

# Townend holds nerve at Badminton

JULIAN HERBERT/GETTY IMAGES

*Britons score one-two as Fox-Pitt pushes winner to the limit on final day*

By Pippa Cuckson

OLIVER TOWNEND, one of the bright young things of British eventing, etched his name on the Mitsubishi Motors Trophy with some ice-cool show jumping on Flint Curtis yesterday.

Townend, 26, had only one fence in hand over William Fox-Pitt and Idalgo, whose clear elevated them steadily as others fell foul of some troublesome planks and a vertical.

Townend also lowered the latter, but his well-honed professionalism sanctioned no more.

"When I walked the course I thought we'd had it; the course was mostly left-handed and it's not Flint's best rein," Townend said.

"But I knew that if we cleared the planks we'd be away."

Townend sidetracked Badminton last year and withdrew from the Olympic reserve list, explaining: "We wanted to row our own boat. Though Flint ran out at Burghley he was in his best form ever and from December I knew he could win here."

The peerless Fox-Pitt had two in the frame – Idalgo, which ended second, and Macchiato, ultimately fifth. Sam Griffiths, a Britain-based Australian, rocketed from 20th to third on Happy Times, with Roberto Rotatori (Della M Irham de Viages) fourth, by far Italy's best-ever result here.

As expected, Saturday's cross-country rode fast, with 16 of 80 inside the time and six a whisker away. But dressage leader Karin Dockers was tearful when realising she had misjudged it on Gazelle de la Brasserie, though costly show-jumping would have lost her the title anyway.

The chances of Lucy Wiegiersma, who



**Closing in: Oliver Townend and Flint Curtis clear another fence in style on their way to victory**

was second overnight, also evaporated when Shaabrak booted out an early fence and three of the last four. Shrugging off her disappointment, she said: "The wheels just fell off."

On Saturday, Zara Phillips was downcast after Ardfield Magic Star pulled a tendon when jumping brilliantly across country, while Toytown, ninth overnight, did not compute the questions at the Sunken Road quickly enough and ran out, ripping off a shoe.

Another ignominious departure was

endured by 2008 Olympic bronze medallist Sharon Hunt on Tankerstown, eliminated for 'unauthorised assistance' when GB team manager Yogi Breisner was among several who failed to coax the mulish chesnut into the start-box.

Badminton's result means that Townend and Fox-Pitt are now the only serious contenders for the lucrative, global HSBC Classics prize, as no-one else has sufficient horsepower of four-star calibre for the remaining three events.

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