

Indefatigable Townend can now set sights on £150,000 Classic prize



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YORKSHIRE'S Oliver Townend fulfilled the ambition of a lifetime at the weekend when he won the Mitsubishi Badminton Horse Trials riding Flint Curtis.

Townend, 26, an indefatigable rider, had his work cut out to win this event, beating the highly experienced William Fox-Pitt into second place.

It means he goes one point ahead of Fox-Pitt as leader in the HSBC FEI Classics series, which has a top prize of £150,000, after two events, with Luhmulen, Burghley and Pau still to come.

The Huddersfield-born rider adds his £60,000 Badminton prize money to the £100,000 he won with Flint Curtis at the new Express Eventing competition at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff in December.

As he recently bought his own farm, Townend said jokingly he could do with the money. But he was truly thrilled to have won at Badminton after four years of waiting.

He and Flint Curtis were third there in 2006 but did not compete in 2007 or 2008. His partnership with Edward and

Robert Nicholson's grey horse has been one of highs and lows but Townend said he thought this would be Flint Curtis's year to win.

Nevertheless it was a nerve-racking finish after he had a fence down in the final show-jumping element but still managed to stay ahead of Idalgo and Fox-Pitt, who also took fifth place on Macchiato.

Townend said he had been dreaming about this moment since childhood.

"I hope to compete in all of the HSBC Classics," said Townend. "I've got horses for all of them."

Flint Curtis, though, will take a well-earned breather and

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Townend added: "I knew he would do it, somehow. I knew last November that he could win it, and now that he has won it, I am still dreaming.

"I know him inside out, and I knew if I did the right things then he would pull it off. It is an indescribable feeling. Flint is a very special horse - we have a very good partnership. Ever since Burghley last September, he has just got better and better."

Australian Sam Griffiths had a fault-free round on Happy Times to gain third place and fourth went to Italian rider Roberto Rotatori on Della M Irham de Viages.

It was his first time at Badminton and he became the highest placed Italian rider in the history of the event.

Lucy Weigersma, who had been in second place overnight on Shaabrak, ended in sixth place after incurring 16 show-jumping penalties.

Zara Phillips had a disappointing Badminton after Ardfield Magic Star pulled a tendon on the cross-country and Toytown had a run-out and lost a shoe.

Other British riders to finish in the top 20 were: Ruth Edge, 8th; Harry Meade, 10th; Francis Whittington, 15th; Daisy Dick, 16th and Polly Stockton, 17th. **SPORT** Endurance held its most northern ride to date at ESCRICK Park near York.

There was a good turn out of more than 60 riders, members and non-members from different counties. The routes were on mainly flat terrain over farmland and woodland with wide tracks and a few gates.

Lack of rain had made the ground harder in some sections and so the minimum speed was reduced to 5mph for the competition riders.

The pleasure riders had a choice of seven, 13 or 22-mile routes. Other Sport Endurance rides in Yorkshire will be held from Crowedge near Sheffield on July 26; from near Doncaster on August 23 and at Easingwold on August 30. More information at www.sportendurance.co.uk.



TOP DUO: Badminton Horse Trials winners Oliver Townend and Flint Curtis.

Picture: Barry Batchelor/PA