Nobody can catch Oliver Townend as he captures his first British Open title with Cillnabradden Evo

Townend ticks Open title off his bucket list

Edited by Pippa Roome
@pipparoome
DO YOU HAVE AN EVENTING STORY?
Email: pippa.roome@timeinc.com

'He went round in cruise control': Thomas Carlile and Upsilon slot into British Open second

Festival of British Eventing, presented by BETA, Gatcombe Park, Glos
5-7 August
By Aimi Clark

IT is rare to find a roll of honour without Oliver Townend's name on it, but that was the case in the British Eventing Open championship until four days ago, when he finally added the title to his already bulging CV.

The Yorkshireman has been crowned Gatcombe's intermediate and novice champion an impressive seven times, but the closest he had come to taking the main prize was three years ago, when Armada finished second to Jock Paget and Clifton Lush, earning Oliver the British National title.

This time Oliver partnered Sally-Anne Egginton's Cillnabradden Evo, a 10-year-old perhaps best known as the horse that fell at the final fence here 12 months earlier, causing former rider Andrew Nicholson's serious neck injury in the process.

Even to the untrained eye Cillnabradden Evo, by the KWPN Creevagh Ferro Ex Siebe, looked weary as Oliver coaxed him to the cross-country finish line, but the second of only two sub-40 dressage marks and a rare showjumping clear – there were four in total – meant they could afford to rack up 10.4 time-faults.

"This horse gets a lot of stick and I do too for riding him. But he'd be as good a jumper as I've ever had and he's very genuine – he just does the odd really thick thing occasionally," stated Oliver, who is also the first British rider to win a leg of the inaugural Event Rider Masters (ERM) CIC3* series, which ran as part of the Open championship.

"He doesn't have a huge distance at this speed and I tried to go as quickly as I could while conserving him as much as possible. It's very nice to win here, but coming home I thought it had gone."

Gatcombe's rolling terrain and Mark Phillips' twisty cross-country course are notorious for being a speed test, and this year was no different. Ireland's Elizabeth Power confessed herself "surprised" to finish on the podium – in third – after a two-phase mark that initially left her and the Good Times Syndicate's Soladoun 16th.

Had their clear not included a momentary pause in the first water while they fought to regain their balance, or the nine-year-old grey hadn't slipped in front of the BETA combination's triple brush at 20b, they probably wouldn't have exceeded the 6mins 30secs optimum time by three seconds.

"There's no such thing as minute markers here – your foot is to the floor the whole way," said Elizabeth. "I brought Soladoun here because he's a speed horse. He's never been off the bridle to the finish before but I could tell that he'd been around Gatcombe."

Upsilon impresses

ELIZABETH finished 0.7 of a penalty behind France's Thomas Carlile, whose eight-year-old Upsilon impressed for the runner-up spot.

"This is some consolation for missing the Olympics," said Thomas. "I'd never ridden here before, but I worked for the Fredericks in 2006 so I knew all the legends of it being a twisty, ▷

'Foot to the floor': Elizabeth Power and Soladoun finish third in the Open

'I think so much of this horse': mother-of-two Sarah Cohen is fifth with Treason

Pictures by www.focusonhorses.com

Sarah Bullimore en route to sixth aboard the Burghley-bound Reve Du Rouet

I OWE IT TO...

A change of noseband

NICOLA WILSON, ninth in the British Open on Bulana (above), credited the mare's tidy cross-country clear to a kineton noseband.

"I've struggled with her brakes in the past because when she gets a little racey she tucks her nose in and looks down," said Nicola. "I wanted something that would lift her head and poll up so that she could see the fence.

"I tried a kineton noseband at Barbury and it made a big difference. It gave me confidence today knowing that I could let her run on and she would come back to me when I touched the rein."

fast course. I thought it might be difficult for my horse because he's young, but he went round in cruise control."

Paul Tapner slotted into fourth on Yogi Bear VIII, securing a 21-point lead in the ERM series in the process.

"I'm surprised how slow I was," rued the Aussie, who picked up 9.6 time-faults. "We should have been closer to the time – I'm kicking myself a bit."

Two Burghley-bound horses, Sarah Bullimore's Reve Du Rouet and Sarah Cohen's Treason, finished on 62.2, but the latter was seven seconds quicker and closer to the optimum for fifth.

This is the only horse that Sarah rides now, alongside teaching and being a mother of two.

"It's tough keeping your fitness up and staying strong," admitted Sarah. "I was riding 10 or 12 horses a day before and there's nothing like that for keeping your eye in. I think so much of this horse. He's 14 and I'll keep going while he does."

Andrew Hoy was the most expensive casualty of Di Boddy's showjumping track, his dressage leader Cheeky Calimbo kicking out five fences and not running across country.

Sara Squires galloped out of the start box lying fourth, but Sula Blue stopped for the third time on course at the final Red Savannah Water (23ab) and was eliminated.

Izzy Taylor will be seeking recompense at Burghley for KBIS Briarlands Matilda's stop at the BETA combination triple brush, which dropped them from second to 13th.

Two more Lincolnshire-bound horses are Joseph Murphy's DHI Top Story, whose round was cut short after they jumped the wrong side of the red flag at the Equex China Water's corner b element (14) and were pulled up by the ground jury.

Meanwhile, Parkiarrup Illicit Liaison's jockey Sonja Johnson – visiting from Australia for a tilt at Rio and executing a plan b – left the course in tears after missing fence seven, the Equistro Wall. Hazel Towers and Simply Smart also failed to negotiate it. ▷

COMMENT

Mark Phillips

Feeling the Festival vibe away from Rio

I was a little anxious before last weekend as the 2016 Festival of British Eventing not only clashed with the Rio Olympics, but also the BBC *Countryfile* weekend at Blenheim Palace. Luckily the weather gods smiled and we had sunshine, near perfect footing and a good crowd on all three days – how a little sun helps.

This year we incorporated the British Open Championship into the Event Rider Masters (ERM). It was a learning curve all round but I think a great success as the two teams from the Festival and ERM worked together for the first time in a very harmonious atmosphere. It was also difficult for the riders as the qualifications for the Open were very different this year. By next year it should be easier all round.

Obviously Rio had a big effect on our entries. Every cloud has a silver lining, though, and it was an opportunity for others to seize success while some of the sport's stars were away.

Oliver Townend in particular "made hay", winning the Open on Cillnabradden Evo, the same horse that fell last year with Andrew Nicholson at the final fence. Many were holding their breath at the end as the horse tired in similar fashion over the last fences, but Oliver carried him home to win the £16,000 first prize by a comfortable margin.

It was nice to see Thomas Carlile over from France. He was duly rewarded with a large slice of the spoils in second place and Elizabeth Power moved up from 16th place with the fastest time of the day. Paul Tapner's fourth place was some consolation for missing out on selection for the Aussie team.

The entertainment business

I have to say the Open and the ERM prize money produced a great cross-country climax, with rider after rider having a real cut over the Gatcombe terrain.

Inevitably that induces the odd mistake. I felt particularly sorry for Izzy Taylor, who was going like a good one when she stopped at an innocuous triple brush in front of Gatcombe house, as she had a great chance of winning.

This year saw the introduction of a new water jump that all but the Corinthian Cup competitors went through twice. This was not popular with everyone, particularly those that missed fences out, but whether we like it or not, sport is in the entertainment business and the clustering of fences in a "roundabout" is universally popular with spectators, sponsors and TV.

On the best footing in years, the courses rode really well apart from the Land Rover At The Folly combination. I walked five strides to two strides, but too many did six and three. I suspect horses backed off due to the people and atmosphere there more than I had anticipated. H&H

● NEXT WEEK: Mark Todd

Andrea Clark and Murphys Bonanza rise up from 13th to win the Corinthian Cup

chequered novice history.

"He used to nap, crash through fences, not take off – even at home," said Emma. "Most of the time we weren't getting as far as the cross-country, so he's been on the transfer list a few times. I dropped him back to BE100 to get his confidence."

The top two plus fourth-placed Ashley Harrison (Zebedee IX) and sixth-placed Daniel Griffiths (Cooley River) were the only dressage score finishers.

Two-phase leader Rebecca Woolley retired Zeno Das Gluck following problems at the TopSpec comprehensive challenge (16abc). Lizzie Provenzano and Fine Feathers, second after dressage, were hampered by three showjumps down and retired after a rider fall at the same water.

Ryan Hawkins's Mc Claren showjumped clear for provisional fourth, but 14.4 cross-country time-faults dropped them out of the top 30.

Townend's speedy ways

ALTHOUGH unable to defend the intermediate (see box, left) and novice championship titles he won here last year, Oliver Townend dominated the advanced section, winning aboard Peter Windus's 12-year-old Dunbeau and finishing second on Sue Chadwick's Samuel Thomas II. Oliver was also fourth on Michael McGrath's Dromgurrihy Blue, sandwiching two-phase leader Tom McEwen's Toledo De Kerser, who exceeded the optimum by 45 seconds, in third.

Oliver's horses were the only ones to record cross-country time-faults in single figures.

Zara Tindall and High Kingdom laid their Aachen demons to rest with a sub-30 dressage mark and clear showjumping round, but they slipped to fifth with 18.8 cross-country time-faults.

Despite an altercation with a loose whippet in front of the Land Rover Folly (17), Olivia Wilmot steered Zebedee De Foja into sixth, behind Rose Carnegie and Landine. H&H

RESULTS

Open ch.- 1, Cillnabradden Evo (O Townend) 39.1,0,10,4=49.3; 2, Upsilon (T Carlile) 44.2,2,9.6=55.8; 3, Soladoun (E Power) 51.3,4,12=56.5; h4 ch.- 1, Chakira Star (A Wheeler) 29.7,0,8=37.7; 2, Master Trump (O Townend) 31.4,3,6=38.6; 3, Dargan (E King) 28.0,14,8=42.8; nov ch.- 1, Events (F Whittington) 29.5,4,2=35.5; 2, Iron IV (S Milner) 31.3,0,4.4=35.7; 3, Oaklands First Time (A Duffett) 33.1,0,3.6=36.7. Cwmtillery Cup.- 1, Murphys Bonanza (A Clark) 32.1,0,0=32.1; 2, Oh Star II Z (Yvie Jeanne) 32.4,0,0=32.4; 3, Iamwotiam (E Conner) 31.4,0=35. adv.- 1, Dunbeau (O Townend) 25.7,4,8=37.7; 2, Samuel Thomas II (O Townend) 33.3,0,4=36.9; 3, Toledo De Kerser (T McEwen) 23.5,0,18=41.5.