



Oliver Townend and Polvier's Harold Spirit, his third winner (section L)



Section I winners Daisy Dick and her "saint of a horse" Spring Along

and Yoshiaki Oiwa (Fifth Avenue Fame) sneaking into 10th place for Japan.

Although this competitive class was blighted by a number of withdrawals, those who did run across country found the ground to be excellent — the puddles from Friday's torrential rain dried out under bright sunshine during the weekend. Riders and spectators were appreciative of the new dressage arenas, although these are now sited further from the lorry park.

Oliver Townend came to Weston with a strike rate of 14 wins from five events. He added three more here. He won the Hartpury College Advanced Under-25 section with Jungle Diva Blue, a horse whose three-day form is somewhat sporadic, but is on "blooming good form" at one-days.

"That's the best dressage he's ever done [the leading score of 25] and although he had two rails down it was a serious track with gluey going," said Oliver. "It was his kind of cross-country, with lots to look at. If he doesn't have to listen, he falls over!"

They left Lucy Holliday and High Times trailing 6pen in their wake, despite Lucy making up a lot of ground from her moderate dressage of 39.2. Matthew Wright took third and fifth spots with Cermont and Park Pilot, his two rides separated by just 1.3pen and Kitty Boggis on Ideal Image. Oliver Signy (eighth on Master Barley) was best rider under 21.

This section was a hot contest of young riders, although six combinations were eliminated in the show jumping.

"There were lots of great horses and when you've got the likes of Kitty Boggis, Matthew Wright and Piggy French, it's always hard to win. We're all young and hungry," said Oliver.

His section L winner, Polvier's Harold Spirit, showed no ill-effects from a dramatic somersaulting fall at Belton earlier this month — racking up the fastest time of the section. Oliver was ruling the photographic evidence, as printed

on William Fox-Pitt's column in *H&H* last week.

"I hope they took a better picture of us today," he laughed. "I gave this mare a good school and she hasn't lost any confidence. She's not the boldest, but she's plenty good enough."

Neil Fox took second place on Young Thomas, adding 14.8 time-penalties to a double clear. Christine Hardinge finished third with Hlawatha II, compensating for their one blip show jumping with another quick cross-country round.

The final advanced section (I) went to the wire, with Daisy Dick and Spring Along inching on to the winner's podium just 0.3pen ahead of Sherelle Duke and Ballystockart. Daisy eclipsed Sherelle's better dressage and marginally faster cross-country time with one of only two double clears. Daisy did not intend to run Spring Along because he has had leg trouble in the past and the going was rumoured to be tacky.

"I'm so excited I ran — the ground was perfect across country, and this has given us a big boost for Badminton," she said. "He's a machine, a saint of

a horse. I made a mistake at the takehner and he just went into full-stretch mode — he never holds anything against me.

"It was a difficult course because every other fence was a 'skinny', with long distances, so you had to kick on and really trust your horse. I wouldn't want to be riding anything lairy.

"He was pretty cool show jumping, too. The arena's on a hill, and the track was gappy," she explained. "It wasn't a pleasant course, but the gluey ground made him concentrate."

Ireland's Sasha Harrison monopolised the advanced intermediate section, taking the two top prizes with Look Sharp II and All Love Du Fenaud. Both rides finished with double clears on 39.2, but Look Sharp was 3sec faster. They left a 6pen gap to Janine Kemp and Venice in third.

The intermediate sections were claimed by Victoria Vaughan Thomas (William The

## COURSE CHAT

■ **GHOSTLY** apparitions: Oliver Townend was visiting a cafe at a show jumping competition last week when he noticed three riders gawping at a picture in *H&H* of him and Polvier's Harold Spirit somersaulting at Belton.

"Neither of them could have survived that," one of them said.

"It's me and I did," corrected Oliver.

■ **ZARA** Phillips, who withdrew from Gatcombe due to her uncle's wedding, gained fine compensation when Tsunami II won a novice class here. He is by Mayhill I, Primrose's Pride's sire, and looks on track for greater things.

■ **NEW** calling: Janet Plant, Weston's organiser of 22 years, took a new initiative in allowing young voices to practise in the commentary box alongside the established team.

■ **OVERHEARD:** A first-time advanced competitor on seeing the first six fences: "Blimey, do we go under or over them?"

Conqueror IIX), Tom Mills (Mercury Rising) and Oliver Townend (Measure For Measure). This was Oliver's third winner from four rides and the pair's third success on the trot. Oliver paid full credit to his father, Alan, for "turning this tricky mare around" after she developed a tendency to refuse.

"Dad evented her last year and still does all the riding. I just sit on her now and again," he said. "It's all about her confidence — she's bay but she may as well be chestnut. We're just enjoying this year." And while Oliver's three winners were capturing the limelight, he quietly pointed to Waterbeck Basil, ninth in the under-25 section.

"He's a special horse but I took him steady because I'm saving him for bigger things," he confided. "He's the class horse in the yard." *H&H*

It's always hard to win the under-25 section. We're all young and hungry

Oliver Townend