"I'm being braver on him and I'm kicking on a bit more. He was a bit stuffy last season, but now he seems to have gone up a gear," said Piggy of Sue Crane's 10-year-old gelding.

Boherdeel Champion, meanwhile, was passed to Piggy last season, just before Windsor when owner/rider Lavinia Wells broke her leg.

"He's a good horse, although dressage was his weak spot, but Ian Woodhead and his team have done wonders with him over the winter," said Piggy.

The 19 starters in the sole intermediate no doubt breathed a sigh of relief that there was no Townend or French in their section. This left the way clear for Owen Moore to take the first place rosette, but by the narrowest of margins — just 0.1 of a penalty from Georgina Clarke and Soul Searcher.

For Owen this was a first win at this level for four years and it came about on Woodfalls

*Most of the prize cheques head to one yard, as Julie Harding sees Oliver Townend and Piggy French clean up*

Thatcher, owned by John Lyne.

"He's a serious trier and is always on your side," said Owen of the Compiègne-bound gelding.

Owen echoed the views of other riders when he praised the perfect, sandy going at Poplar.

The fences found favour with competitors, too, Oliver Townend's only comment being: "The third from home [a narrow roll top with three strides to a corner] was a big ask."

However, organiser Mike Lloyds was somewhat dejected, for the big names who once patronised this event in droves were conspicuous by their absence, while intermediate entries amounted to around 60 when once the starters counted down almost 200 horses at this level.

"We've had to run an intro class to get the entries," said Mike. "Without those, we would have been stuck."

However, it was on intro day — Saturday — that the medics were at their most busy, with five riders needing hospital treatment, including Sharon Hunt, who fractured her collar-bone in a tumble at the final novice fence from Whatawizard. H&H

## COURSE CHAT

■ GUY Herbert came in for a fair amount of stick from the commentators when he lost his way in a wooded section of the course.

"He clearly didn't walk the track with dad," was the cutting comment.

Dad, of course, is technical adviser Phillip Herbert.

Woodfalls Thatcher is a serious trier and is always on your side

Owen Moore