

Hindquarters

"His hindlegs and hocks are away from him, which could make it hard to engage and propel him up and over a fence," says Henrietta Knight, trainer of treble Gold Cup winner Best Mate, a showing judge, and who has evented up to four-star.

Having said that, there are plenty of racehorses with similar hindlegs — although it's harder to shorten them, it can help them gallop with a big, long stride. He looks as though he's light on his feet.

"I'd prefer to see more of a second thigh and more rounded quarters — I like a good bottom, but he is in very good condition and I can see why he has done so well as an event horse."

Outlook

"The overall picture is of a nice workmanlike horse, who would be capable of whatever job he was given," says Henrietta.

"He's not an oil painting, but many top National Hunt and event horses aren't. He looks fit, lean and tough.

"This horse has a lovely outlook. He has a sensible head, a kind, genuine eye and nicely shaped ears. They are well set apart, not mean ears. He looks straightforward and honest, although I gather he was quite naughty when he was young."

Front

"He has a good foreleg, which is well positioned under his shoulder," says Henrietta. "This should help him bend his knees and jump well. I like his pasterns, which are neither too long nor too short. I wouldn't be worried about the bump on his knee or his capped hocks — those are obviously old injuries which don't affect him. Considering his age, his joints look to be in good order.

"Here it looks as if his shoulder is a little straight. A good slope gives well-oiled movement, and helps with extension. A straight shoulder can give stumpy action as they struggle to bring their legs forward. It could be that his excellent foreleg counteracts this."

17.1hh 16yo Spanish chestnut gelding

Owners: Paul and Diana Ridgdon
Bred by: B.T.A/Casa de Neves, Spain (Ramon Beca)
Rider: Oliver Townend
Successes: British national champion, Galcombe 2013, 2nd Badminton 2014, 4th Burghley 2012, 2,273 British Eventing points

Armada

Oliver Townend's cross-country machine is still, at the age of 16, going from strength to strength

HE has a higher cruising speed than most riders would be comfortable with," says Oliver, referring to Armada's brilliance across country. "He doesn't like to be overly controlled, so I try not to interfere."

Only a handful of horses have ever made the time at Gatcombe's British Open Championships; in 2013, Armada finished 10 seconds inside.

"He was even slowing down in the last minute," says Oliver. "That was the most thrilling cross-country ride — he went through a six-stride distance on four. He's like a full blood horse; he has a huge gallop and serious scope."

Andrew Nicholson produced this 17.1hh son of Fines up to CCI4*, passing the ride to Oliver in 2012.

"I remember Andrew saying that as a novice, Armada made everything feel ridiculously easy — the only problems came when he tried to control him," Oliver says.

'When his blood boils, he is very fiery'

Armada has forced Oliver to re-evaluate the way he judges distances.

"If I can't see a distance, it's not a worry, as he pulls himself off the obvious stride anyway. He just picks up and goes."

The chestnut's chink is showjumping — he can drop four or five on the final day. But Oliver believes that, at 16, the horse is still on the up.

"It's amazing how much I look forward to riding him each day," he says. "Most horses his age are past their best, but he's getting better and better."

Although he's "calm and gentle" in the stable, Oliver has learnt to select competitions very carefully. Some atmospheres flick a switch.

"When his blood boils, he is very fiery," he says. "I just choose where to be competitive. His mentality is the only thing that holds him back. At his peak he is a five-star horse." **H&H**

Fines XX

Berganza 17

El Gaucho XX

Mariska XX

Golfi

Pandora