

TALKING TOGGI

International event rider, Oliver Townend, is the first of the Team Toggi riders to be interviewed by Sue Porter.

Oliver Townend

ENTHUSIASTIC AND COMPETITIVE That's Oli...



Riding Clover Curtis at Chatsworth Horse Trials 2008. Photo by Graham Porter.

Twenty-six year old Oli is based in Shropshire at Gadlas Farm, which he says is the 'most expensive thing I have ever bought, but my biggest achievement', and where, at the last count, there are around 35 horses.

Oli finished his school years in the company of 'some Whitakers' at Salendine Nook High and admits to leaving with 'not many' qualifications. "I had no interest in going further, education-wise, especially to university," he says, "I just wanted to progress in eventing."

Riding since he was seven years old, Oli admits to not really knowing why he decided on eventing as his preferred discipline. "It just happened, but I suppose it was meant to be. My father rode at Burghley, my mother showed side-saddle at county level, and I achieved a lot of success in showjumping and was on the Pony Club eventing team."

"If I hadn't gone into eventing," he says, "I would have looked for a career that would have enabled me to make lots of money. I suppose when I retire I will stay in equestrianism somehow but I'd like to think I could spend some of the time abroad. I love travelling, and skiing in the Swiss Alps, but somehow I always seem to end up in Ireland, perhaps that's why I prefer an Irish headline in my horses!"

Oli's proud to be a member of Team

Toggi, and is delighted to be one of their sponsored riders. "Toggi, and Champion are my main sponsors," he says, "they are great to work with and I get to wear fantastic Toggi clothes all the time. In fact, my favourite item of clothing, which I admit are worn to death, are their wool jumpers."

"I am also very lucky to also be sponsored by TRM, Dodson & Horrell, Bucas, Lincoln, Belvoir, MacWet and Charles Britton Surfaces. Sponsorships are extremely important and very valuable, and for me, personally, take a lot of the financial pressure off."

He admits he is very focussed and ambitious and that he would like to win 'lots' of titles, 'if not all of them'. And, although Gatcombe is down as his favourite event, I suspect that taking home the large winners pot of £100,000 from the 2008 Express Eventing Challenge at Cardiff, with Flint Curtis, might now be in the running as a contender. Flint Curtis is, according to Oli, "my favourite horse - past or present", but he does admit that if there was one horse he wished he could have owned, it would have been Fachoudette.

I then asked him where he sourced his horses, and what age he preferred. "I will source my horses from anywhere," he says, "they just have to be good enough. As for age - well nothing more than 12 years old. I'm always on the look out though for something special."



Oli, relaxing with 'Piggy' French.



Doing what he does best - eventing.

With a yard full of horses Oli's day is taken up with training, and he puts in around 11/12 hours a day, with a daily routine that, as he puts it, "starts around 5am and finishes when it's dark." "Social time is practically non-existent,"

Oli says, "especially when you have a yard full of horses and compete every weekend." So, I asked him who would be his ideal dinner guests (if he had time, obviously) and what would he give them to eat.

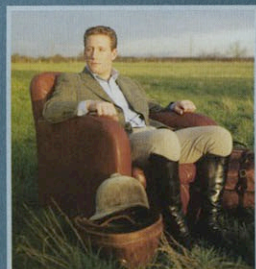
"That's an interesting question, let me think," he replies. "Well, it looks as if it'd be as lads night, as I'd invite Lester Piggott, Michael Dickinson, AP McCoy, John Francoombe and Nelson Pessoa. Champagne is my 'tipple' so that would flow all through the evening, and as I personally love Chinese food, I would order in a banquet take-away. I suspect the evening would be quite riotous and a lot of fun."

As we go to print the 2009 eventing season is underway and I'm sure Oli will be out there as enthusiastic and as competitive as ever. He's a very talented rider, and deserves all the success that comes his way, and with 2012 beckoning who knows...?!

Photos, unless mentioned, courtesy of Toggi.

Oli's Top Tip Just go out there and enjoy yourself - have lots of fun.

Oli TAKES PART IN A FASHION-SHOOT FOR THE TOGGI CATALOGUE



Off The Cuff:

Any Nicknames?
Apple

Music Preference?
Modern/Irish - KT Tunstall

Most Read Book?
Vincent O'Brien Biography

Favourite Film?
Layer Cake

Last Item Bought?
Shaving Gel

Beer or Champagne?
Champagne

Who would you give your last Rolo to?
Piggy French

Most embarrassing moment?
Had lots - too embarrassing to tell

What was the last lie you told?
Can't remember - it was a long time ago

Do you have any pets?
Three terriers - Flint, Maisie & Tilly