

Armada vs Nereo

Having evented at the top level against each other, how do these flamboyant full-brothers compare?

Catherine Austen finds out

ARMADA and Nereo will forever be known as two of the most successful full brothers to have evented in Britain. Both bred by Ramon Beca in Spain, they are by the thoroughbred Fines, a successful racehorse, out of a mare called Berganza, who is by the Hanoverian Golf I.

Andrew Nicholson brought Armada, now 17, over from Spain as a four-year-old, and later sold him to Paul Ridgdon. Nereo, now 16, arrived in the UK as a three-year-old and was sold to Deborah Sellar.

Andrew competed the brilliant, flamboyant pair of chestnuts until the end of 2011, when he suggested that the ride on Armada should go to his friend Oliver Townend. Andrew had already completed eight CCI4*s on the horse and finished in the top four at three CCI3*s, but Oliver went on to do another nine CCI4*s with Armada and finished second at Badminton on him in 2014. He also won Burnham Market's CIC3* that year.

Armada, who now lives back with Andrew in semi-retirement, amassed 2,559 British Eventing points during his career.

Nereo has racked up 2,751 so far — and shows no signs of stopping. The younger brother won Bramham's CCI3* in 2009, and in 2010 took the prestigious Aachen CIC03* and won two bronze medals at the World Equestrian Games (WEG).

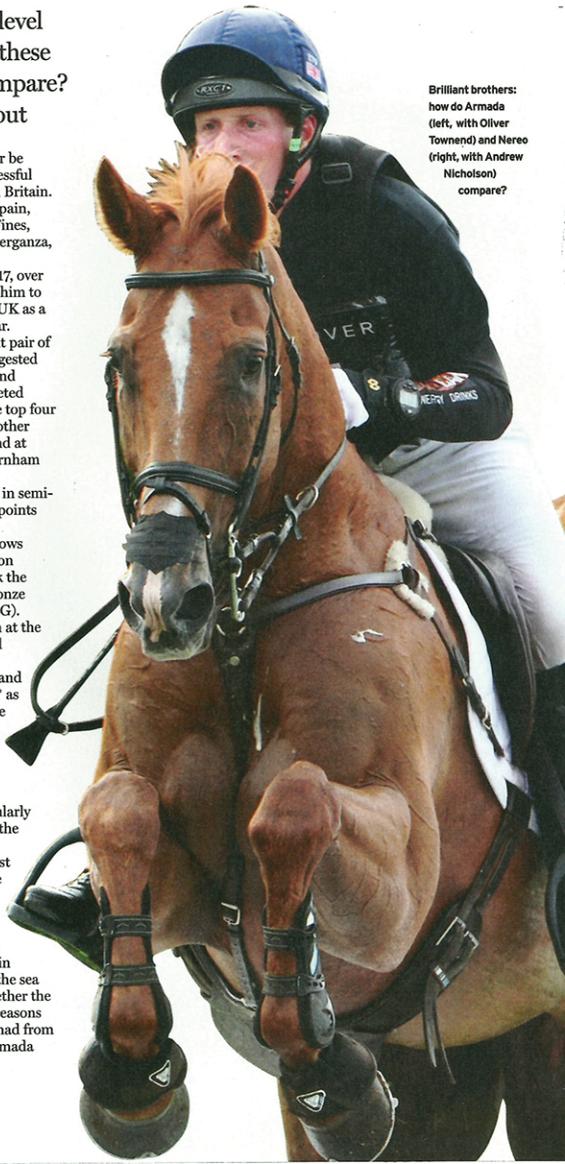
In 2011 Nereo was British Open champion at the Festival of British Eventing at Gatcombe and finished second at Burghley. In 2012 he was fourth individually at the London Olympics and a team bronze medallist, and won Pau CCI4* as well. He has since finished second twice more at Burghley, and third at Badminton, and won Barbury's CIC3* this summer. He also has six advanced one-day wins to his credit.

Conformation

"If you look at them from a distance, particularly in the winter, you can easily mistake one for the other," says Andrew. "But up close they are distinctly different. Armada is taller — at least 17.1hh compared to Nereo's 16.3hh — and he is a lot rangier. Armada has longer legs and a longer back; Nereo is still big but more compact — a stronger type."

"They both have very good limbs and have been incredibly sound. Where they are bred in Spain at Casa Neve, near Seville, was under the sea centuries ago, and I've always wondered whether the high salt content in the land was one of the reasons why they — along with all the horses I have had from there, even if they are totally unrelated to Armada and Nereo — are so tough."

Brilliant brothers: how do Armada (left, with Oliver Townend) and Nereo (right, with Andrew Nicholson) compare?



if someone they don't know approaches them." Oliver says: "Armada is quite a shy person, but a nice one — gentle and sensitive. He's an alert, switched-on horse with no badness in him at all."

Way of going

"THE main difference between them is that Armada has unbelievable power," says Andrew. "He finds everything extremely easy; he is graceful, has exceptional scope and is a very good galloper. He has always found life easy; whereas Nereo doesn't have the same gallop and scope, so has had to try harder at everything — which probably has made him easier to ride."

"Armada is easier on the flat than Nereo — he has power, athleticism and a softness that Nereo lacks. But Armada is hotter in the brain and, because it comes so naturally, his mind can wander, whereas Nereo has to concentrate hard so has always been very calm to ride in a highly atmospheric arena. Nereo is very rideable — you can be sure that he will let you squeeze every ounce out of him in a dressage arena."

"But they have both always wanted to work," Andrew adds.

"Nereo's natural stride pattern is easier to ride than Armada's because it isn't so open, which is probably why Armada became tricky to showjump in his later years. The more top-level cross-country Armada did, with his vast stride opened up, the more difficult it would have been to shut it down again in the showjumping."

Oliver says: "Armada is basically over-powered. My job as a rider was to sit behind him and keep him calm. He is naturally hot and his blood could boil very quickly, although he became a lot calmer as his career went on. He was very good on the flat and had all the attributes needed to be in the top few at CCI4* level."

Career highlights

"AT his peak, Armada had endless stamina," says Oliver. "I'll never ride another who could do the things he could — not many horses make the time at Gatcombe, but he was British national champion [in 2013] and finished 10 seconds under the time slowing down, having put four strides in a distance where everyone else put six."

"The year he was second at Badminton it was the biggest track I've ever seen and the conditions were very wet but, knowing I was on Armada, I just thought, 'brilliant...'"

"We suited each other, and he allowed me to show what I could do on a difficult horse."

Andrew says that the highlight of Nereo's career so far was winning individual and team bronze at the Kentucky WEG in 2010 as a 10-year-old, finishing on his dressage score.

"But at Barbury [where he won the CIC3*] and Burghley [where he finished second] this year he felt the best he ever has in his jumping technique. He doesn't look or feel like he is 16, and we will aim for Badminton in the spring if he continues to be in such good form." **H&H**

Oliver adds: "Armada is very balanced and well-conformed — a proper, old-fashioned chaser type, even though he isn't full thoroughbred. He has always been very tight and defined."

Temperament

ANDREW says: "They are similarly suspicious of people. They both like a clear routine and sticking to that routine. After three days of being roughed off in the winter, they are buggers to catch! But they are both kind and very gentle; they just don't like fuss and will take themselves to the back of the box."