

As the event season nears the end of term, Oliver Townend was top of the class with Linda Evans's nine-year-old mare Polvier's Harold Spirit in the single advanced section at Witton Castle.

"I had a brilliant ride; she's so straight. You put her on a line and she just stays on it," said Oliver. "In the second water, she spooked going in. I'm not sure how many strides she took in the water, and God only knows how she jumped up the steps — but she kept on going."

In a competition where fast times were crucial, they added 14.8 time-penalties to a good dressage of 31. This was the second-fastest time of the day.

Having only been together since Windsor in May, Oliver and the mare have since contested several OIs. The home-bred grey by Fire Rocket will be aimed at Bramham next year. Oliver also took home the new Ernest Fenwick Memorial Silver Salver for the highest-placed advanced rider under-25, kindly donated by the England family.

Despite feeling as though she had put her foot down, local rider Julie Robinson and her old campaigner Irish Skater were unable to match the winners.

"I really thought I'd gone fast enough and I can't believe I've lost out again," joked Julie.

When asked if she was retiring the 18-year-old, she quipped: "Nope. Definitely not! We'll just see how he is next year."



Witton Castle

Advanced

- 1st Oliver Townend on Polvier's Harold Spirit
- 2nd Julie Robinson on Irish Skater
- 3rd Polly Stockton on Oscar

Above: advanced winners Oliver Townend and Polvier's Harold Spirit en route to a double clear. Right: Nigel Taylor and the seven-year-old Nordic Gent capitalise on their superb dressage score of 24.3 with a fast clear across country to stay at the front of the OI section

Julie show jumped clear and was foot-perfect round Janet Plant's 27-fence track.

The joint-leader after dressage was Anne Henson's 17-year-old Oscar, ridden by Polly Stockton. They had to settle for overall third place, 0.7pen behind Julie. This pair, which won Martinvast CIC* in August, looked classy in each phase but added 21.2pen to its dressage score.

Nineteen-year-old Rose Macpherson and her sister Ibbly's "hand-me-down", Golden Needle, took fourth in Rose's first ever advanced class.

"Ibby didn't want to ride her any more. I did my first ever intermediate this spring and now this — it's been a brilliant year," said Rose.

After a fortnight's training with Caroline Powell, Rose's decision to switch to the advanced provided the perfect ending. They clocked by far the fastest time of the day, adding just 7.6 time-penalties to their dressage score.

"I know she's really fast. I trust her implicitly because I know she'll always jump — so I don't mind galloping into fences,"

beamed Rose.

Monarch's Jeremiah Daly, ridden by J-P Sheffield, closed his account for the season in fifth place, followed closely by Louise Skelton and her own Bit Of A Barney.

Ruth Friend and Big Thyme, in joint-first place after the dressage, took a dislike to the wall (fence 18) and walked home, as did Julia Crowson (Paprika II) and Wyndham St John (Current Diplomat).

Problems were spread evenly, with the

new Seat Corner (fence seven) proving influential. The awkward approach and distance between the offset narrow Keeper's Cottage (fence nine A/B) also caused trouble.

The advanced track certainly looked more "beefed up" than in recent years. Organiser Richard Shield said: "Following Hugh Thomas's spring visit here, we've changed several fences and built some to maximum dimensions. We'll continue to make changes to keep it in line with other advanced tracks. The problem is that we run early in the spring and don't want to ask questions too early on, and late in the autumn when horses have been running all season."

Nigel Taylor was in pole position in the open intermediate on Mary Williamson's seven-year-old Nordic Gent. The Burgie CCI* runners-up capitalised on their excellent dressage score of 24.3pen and, despite

knocking one show jump down, maintained their lead with just 8.8 time-penalties. They now head to Le Lion d'Angers.

Rachel Thompson's stallion Upton's Deli Circus finished runner-up, ahead of Penny Lawin and Hakuna Matata III.

"He's done so much stud work this year that he's quite tired and couldn't go any faster," explained Rachel after recording a still-credible 11.6 time-penalties.

Problems mainly occurred at the water (fence 11), where the line through the three elements was perhaps a little strong for some.

British team stalwarts Ian Stark and Karen Dixon monopolized the intermediate competition, both putting up impressive performances to win their respective sections.

Ian rode The Relic for the Duchess of Devonshire, leading from the start in section L to add 12.4pen to his dressage score of 25.2. Ian described his cross-country as "just great".

Keeping it in the family, Smart Enough, the nephew of Karen's brilliant Get Smart, won intermediate section K decisively. The Primitive Rising seven-year-old, jointly owned by Ray Parkin and Karen, is also heading for Le Lion d'Angers.

I trust her implicitly because I know she'll always jump — so I don't mind galloping into fences!
Rose Macpherson on Golden Needle



Smart Enough, nephew of the great Get Smart, heads for an intermediate win with Karen Dixon

No signs of retirement for the 18-year-old Irish Skater, advanced runner-up under Julie Robinson

Young pretenders take the crown

A young mare and an up-and-coming rider stake their claim in the advanced section, while Dixon and Stark show why they're still top stuff among the intermediates.

Rachel Wakefield reports

COURSE CHAT

■ FRESHER student Rose Macpherson will miss her first week at Edinburgh University to ride her Highland pony at HOYS.

"It's worth putting your money on us — if my luck continues this week, who knows..." said Rose, hoping she's on a roll after taking fourth place on her first stab at advanced.

■ SCOTSMAN Peter Reid took up riding only two years ago but was having his final run here before heading to Australia for the Adelaide CIC**s, then moving on to Puihinui in New Zealand.

His horse, Jiggalong, is no stranger to trans-hemispheric air travel. He flew to Korea for the Asian Games with his previous rider, Hamish Macauley. Perhaps he's already clocked up frequent flyer points!

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