



Clockwise from top left: 3 Day Event Adelaide, unique in the world, Andrew Cooper with the city in the background; Emily Anker and Glenwood Park Cooper through the Bates Hollow; Oliver Townend on his way to victory in the 3\*\*\*; Andrew Cooper and Bradgate Dante, showjumped into the lead in the 2\*\*\*; Hazel Shannon and her ex-racehorse galloping to a win in the 4\*\*\*\*

Of that lot, only Ollie Townend made his way to beautiful sun-drenched Adelaide, and even then, it was a pick-up ride in the three-star, not the four-star. Certainly the ten-horse lineup in the four-star proved not only are we critically geographically isolated, but that we just don't have the depth of riders and horses at the top, that the Brits do. In fact, even looking at the three-star entries proves this once again...

So how did Adelaide do it? Well perfect weather in one of the world's most fabulous locations helps - even if this year, a fair-sized hunk of the park had been turned into an industrial wasteland (more Geoffrey Smart than Hans Heysen). You take care of the guests, keep them fed and lubricated and provide some additional entertainment to keep it moving. The truth is, I don't think 80% of the spectators would have been any more entertained if half a dozen of the world's top riders AND their horses, had parachuted from the clouds, to take part (the parachute bit they would have liked better than the eventing action).

The loss of ground did make things a bit more difficult for Mike Etherington-Smith, when it came to designing his track, but he handled the challenge with his usual sangfroid:

"It made it more interesting, that's for sure, it was a challenge, but that's what I get paid to do. We found enough ground, and some more by using some ground that hasn't been used for quite a few years now. The weather has helped because the footing is probably as good as it is ever going to be, because of the wet spring. It caused a few headaches, but that's fine."

Is it an added worry that you are designing for a set of entries that are perhaps not the best Adelaide four-star is ever going to see...

(Michael is laughing) "That's very diplomatic. You have to be mindful of that, Martin Plewa (TD) and I have had conversations, I have put in a couple of alternatives, that if I had a field of sixty I wouldn't have. With just a small field of ten, you've got to have horses in front of people, and at the same time, make it a meaningful competition. That throws up its own set of issues and thought processes. It's great, some people stepping up to four-star for the first time. If you've got a horse that is fit and ready to run at four-star, then you are going to enter it, aren't you?"



Course designer, Mike Etherington-Smith

"With small fields, it is hard to know how many will get to the end. I can only offer up a track, it's not a Badminton or a Burghley, but it has its own personality here because it is not a Badminton or Burghley venue, so it has to be a different style of course. It is still a decent enough track. If they are going to go all the quick routes, then they are going to have done some jumping by the end of it. No question."

You were saying earlier that you are not entirely comfortable with a new style of cross country course that keeps the horse turning, turning, all the way...

"We've seen a couple of tracks in the last couple of years like that. One of the things as course designers, we are very mindful of, is the mental effect that courses have on the horses, as well as the physical side of things. This is my personal philosophy and I don't want to be critical of other people's courses, although it will probably come across as that."

"When you've got a big open park course, horses feel confident if they can see where they are going, understand where they are going. If you then start pulling them off those lines, I'm going this way, oh no, I'm going over here now, this way, no that way, that gets horses questioning things when actually what you are trying to do is build confidence. If the horse is feeling good, whoopee doo, I know what I am doing here, they grow with the experience rather than starting to question the experience. It's a style that I have noticed creeping in, and I'm not a fan. It's a balance, you are always trying to manage speed and pace but at the same time we have to manage the mental effect on the horses as well, which I think is very important."

Perhaps the perceptive few amongst you by now will be saying, Hector doth gush too much, and you are right. I am trying to put the most positive spin I can on the action. One of the first people I met in the lift going down to breakfast on the



A visitor takes out the 3\*\*\*, Oliver Townend riding Tim Boland's Napoleon



day after the four-star dressage, was one of our most experienced and knowledgeable equestrian observers - "you know I was just thinking about you, I thought how will Chris write up those four-star tests..." HE was laughing.

How indeed? Some of the four-star tests left you wondering how the riders expected to control their horses across country, when they had so little influence on them in the 60 by 20. The best were neat and vaguely accurate, and it is reflected in the scores, which ranged from 51.8 to 77.10. There was just one score of 8, for a War Hawk halt, from New Zealand's Helen Christie, although Polly Ann Huntington, thought it worth just a 6.

Just a couple of weeks before Adelaide, I was at Pau four-star, where the winning test - of the 49 that competed - was a 39.5, with five scores under 45, and another 11 under 50. We do still have a major problem with our dressage phase in Australia and pretending we have not, is not going to fix it.

The paucity of talent at the advanced levels was underlined in the Three-Star, where a visiting Pom on a horse he'd sat on three times, won. Oliver Townend was full of praise for the event, "It's unique - I've never ridden in a place like that, well he would say that wouldn't he... But the lad was disarmingly frank about the British scene when we had a chat:

It's too easy, they just pop you on a plane, pop you off, toss you on a pony and you win the class... "I wish it was that easy, or I wish it felt that easy. I've just enjoyed myself full stop. It's been my first time in Australia. I've been out here with good friends, Tim Boland and his girlfriend, Sophie Adams, and I've just had the most amazing two

weeks of my life, it's just fantastic. I've done Sydney, I've come here - it hasn't felt like eventing because normally I've got a lot of pressure, I've put the time in myself, I need to produce a result for owners that back me, or sponsors, or investors. And here I've just come and had a whale of a time and luckily the result has been good at the end of it." Looking at the British eventing scene, do you think they will give the coaching job to Christopher Bartle?

"I think he will hopefully have a rôle. I'm a big fan of Christopher's, he was my first boss. I think it would be a great opportunity for all involved, especially Christopher to have a second go at trying to manage me." Ollie is laughing wildly - "Hopefully it will last longer than it did the first time, but I was only seventeen then."

It is a bit of a puzzle though, we all look at the UK and say well there's the best sport, the best courses, the best owners, the best structure, wads of money from the lottery, and yet the British team continues to rely on a few increasingly aged riders, with very modest success...

"I don't think it does me any good to tell you my true feelings about the situation, but having said that, you say it's the best structure, it can't possibly be the best structure, because we have all the events, a phenomenal number of horses, a phenomenal amount of riders, and the system hasn't worked for a long time now. I don't really want to get into it now, I think we should be looking to the future. There should have been a clean sweep in 2012, that was a missed opportunity, but there is no point in looking back, let's hope the good guys get the positive feel back and move forwards." ▶



Andrew Barnett, an ex-showjumper, and Bradgate Park Dante



Does your selection process have a nominated series of selection events leading up to a Games or a WEG, or is it totally subjective judgment of the selectors?

"Again you are pressing all my right buttons, but I don't want to get into it too much, but for me, the selection from a rider's point of view - not the selection of the team in the end - but the long lists that appear have no resemblance to current form whatsoever - so is it a straight job? You answer."



from go to whoa, since he was first out in the two-star test... Tell me a little about the horse? "Bradgate Park Dante, but we call him 'Dangles' at home, which is probably not a great name for an eventer. He's owned by John and Bev Healey from Bradgate Park out at Orange. He was bred for my partner, Tarsha Hammond, to ride. They said we've got a heap of dressage horses, but we are going to breed you an eventer. They bought a little Appaloosa from just up the road and put her to Dutchman and this is the first foal. It's not often that the dream happens..." How did you manage to extract him from Tarsh? "Tarsha got injured. I was always like, no no I'll give it back to you, it's yours, it's yours, then we had two beautiful kids..." It's always the tactic, you get them pregnant then you get to ride their horse... "We've actually got a younger brother that she is starting to event, and he's a lovely horse too." What are this horse's strengths? "He's very good on the flat. We weren't leading after the dressage, but I thought he'd done a fantastic job and he is just going to get better. He is extremely brave and he is just a trier - he keeps getting better and better. I think there's a lot more in him to come. We were just lucky enough that today was our day, and he jumped really well. He was very tired yesterday and you never know what your horse is going to do, but he came out and he was fantastic today." You were a showjump rider... "John Healey is actually the reason I am eventing. Tarsha had got injured and we'd organized for the horses to go off to different places and John said ▶

Gemma Tinney was the winner of the Bates Young Rider award at Adelaide and won herself a Bates Saddle, which is fitting since Bates have long been sponsors of Team Tinney... "I was first placed young rider, and I was so happy with that because it was a bit field of young riders. Bates sponsors our family and have done so for a long time, it was so good to have them sponsor that event."

# ADELAIDE FOUR STAR

## Another great day in the park...

Story by Chris Hector and Photos by Roz Neave and Marcel Berens

Just think for a moment how much smarter than all the other 4-star organizers around the world, the organizers of the Australian International 3 Day Event have to be. Even in an Olympic year, Burghley can rustle up Christopher Burton, Andrew Nicholson, the Prices, Bettina Hoy, Oliver Townend, Caroline Powell, Mark Todd and Kristina Cook to fill their top ten places.