



Just two weeks into their partnership, Oliver Townsend and Fenyas Elegance jump clear to claim third in Saumur's CC13*

Townend's gamble pays off



The home side take the top two spots in the NAF Five Star Saumur CC13*, but Oliver Townend presents a potential new British team horse in third. Martha Terry reports

OLIVER TOWNEND'S bold gamble to take a horse he had ridden just six times to Saumur CC13* paid off, as he finished third and best Brit with Fenyas Elegance.

"I'm just grateful she didn't make a fool of me!" said Oliver, who started riding PJ Hegarty's Ricardo Z-sired 11-year-old, previously competed by Aoife Clark, two weeks previously.

The French crowd cheered home the winner and runner-up, as Mathieu Lemoine on an exciting nine-year-old, Bart L., just shaded Astier Nicolas (Plaf De B'Neville). The two Frenchmen had been in charge from the outset, but beneath them the order chopped and changed – especially during the influential showjumping phase. A double clear from Britain's Nana Dalton on Abbeylara Prince moved her

up from 21st to sixth. It might have been a low-key renewal of the Loire event, set in the sandy woodlands of the French national school of equitation, but don't bet against the top three horses reappearing at the Europeans or the Olympics.

Astier has already hung a European team bronze in his cabinet courtesy of Plaf, while Mathieu has been knocking at the door for a big result. And on this performance, could Oliver finally have the showjumper to propel him back into team reckoning?

None hit the 30s
OLIVER held the lead with the inexperienced Note Worthy on dressage day one, scoring 46.1. It proved to be a decent mark, too, as although Friday's riders pushed closer to the magical 40, none topped it. Mathieu and Wiltshire-based Astier



Above left: Astier Nicolas rides Plaf De B'Neville into the runner-up spot. Above right: Mark Kyle and Jemilla add just 0.4 of a penalty to their dressage to finish fifth

took first and second with 40.9 and 41.3, but the French crowd were biting their nails right up to the final two riders. This pair, Andrew Nicholson (Cillnabraden Evo) and Oliver Townend (Fenyas Elegance), produced some movements to threaten the French en route to third (43.9) and fourth (44.9), with Note Worthy now fifth.

Oliver was thrilled with Fenyas Elegance's test. "She's complicated on the flat, so I was really proud of her," said Oliver. "She has huge ability, but has had some difficulties recently and isn't good at handling pressure."

"She knows what to do, so I sat on her just five minutes before my test and patted her."

Pathfinder Nana Dalton was the only other Brit to break into the 40s, lying 10th on Sheila Jones' Elite Syncopation.

Top two unchanged
PIERRE MICHELET'S track proved less exacting than expected, with 78% of the 32 horses going clear, 12 of whom were inside the time.

Nana put up an excellent trailblazing round to finish seven seconds outside the time with Elite Syncopation. The grey had a wind operation (see box, p68) after "hitting a wall" at Blenheim CIC3*.

"It's the first time I've asked him to go fast," commented Nana. "He's so big [17.1hh] and the first part was twisty. He misread fence 4 [a bullfinch in a pond under a roof] and almost landed on his take-off stride, but he was very generous."

Andrew and Oliver both had contrasting experiences on their two rides. While Andrew's Tesco zoomed round inside the time to move up from 17th to eighth, third-placed >



Eventual winners Bart L., by Gribaldi, and Mathieu Lemoine finish the second phase 29 seconds inside the optimum time, despite the horse feeling 'overwhelmed' at first and needing to be set up

Cillnabraden Evo jumped out at 15b, an offset corner three strides after a massive table – which also caught out Alice Dunsdon (Fernhill Present).

Meanwhile, Oliver's Note Worthy struggled to regain his enthusiasm after an early scare at the watery bullfinch, and declined to jump the narrow house into another pond.

"It's just lack of mileage," said Oliver. "He is a good a horse as I've ridden and has a serious future."

The two French leaders left nothing to chance, both blitzing round to retain the first-phase order. Mathieu was 29 seconds inside the optimum on his Gribaldi-sired CC13* debutant.

"My stopwatch stopped at the fourth fence," said Mathieu, who was third at Le Lion's young horse championships in 2013 with this horse.

"Bart was overwhelmed to start with, so I had to set him up for the fences and it felt slow – but I was wrong about that."

"He took out strides after the brush over [to two offset triple brushes] but I just went with it."

Like his compatriot, Astier could afford to freewheel towards the final fence – the four-foot thick "stem" of a magnificent petunia bouquet.

"I was slow at the beginning, but Plaf has a huge stride and made it up on the racecourse stretch," said Astier of the 12-year-old who had last year off due to stiffness and was here to qualify for the Olympics.

"He's so experienced that if we'd had a run-out it would have been my fault."

When 2008 Badminton winner Nicolas Touzaint (Radjague) slotted into the third berth vacated by Andrew, the pressure was on Oliver, last to go with Fenyas Elegance. Although he was stepping into the unknown with a new ride over a

5,940m track, the mare stopped the clock with 14 seconds to spare.

"Every time I put the pressure on, she responded," said Oliver. "Fitness was a question mark, but she is a professional, she wanted to get to the end."

"I hope to give her a more fluent ride once I know her better, but we were effective."

Another British rider to impress was Emily Llewellyn, who rose from 18th to ninth – her final result after rolling a showjump – with Worldly Du Hans. Keith Lovelock bought the Worldly-sired gelding last year at Fontainebleau.

"I saw him and wanted him immediately – and we persuaded his owners to sell," said Emily. "He was a machine today; he did everything I asked and more."

Kyle's clear takes fifth

WHEN the first two into the ring, Nana Dalton (Abbeylara Prince) and Andrew Nicholson (Cillnabraden Evo) jumped clear – out of order because of their second rides – it looked like the showjumping would be a formality. But it was another 15 horses before another clear, when Mark Kyle popped round on Jemilla for eventual fifth.

Despite the earlier devastation, the top three riders kept their cool for clear rounds. Fenyas Elegance never looked like touching one.

"It's a change for me to have one that does that on the final day," said Oliver, referring to his top horse Armada's disdain for the coloured poles. "She's exceptional. She has her quirks, but I am more than happy to live with them for the rest of her life."

Astier's nerves were jangling as he missed at an upright on the horse with whom he finished ninth at Badminton 2013 – who is not the most reliable

AGAINST THE ODDS

ELITE SYNCOPATION looked a picture galloping clear with Nana Dalton. But as the saddle was removed, it exposed an extraordinary spine. A chunk has been scooped out behind his wither, so it looks almost as if he has a second wither 25cm further down.

"He reared and fell over backwards a few years ago," said Nana. "He was knocked out cold for 10 minutes and broke four vertebrae. When they got infected, the vets cut them out. It honestly doesn't affect him."

The grey has had five operations – two for his withers, others for a tooth, his wind and a tendon sheath.

"He sliced the tendon at Erigde as a novice and he was on the table that night – and had an MRSA infection then, too," said Nana, delighted with the Golden Bash gelding's 18th place at his first CC13*.

"He'll probably go all the way now. He shouldn't because of everything that's happened to him, but he has the scope."

showjumper – and had to take a circuitous route to the treble, leading to a time-fault. He rubbed a few more but they all stayed put.

It'll be seeing more of this smooth, quiet rider in the future. His style is reminiscent of Andrew Nicholson, for whom he worked when he first came to England back in 2009. He's now settled in Calne, at Helen Cole's base.

"England is brilliant for eventing; so competitive, so many events," said Astier, 26. "It's fun coming back to France though – we have great fans."

Bart had been supreme throughout and was immaculate showjumping, leading to chants of "Mathieu, Mathieu" from just those fans as the 31-year-old galloped his victory lap of honour. **H&I**

Nana Dalton and Abbeylara Prince are clear both across country and in the influential third phase to move up from 21st to sixth



Picture by Eric Knoll

ONE TO WATCH

Hanne Wind Ramsgaard
TRUE amateurs are virtually non-existent nowadays at this level, but the smiling Dane Hanne Wind Ramsgaard is an exception. The 36-year-old works full-time in a windmill factory, and could be heading to the Olympics, having finished eighth. She bought Vestervangs Arami in 2005 as a foal from local breeders to do dressage. But as she took up eventing in 2007, he was diverted. The pair both did their first CC14* in Pau in October, but this was their first cross-country inside the time since one-star. "He has no thoroughbred blood," says Hanne Wind of her 17.2hh mount. "But he always works with me, fighting to get between the flags."

