



# Townend off to a flying start

**ISLEHAM, SUFFOLK**  
1-2 March

By Martha Terry

OLIVER Townend's three-pronged attack on Isleham's OI showed that this man means business right from the season's curtain-raiser. After the dressage phase his rides — Clover Curtis, Waterview, Divine Inspiration — held the top three spots, but it was the leader, Clover Curtis, who landed the spoils by 2.3pen from Chase The Moon (Piggy French).

"It's good for the average to get going at Isleham and the ground was the best I've seen it," said Oliver, who won last year's intermediate here on Waterview.

Clover Curtis — by the same sire, William Curtis, as Oliver's top ride Flint Curtis — had an unsettled season in 2007. His rider Ronnie Durrand died suddenly, and although he won Thirststone on his second outing for Oliver, he subsequently underwent a wind operation after retiring at Blenheim.

This was his first event since the op, and he showed his enthusiasm with a 27.1pen dressage. He briefly lost this lead with a rail down, but regained it with the third fastest cross-country.

"He felt good," said Oliver. "He's very

experienced and straight." Mercifully for his rivals, Oliver's other two OI campaigners blotted their top dressage scores with inconsistent jumping. They lowered five rails between them and Waterview compounded this misdeed with a run-out at the off-set skinny at fence three.

Polly Stockton (Diamond Sun), Tony Warr (Coolgrange Merger) and Piggy French overtook Oliver's three with elusive fault-free show jumping rounds. While Tony endured a stop at the water, Polly opted for a slow clear and Piggy couldn't keep tabs on Oliver — stopping the clock 2sec adrift.

Only one combination across the intermediate sections managed to beat

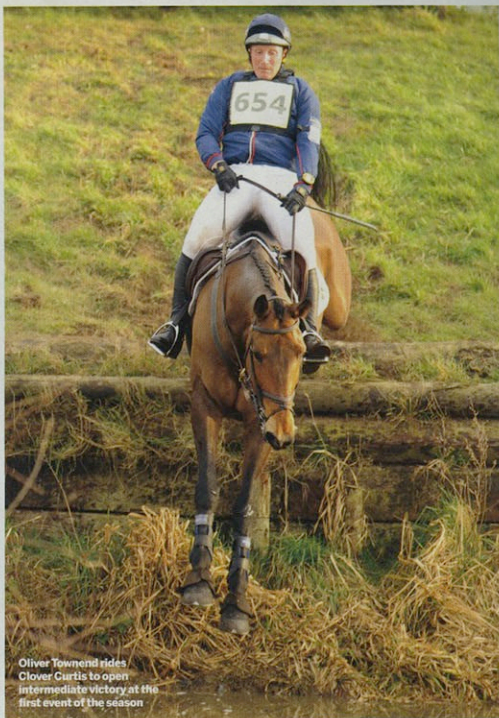
the optimum time — and that was the smallest and oldest horse in the field, Cornice, a 15.1hh 15-year-old mare, pinged round under Suzy Ottewill, but couldn't recoup the damage of a 41.4pen dressage and three poles down. Nevertheless, they leapfrogged up from second-last to eighth.

Young rider Rachael Lupton, 20, impressed with her two speedy greys, Blue Brook and Holly Blue Curtis. They finished third and fifth respectively — sandwiching another grey, High Times (Lucy Holliday), in fourth.

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Oliver Townend rides Clover Curtis to open intermediate victory at the first event of the season



Rachael Lupton and Blue Brook on their way to third in the OI

disappointed with Blue Brook's show jumping — he rapped two.

"The sticky ground didn't suit him — he's normally careful," she said. "But cross-country he was spot-on. He's only 15.3hh, but he really cruises."

Rachael has owned the gelding since he was four, and together they were on the Bedale branch of the Pony Club area teams. He is her principal young rider hope as his dressage is better than that of Holly Blue Curtis, whom she bought from Piggy French last autumn.

The class act in the lineup was Irish rider Jonty Evans's Cregwarrior. They set out across country in the shake-up, adding just one show-jumping penalty to a 33.3 dressage. But their challenge came to an early end when the horse fell at fence three. Both



Intermediate winners Andrew James and Cudlic Earl

Jonty and Cregwarrior were quickly up on their feet, but out of the running.

Oliver Townend put in a spirited bid to land an Isleham double in the intermediate section, but was follied by Andrew James's superb jumping display on Lucy Williams' Cudlic Earl.

Oliver's Tribal Leader was attempting an intermediate four-timer, on the back of wins at Aston, Aske and Oasby, but hampered his chance with two show jumps down to finish third. Black Ace followed suit over the coloured poles, but his superior dressage (28.6) netted second prize.

Andrew James had left himself with plenty to do after dressage — he was fifth-last on 41.9. The horse is being prepared for Compiègne CCI\*\* next month, and was feeling a

trifle exuberant. "He blew up in the dressage," admitted Andrew. "But he is only just still an intermediate, so he'd be one of the better horses in the section — and he's a lot fitter."

Cudlic Earl produced one of only three clears show jumping and backed it up with the fastest time in the section — 2.8pen. The horse is a full Thoroughbred.

"He is very fast," said Andrew. "He's always been super, but it's taken time. He used to glance off skinnies, or stop at the first show jump."

He is also extraordinarily accident-prone. The gelding was sporting facial scars where he had poked his head through a glass window three weeks previously, and a huge bald bruise on his hip where he had "bashed his way into

Wayne Garrick finishes fourth in the intermediate section on Cornish Murphy

Results

ISLEHAM

OI (sec N) — 1. Clover Curtis (O Townend) 27.1, 4.4, 8.35=33.2; Chase The Moon (P French) 30.5, 0.6, 8.37=3.3; Blue Brook (R Lupton) 32.4, 8.4=44.4.

Int (sec M) — 1. Cudlic Earl (A James) 41.8, 0.2, 2.4=44.7; 2. Black Ace (O Townend) 28.6, 8.9, 6.46=2.3; Tribal Leader (O Townend) 32.9, 8.9, 6=50.5.

IN (sec L) — 1. Thats My Locus (H Dove) 37.1, 0.6, 4=43.5; 2. Okay Man (A Smalles) 33.8, 4.6, 4=42.3; OOI Raphael (P French) 33.3, 3.10=46.3.

ON (sec J) — 1. Vanilla Sky (E Canum) 26.2, 0.3, 6=38.2; Sportsfield Othello (J Murphy) 24.3, 0.7, 2=41.5; 3. On Your Marks (J Chappell) 28.7, 0.2=44.3.

JON (sec K) — 1. Task Master (C Nelphinstock) 27.1, 0.3=30.3; 2. One Way (R Chinery) 26.7, 4.1, 6=32.3; Killacoran Blue (E Stoddart) 19.1, 4.10=32.1, nov.

(sec H) — 1. Loughshore Comedy Act (P French) 32.9, 6.8=39.7; 2. Wotzcracker II (R Row) 38.1, 4.0=42.1; 3. Marin D'Ele (S Wales) 32.4, 0.10=44.2.

(sec I) — 1. Treddies (Wills) 25.7, 8.9, 6=43.2; Roma II (A James) 32.7, 0.13=49.3; 3. Ballyragget (P French) 41.9, 0.8=49.0.

OPN (sec DJ) — 1. Cirquenne (O Ruane) 23.0, 0.2=23.2; 2. Russelstown Prince (L Ritche-Bland) 24.0, 0.9=24.3; 3. Salvo (O Moore) 20.5, 0.2=24.5.

PN (sec A) — 1. Cobwold Rivall (G Howe) 20.0, 0.2=20.2; Miami Gold (C Hummable) 32.0, 0=32.3; Ordreds Carey (M Edmundson) 22.0, 0.0=22.0.

(sec B) — 1. Rene Frost (F Payne) 32.0, 0=32.2; The Earl Of Balvedere (P Peters) 25.0, 0.1=25.1; 3. On (B Jones) 37.0, 0=37.0.

(sec C) — 1. Trellis (E Clark) 33.0, 0=33.0; 2. Kimber See (F Young) 33.5, 0.0=33.5; 3. One Two Many NJ (B Levett) 26.4, 4.8=34.8.

the living area of the lorry." Belgian-bred Black Ace finished 1.5pen adrift of Cudlic Earl, but Oliver was content with the nine-year-old's performance at his second intermediate.

"He's been slow to mature," he said. "He has definitely got the potential to be top class, but I'm worried he'll be 25 by then."

As usual at Isleham, the water took its toll. Horses cannot see the precipitous drop until they have taken off over the first fence. The stride within the water towards the steps out is a long two, and many fiddled in three. But it was the show jumping that proved particularly influential —

jumping a rumble of discontent among those who felt that "peculiar distances to stiles" were not appropriate for the first run of the season. Just 16% were without penalty. H&H