

Blair Castle Equi-Trek International, Perthshire
25-28 August
By Pippa Roome

OLIVER TOWNEND became the first person to win two Event Rider Masters (ERM) classes when he claimed the fifth leg at Blair on Cillinabraden Evo, also his winning mount at Gatcombe three weeks previously.

"I should have focused on ERM a lot sooner," said Oliver. "I was a bit stupid chasing the Olympic dream earlier in the year. Now I'm 100% focused on this."

Sally-Anne Egginton's 10-year-old Cillinabraden Evo, by Creevaugh Ferro Ex Siebe, has found his form recently after a slightly chequered career. He fell at the last at Gatcombe with Andrew Nicholson last year and jumped into a ditch at Barbury with Oliver in July.

"It's almost impossible to anticipate when the problems are going to occur until about three strides before," admitted Oliver after his dressage here. "I hope we've turned a corner and learnt enough about him to do the job."

As at Gatcombe Oliver lay second after the first phase here, but his clear showjumping catapulted him to the head of affairs. However, Bettina Hoy was less than a penalty behind with her dressage leader Seigneur Medicott, who had had two showjumps down and a time-fault.

In the reverse-order cross-country, the German had a great round until the final combination, the Autoeocose angled brushes (fence 23ab). Keen to ensure the horse didn't run out, Bettina pulled too far left and, faced with the high part of the brush, Seigneur Medicott baulked.

Oliver was "lucky enough to be right next to a speaker" when Bettina's fault was announced and so took his foot off the gas, aware that he could now afford time-faults. Nonetheless, Cillinabraden Evo looked considerably stronger than at Gatcombe, where he finished tied.

"I gave him a very different ride here," said Oliver. "I felt I had to be quick in the first

Evo's even better



Oliver Townend and Cillinabraden Evo score back-to-back wins in the ERM series with the fastest double clear of the day

minutes on the flat, then I gave him as much time as possible up the hill. He showed how fast he is to finish with only 2.4 time-faults as I really was going quite slowly in places."

Oliver's seven Blair rides all finished in the top six in their classes, quite a feat even by this prolific rider's standards.

A tricky flag decision

THE ERM results were in doubt until after extensive video

review of Jock Paget's close call with a flag at the first of two triple brush arrowheads following a drop (fences 13 and 14ab). He and Angus Blue would have finished second, but were judged to have been outside the boundaries and eliminated.

This left Tom McEwen the runner-up on his first run this year with Diesel, his 2013 Bramham under-25 winner whose career has been interrupted by injury.

"It's seriously exciting having Diesel back – I have missed riding him across country," said Tom, whose only preparation was a spin around the eventers' challenge at Hickstead. "I don't think it would be fair on him to do another three-day and we will be aiming him for the Masters next year."

Gemma Tattersall took third on Caroline Teltch's eight-year-old Santiago Bay.

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The mare became "buzzed up and overexcited" at the start and Gemma had issues getting her into the box. But she then "skipped round" the track and finished just 1.6 penalties behind Tom, who was 10.9 marks adrift of Oliver.

Any of the top four riders on the leaderboard can secure the series title in the final decider at Blenheim – the contenders are current leader Paul Tapner (sixth here on Kilronan), Gemma, Oliver and Jonelle Price (fourth here on Cloud Dancer II).

Wilson takes the crown

NICOLA WILSON has long ruled Blair's CIC3*, with four wins in seven runnings, but she had never scored a CCI victory here until this year. She led the flagship CIC3* from pillar to post, but cut it a bit fine by not

only having a showjump down in the treble, but also seven time-faults to reduce her cushion to 1.3 penalties.

The Newmarket Venture 12-year-old Annie Clover, who belongs to Nicola's parents Mary and Barry Tweddle, has had a competition break since

Burgham a month ago to undergo embryo transfer. She heads to Pau CCI4* and Nicola had that in mind when she went fairly steadily across country for B.4 time-faults, but also found she "had her hands full" and had to waste time setting up.

The mare was super honest on a long rein through the turn to the corner in the first water and never lost forward momentum when she only got one front leg properly up the step out on the return trip, pinged on over the boat off a bounce distance.

"She's a genuine mare and knows to go between the flags," said Nicola. "I really like her, she's such a sweetie, although she is quite awkward to look after. She's claustrophobic about doorways, so that's a challenge wherever we go."

The family's week didn't start so promisingly – Nicola's mother Mary was sporting a sling after breaking her shoulder in a fall on Tuesday.



Tom McEwen's Diesel makes a sparkling comeback to finish second in the ERM

A change of fitness regime pays dividends for Flora Harris' CIC3* winner Bayano



TALKING POINTS

Veterans having fun
SEVERAL experienced older horses enjoyed a CCI* outing at Blair.



• Sixteen-year-old Hendon Attorney General (above), who won Boekelo CCI3* 2013 and the CCI2* at Blair the same year under New Zealand's Lizzie Brown, took 10th under Scottish rider Rosa Onslow, IT.

• Porthill Rusty Nail, who is now 19 and competed at three-star with several riders including his owner Grace Moran, landed 36th for another Scottish 17-year-old, Lauren Robb.

• Classy Touch, who is now 21 and competed at three-star with Olivia Wilmot, finished 37th under Caz Mosley, a veterinary nurse from Peebles who has recovered from spinal surgery following a serious car crash.

Oliver Townend was second on Kathleen Wilkinson and Rachel Wood's ODT Ghareeb and third on Val Ryan's Lanfranco, the only horse to make the time across country.

This class had 11 starters and Louise Harwood, who landed fourth on Balladeer Miller Man, was the only one of the seven finishers to put in a showjumping clear, although her score was marred by 12 time-faults. Louise was second after dressage on Jenga II, but lost her chance when incurring 20 penalties at the Bruadar Bothys (fence 15abc), three houses on a curving left-hand line culminating in a skinny.

ERM series leader Paul Tapner takes third in the Scottish open on Bonza King Of Rouges. Paul also finished sixth in the ERM CIC3* on Kilronan



Clever care reaps rewards
AUSTRALIA'S Bill Levett led the dressage on 37.5 and showjumped clear in the Scottish open championship CIC3*, but then withdrew as improvise is Burghley bound.

Dressage runner-up Flora Harris capitalised by adding just 0.8 of a time-penalty to her 42 dressage for a comfortable win.

Flora's ride Bayano, a 10-year-old son of Contendro II owned by the rider's mother Caroline and Rebecca Salt, won Bramham CCI3* last year, but then had a poor run at Aachen, which resulted in him losing his place for the Blair Europeans.

"We discovered he was prone to becoming quite anaemic, which we hadn't grasped before," said Flora. "Now we manage him quite differently. He's only half thoroughbred but we don't murder him with fitness work. He works hard five days a week – being ridden twice a day sometimes – but always has two days of rest in the field."

Oliver Townend was second on Peter Windus' Jumbo 12-year-old Dunbeau.

"I couldn't believe how straight he was across country," he said. "He's come

on so much over the past year." Paul Tapner landed third with Angela Scott, Jenny Waaler and his own 13-year-old Bonza King Of Rouges, a horse he took the ride on when Matt Ryan gave up eventing in 2013.

"He's extremely talented, but this is his first competitive run in 12 months as he hasn't been



CCI3* winners Jonelle Price and ODD impressive, who is being aimed at the young horse World Championships



Kirsty Johnston finishes on her dressage score for third in the CCI on Classic VI

the soundest," said Paul. "Hopefully he'll now go to Boekelo and do something special there."

New face tops CCI2*

STUDENT Caroline Clarke blew her own expectations sky high by winning the CCI2* (see box, right). She moved up from fifth after dressage and although she looked a little cautious initially in the showjumping, her ride Touch Too Much was extremely careful.

"It was terrifying, I was absolutely shaking outside," she said. "I went through the course about 30,000 times in my head and with my brother Dan. Last time I was here, when he was a six-year-old in the one-star, I got lost and we had five time-faults."

Jonelle Price was the only other rider to finish on her dressage score with second on eight-year-old Kindred Spirit IV.

"He's a Kiwi thoroughbred, so it's kind of back to our roots," said the New Zealander, who was a Blair debutant.

The 1990 world team gold medalist Andrew Scott and his wife Louise had the horse at home in New Zealand until the spring last year, but believing the son of Postponed could make his mark eventing, they formed a syndicate and sent him to the UK.

Paul Sims took third on Fred and Roselle Willis' 10-year-old mare Last Secret, whose 7.2 cross-country time-faults cost them second.

"It was rider error in the first few minutes – I couldn't find my rhythm," he said. "We've been playing with bits and nosebands as she can come out tanking, but I actually had quite a bit of control. She nearly jumped me off at the third fence as I got in too deep, then I gave myself a shake-up. I am looking



Paul Sims moves up the order in the CCI2* after a double clear on Last Secret earns him third place