

'Boekelo's course must evolve'

This great CCI3* needs a cross-country shake-up, says Oliver Townend

BOEKELO is unique. No other event has an atmosphere like it on cross-country day, and it is famous for its parties. The organisers want to do everything possible for the riders, and the new all-weather arena for dressage and showjumping is fantastic.

I was a little disorientated when I arrived, because the whole site has moved and changed around, but it still has a very special feel.

It is disappointing, therefore, that despite ongoing improvements in so many areas, the cross-country track doesn't seem to move on in the same way. I know the track runs over a great many small plots of land belonging to different people, and it must be difficult to coordinate working on it, but more could be done on the footing. This is one of Europe's leading CCI3*s and, with the money the event must get from the vast Saturday crowd and

Oliver Townend won Badminton and Burghley in 2009, and Burghley again this year. He has been the leading event rider in Britain for the past three seasons.

OPINION

the great sponsors it attracts — enough to install that excellent main arena this year — they should be able to afford to invest in the ground.

The subject of how often events should change course-designers has been discussed a lot this year. I have absolutely no personal problem with Sue Benson, but she has designed Boekelo since 2000 — surely, on a flat track with few natural features to work with and encourage inspiration, that is too long?

Last year there was a tight, turning combination on an S-bend that didn't work — this year it was repeated but made even tougher. Twenty-five horses faulted at it; that's a quarter of the field. For me, you can't argue with numbers — is that good course-design? It's fine to create a difficult fence, but why not, considering it was only fence eight, give everybody a get-out-of-jail option as well?

I felt for the track to go into the main arena at fences three



and four was much too early. Why, when it is such a focus point for the crowd, not use it later in the course and create more of a spectacle?

Riders have been suggesting to the organisers that it might be time for a change for several years now. We still come to Boekelo because the calendar dictates that it make sense to compete there — but I think if you put an event like Millstreet on a week later, you'd see a big shift.

There is so much that is great about Boekelo. If the horse

side of things evolved in the way other aspects of it have, it could be the best event in the world.

ONES FOR THE FUTURE

MY Boekelo horse, Ridire Dorcha, is hugely exciting. He now belongs to good supporters of mine, Tim Boland and Karyn Shuter, and probably has more power than any event horse I have sat on before. Like my Burghley winner Ballaghmor Class, who at 10 is a year older than Ridire Dorcha and who also came to Boekelo to do his first CCI3* last year — and had a run-out at what this time was fence eight — he is very much one for the future.

Ridire Dorcha only did his first advanced at Blair five weeks ago; he didn't start eventing until he was seven and because we think the world of him we've been overcautious with him, really. He did the best dressage test he could at this stage, and jumped a double clear. I'm very pleased with him and excited about next year. H&H

NEXT
WEEK

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reflects on the
2017 season