

# How Oliver made the leap

The milkman's son who rose to become one of the world's most successful eventers, Oliver Townend has taken the top spot at Badminton and Burghley. Here he shares the key moments, people and ponies who made him who he is today

## Learning from dad

Growing up watching his dad, Alan, work with young and problem horses, Oliver was determined to follow in his footsteps. "Dad was always very natural with horses and they liked him," he says. "I remember watching him work with them and he was so patient. He never had any fear, no matter how sharp they were. Dad was a milkman, but evented in his spare time and produced and sold horses to help pay for his hobby. He's the reason I first got into horses and he's still very hands on now. He works with the younger horses and helps keep my top horses fit when I'm away competing."

## 'Cracking' Cool Mule

While Oliver's first pony, Brambles, was good fun, along came Cool Mule, who was a cut above. "I bought him when I was 10 and he was cool, hence the name, but very naughty at the start," says Oliver. "He was tricky to ride and, as a result, I bought him for next to nothing. It took a lot of hard work, but we went on to ride at the Horse of the Year Show and take the Junior Newcomers Show Jumping title."

## Leaving school

"I wasn't interested in school and, as soon as I could, I left," says Oliver. "My mum

wanted me to carry on in education, but I was out of there!" It was all about horses for Oliver, even back then, and from the second he got Cool Mule and caught the competitive bug he knew he wanted a career with horses. "My first job was working in Ireland for Carol Gee and Paul Donovan, who were dealers," he says. "I later worked for Christopher Bartle and Kenneth Clawson, and started my own business, buying and selling horses, at 21."

## Finding my 'eyes on the ground'

Even top riders need guidance, and Oliver has found that in good friend Karyn Shuter. "She's a close friend who, when she watches me ride, acts like my own eyes from the ground," says Oliver. "She's very direct and explains things in the simplest of terms."

## Touring with Geoff

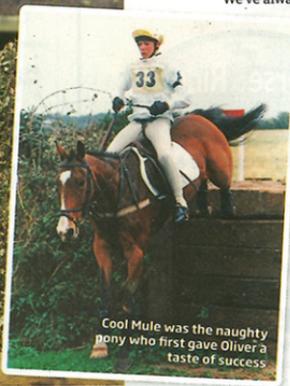
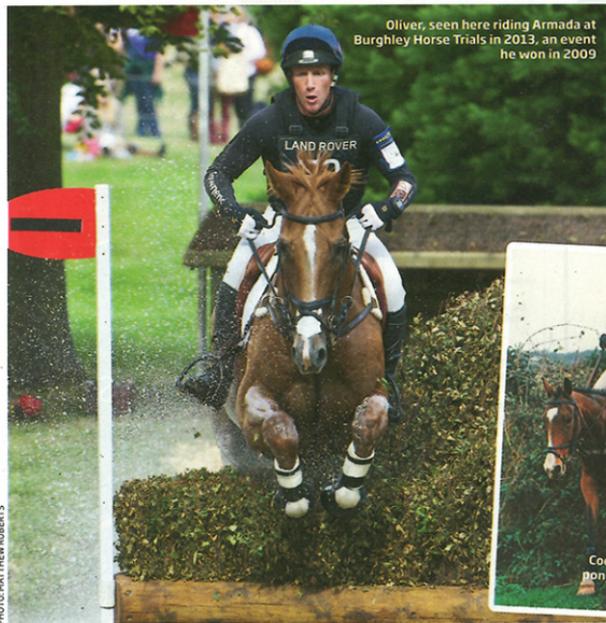
Together with show jumping personality Geoff Billington, Oliver's popular Champions Tour a couple of years back saw him entertain crowds up and down the country. "I've no plans to tour with Geoff again at the moment, but he keeps mentioning it!" says Oliver. "The tour was great fun and we loved demo-ing at Your Horse Live in 2013, too."

We've always got on well and we spark off each other."

## Discovering my 'drive'

Eventing's an expensive business and it takes real drive and hard graft to keep everything going. "My idea of relaxing is to ride nine horses rather than 13," says Oliver. "I wouldn't be where I am now without the support of my team and my sponsors."

Oliver, seen here riding Armada at Burghley Horse Trials in 2013, an event he won in 2009



Cool Mule was the naughty pony who first gave Oliver a taste of success

PHOTO: MATTHEW ROBERTS