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The 'generous and honest' Belane Queen takes the national title for Nicola Wilson

Andrew Hoy – who won here in 1997 on Darien Powers – led the dressage with a mark of 31.5 on Rutherglen, but three showjumps dropped them down to 15th. Their weekend ended sourly with a fall at 1c, the second of two downhill skinny brushes on three forward strides after a drop wall.

Oliver Townend, whose results at Gatcombe showed why he is undoubtedly the most successful British rider of his age, lay in second and third with Mr Hiho (32.6) and Armada (33.5). Patsy Mason's Mr Hiho just had one fence down in the second phase, but Paul Ridgeon's Armada – who had jumped clear on his two other CIC3\* runs, at Burnham Market and Barbury, this season – hit four.

Mr Hiho therefore shared the lead with Paulank Brockagh, whose clear round elevated her from eighth after dressage, but Oliver withdrew the San Remo 11-year-old, who is on the way back to full fitness after a breathing operation.

Armada had plummeted to 23rd. But the brilliant, difficult 16-year-old is probably the fastest event horse in the world, and he and Oliver sailed round inside the time – as they did two years ago – and he shot back up the order to finish fourth.

"I had no intention of trying to do that – I set off at a nice speed and added a stride to all the single fences, to help prepare for Burghley," said Oliver who, when discussing the frustrations involved with eventing Armada, added: "He's just too good not to go on with."

Three of the top 10 after dressage were withdrawn at that stage – Bay My Hero (fifth, William Fox-Pitt), Clifton Lush (seventh, Jack Paget) and Coopers Law (10th, Emilie Chandler). And a further three of the top 10 after showjumping decided not to run cross-country – Mark Todd and NZB Campino (seventh), Izzy Taylor and KBIS Briarlands Matilda (ninth), and Andrew Nicholson and Perfect Stranger (third).

The latter was as a result of a fall at the final fence with his fourth-placed ride, ClInabraden Evo. Andrew injured his neck and was receiving treatment at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford as H&H went to press on Monday. It was a frustrating weekend for Andrew – the pre-event favourite, last year's winner Avebury, was withdrawn before dressage with a foot abscess.

Between Christopher and Oliver in the final line-up were two women who have become extremely competitive at the top level in the past year or so – New Zealand's Jonelle Price and Britain's Nicola Wilson.

Both picked up just 6.4 time-faults across country and they finished half a mark apart on 48.2 and 48.7 – Nicola did a better dressage with Belane Queen, but Jonelle only collected four, rather



Tom McEwen and the 'quirky' Toledo De Kerker claim third in the Intermediate

than eight, showjumping penalties on Trisha Rickards' Classic Moet.  
 Jonelle, finishing second on her first Festival of British Eventing ride, said: "She's not the most talented and is no oil painting, but she is so gutsy and brave and is a pleasure to ride because she gives it everything. Tim [Jonelle's husband, sixth in Saturday's

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Oliver Townend shows the promise of his young horses with a Novice (Sonic De Sermentol, pictured) and Intermediate (Note Worthy) Championship double

Intermediate Championship on Kiltubrid Rhapsody) said riding round here was like going down a drainpipe, but I had a beautiful ride."

Nicola's third place gives her the title of British national champion on Ann and Valerie Robson's coloured mare, who is gathering a serious fan club. "I'm pinching myself," she said. "I was very grateful to Belane Queen at the double of corners [14 and 15] – I slightly overshot my line and she was so generous and honest."

Louise Harwood and Georgie Strang, both of whom had the look of women determined to prove the selectors for the European Championships wrong to overlook them, took fifth and sixth places on Whitson and Cooley Business Time.

And Olivia Wilmot – one of three riders to jump two clear showjumping rounds alongside Andrew Nicholson and William Fox-Pitt – was seventh on Cool Dancer. Her second ride Zebedeo De Foja was one of several, including Fernhill Pimms, sixth after showjumping under William Fox-Pitt, to run out at the second of two big corners at fence 15. William also picked up 20 penalties on fifth-placed Luxury FH, this time at fence 11.

There were 30 cross-country

starters in the Open Championship and exactly half of them jumped clear. Seven fences on Mark Phillips' track caused problems – and just poor Sam Griffiths was caught out by the brush arrowhead at 21b. It is the first cross-country blip his 2014 Badminton winner has ever had. She looked to leave a leg, and rider and horse were as surprised as each other to find themselves on the deck. Luckily, the mare cantered merrily off and was caught just before crossing the road between the course and the lorry park.

The rain gods had not smiled on Gatcombe and the going was fairly firm, but Christopher Burton praised the grass cover and the work done to the track.

Jonelle added: "I was pleasantly surprised by how the cross-country rode. The worst part was the dressage."

Townend's double

If Armada had been a little less casual over the coloured poles, Oliver Townend would have become the first person to win all three of Gatcombe's championship titles. The 32-year-old still had an outstanding weekend, taking both the Smith & Williamson Intermediate Championship and the Dodson & Horrell Novice

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IN THE GENES

Third generation home-bred

POLLY STOCKTON was third in the Novice Championship on Mafra Smithers' Stanhopes Mr Macoy.

By Stanhopes Diddicoy, the seven-year-old is out of Miss Haversham, whom Polly evented to advanced level, and is the third generation that Mafra has bred; Owen Moore rode the grandam, Swallow XII, also to advanced.

Magnus Nicholson broke in Stanhopes Mr Macoy, and the horse was successful in the show ring before going to Polly.

"Hunting helped him enormously," she said. "He's quite confident about life and is laid-back and easy – his mother was much more feisty!"



Championship – and finishing second to himself in the latter.

"I love it here," he said. "You're up against the best peers to your horses. This is to a certain extent our Cheltenham, and it's very special when you fancy one for it and a plan comes off."

Oliver led from pillar to post on the winners of both classes. Note Worthy, owned by Andrew Cawthray, left the rest of the field trailing by a staggering margin of 12 marks in the Intermediate final. The Limmerick 11-year-old was easily the fastest of his class and added only 1.2 cross-country time-faults to his 23.3 dressage mark.

Oliver sold Note Worthy as a seven-year-old to Tim Boland, who competed him in Australia. When Tim came to Britain to have a crack at getting to the World Equestrian Games, he brought

the horse with him and Oliver, who had always liked him, bought him back.

"I really rate him – he's careful and needs a squeeze occasionally, but has endless gallop," he said. "I was drawn early so I had to go quick, but that's his strength."

Second was Vittoria Panizzon riding Amy and Patricia Lambert's Chequers Play The Game, who finished on 36.5. Vittoria, who was third in this class in 2011 with her Olympic ride Borough Pennzy, took on the ride from Jack Paget this season.

"Because I'm used to producing mine from scratch he still seems like a new ride, but I'm really enjoying him – he's a happy, easy horse who tries hard," she said.

Tom McEwen took third on Frank and Jane Inns' Toledo De

Kerker, on whom he finished second at Le Lion d'Angers last year.

"He's very quirky – he can bolt, you can't jump him at home and he's very tricky in the warm-up, but at the same time he's got a lovely temperament and was completely class today," said Tom, who will aim the son of Diamant De Semilly at Blenheim's CCI3\*.

William Fox-Pitt was fourth on Ramdam De Mons, while Oliver also took fifth on Power Drive.

A giant future star

THIS is the second time Oliver – who has now won eight Festival of British Eventing titles – has taken the top two placings in the Dodson & Horrell Novice Championship. He did it 10 years ago in 2005 on Best Of Spicars and Haveray Park Beau (Armada

was fourth under Andrew Nicholson), and this time he rode Sonic De Sermentol into first and Ridire Dorcha into second.

Sonic De Sermentol, a nine-year-old French-bred Anglo-Arab, belongs to Belgian eventer Stephanie D'Andrimont.

"He's huge – just under 18hh," said Oliver. "I told Stephanie two months ago we'd win this, but being Belgian she had no idea what I was talking about!"

They completed on their dressage score of 27.7.

Karyn Shuter's seven-year-old Ridire Dorcha, another by Limmerick, and bought from Vere Phillips, only started eventing in March.

"I'll take a breather with him now – he's got here very quickly, but because he finds it easy, not because he's been under pressure," said Oliver.

Polly Stockton took third just 0.2 of a penalty behind (see box above), while Piggy French finished on her dressage score for fourth with Morswood.

Lizzie Baugh and Quarry Man had been second after dressage, but 10 time-faults dropped them to 14th. William Fox-Pitt – eighth on ReInstate and 15th on the Soapdodger – had a ducking in the water from Dynasty, while Andrew Nicholson managed to get unshipped from Byrnesgrove First Diamond at the third fence, remount and still get home inside the time. **H&H**

RESULTS

Open ch. - 1, TS Jaimalio (C Burton) 36.9,4.28=43.7; 2, Classic Moet (J Price) 38.8,4.6,4=48.2; 3, Belane Queen (N Wilson) 34.3,8.6,4=48.7. Int. ch. - 1, Note Worthy (O Townend) 23.3,0.12=24.5; 2, Chequers Play The Game (V Panizzon) 26.5,4,10=36.5; 3, Toledo De Kerker (T McEwen) 24.2,0.12=4=36.6. Nov. ch. - 1, Sonic De Sermentol (O Townend) 30.7,0.0,4=31.1; 2, Stanhopes Mr Macoy (P Stockton) 29.7,0.16=31.3. Cornhill Cup - 1, Deo Volente II (N Brook) 22.5,0.0=22.5; 2, Sari De Lobelle (S Chittiborough) 32.0,0.0=32.7; 3, Lorelei (C Taylor) 34.4,0.0=34.4.



Vittoria Panizzon and Chequers Play The Game, a new ride for her this year, pick up second in the Intermediate Championship