

Diva sings in the rain

Oliver Townend gallops through the downpour to take the OI. Martha Terry reports from a soggy day in Norfolk

PIGGY French and Flintlock II have finally relinquished their stranglehold on Great Witchingham's OI. The pair was bidding for a hat-trick, having won the last two renewals, but was relegated to second by Oliver Townend and Jungle Diva Blue.

Jungle Diva Blue was fortunate to get the run at all, after a torrential downpour threatened the conclusion of the class. Despite two local events being abandoned due to flash-flooding, technical adviser Jonathan Clissold decided to let the final 15 horses run.

Oliver had given himself every chance of usurping Piggy's crown by riding three horses.

"Any of my three could have won, but I didn't think it would be the one that had to go round in some of the worst conditions I've ever jumped in," explained Oliver. "It was pretty horrendous — you couldn't see a thing through the rain. We were all riding a lot longer and kicking a lot harder by the end."

"But I got my own back on Jungle Diva Blue — he's usually so strong, but I had to kick him for once!" Emily Birch's gelding lay in third after the dressage on 28.7pen, but moved up with a double clear.

Piggy was content with her haul of rosettes — also taking fifth place on Femdale Victoria. The 16-year-old Flintlock is now retired from three-days having amassed nearly 500 points, but shows no signs of taking it easy — this was his ninth outing this season. "He does it for fun now," said Piggy. "He's not that fast but he's a hunter-type who loves mud."

Femdale Victoria blemished her second-placed dressage score with a show jump down, but Piggy was satisfied as the partnership is just six weeks old.



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Oliver Townend



Above: Oliver Townend snatches victory with his third ride in the OI, Jungle Diva Blue. Left: Philip Valori and Windle Amazon win the intermediate after a year's break

"She's a sweet mare who doesn't have a weak phase and I hope to take her to Blenheim," explained Piggy.

Less than 1 pen behind Flintlock was

Beanie Hughes on her own Duel, who complemented a competitive dressage (32.6) with a fast cross-country, but knocked a show jump down.

Two riders short-listed for the Europeans did their selection prospects no harm. Fourth-placed junior Jolyse Clancey (On Song) added only time-penalties to her leading dressage of 26.1, while young rider Chloe Newton and Parsley II made amends for their fall at Punctestown to finish seventh.

Jeanette Brakewell and Over To You warmed up for Athens with a double clear, but went conservatively across country.

Jumping was at a premium for the less-experienced intermediate section, where there were only two double clears. One of these was the dressage leader, Joanne Dudley (Delta Island), but 36 time-penalties dropped her to seventh.

At the other end of the scale, the winners, Philip Valori and Windle Amazon, lay in lowly 24th spot after the first phase, and tipped a show jump. But then they clocked the fastest time to add just 11.2pen, putting them 2.5pen ahead of Vicky

Simpson and her seven-year-old Auburn Hill. Vicky is based at the Scottish Borders, but regularly travels south to train with Tim Brown in Leicestershire.

Philip, 19, has only been back for six weeks from a gap-year trip sailing in the Caribbean. He had entered his mare in the novice, but was so encouraged by her jumping at a recent training week with David Hunt that he moved her up to the intermediate.

"The Valori yard is back in action," Philip said. "That's our first run for a year, and she was really pinging. I don't feel like I've won it though — the others lost it!"

Philip has had Windle Amazon since she was a just-backed three-year-old, taking her through the Waveney Harriers Pony Club branch and juniors.

"She's a horse of a lifetime. If she packs it in, that's the end of it," he said.

David Sayer's cross-country generally rode well, despite the monsoon conditions. One rider tried to have the angled rails at 17 removed, to no avail. Oliver Townend had a run-out here on Polly Williamson's former ride, Topping, who slipped.

The summer course runs through the water meadows, usually giving perfect going in July, but the plan backfired in this capricious English summer. The influential second water complex was removed for Sunday's novice classes due to waterlogging. The organisers did a superb job to keep the event going throughout these deluges with very little delay.