

Townend and Flint Curtis hold nerve at Badminton

Equestrianism

Jenny MacArthur

Oliver Townend, riding Flint Curtis, became the first British winner of the Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials since 2005 after a nail-biting final show-jumping phase yesterday. His win, on Edward and Robert Nicholson's outstanding grey gelding, came at the expense of William Fox-Pitt, the winner in 2004, who had to settle for second place — for the third time — despite completing the best round of the day on *Idalgo*.

Townend, 26, who won £100,000 with Flint Curtis at the inaugural Express Eventing International last November and collected a further £60,000 yesterday, was ecstatic. "I've been dreaming of this since I was 8," he said. Third in 2006, he withdrew in 2007 because of the hard ground, going on to win a team gold medal at the European Three-Day Event Championships that year. There was disappointment last year when he missed out on Olympic selection, but he reset his sights for this year's Badminton.

Even so, he needed every ounce of horsemanship to secure the win. He could afford only one mistake over the 13-fence course. "I knew the planks [Fence II] was the one I might have down and I was also worried because the track was on a left rein, which Flint doesn't like," Townend said. He

Results and positions

1 *Flint Curtis* (O Townend, GB) 44.5pens; 2 *Idalgo* (W Fox-Pitt, GB) 45.2; 3 *Happy Times* (S Griffiths, Aus) 53.3; 4 *Irham de Vaiges* (R Rotatori, It) 55.7; 5 *Macchiato* (W Fox-Pitt) 55.8; 6 *Shaabrak* (L Wiegiersma, GB) 56.5.

HSBC FEI Classics: Leading positions: 1 Townend 18pts; 2 W Fox-Pitt 17; 3 L Fredericks (Aus) 15; 4 B Hoy (Ger) 12; 5 Wiegiersma 11.

duly used up his advantage at the planks but stayed on four faults to finish 0.7 of a point ahead of Fox-Pitt.

Despite the frustration of another