

Ballaghmor Class

Racehorse trainer Jessica Harrington assesses the fleabitten grey who put Oliver Townend in the spotlight in the autumn with a special win at Burghley

"BALLAGHMOR CLASS is probably the epitome of a professional's competition horse," says Oliver Townend.

"He was very sharp as a young horse, and is still very reactive, but that alertness means he is adjustable and responsive. Across country, he is one of the few horses I've ridden who feels wholly 'mine' — we are tuned into each other."

At Burghley, "Thomas's" cross-country round felt as good as it looked. "I barely needed to touch him. It was the smoothest Burghley ride I'd ever had," says Oliver.

Oliver travelled to Ireland to see Thomas as four-year-old. "He already looked like an event horse. I liked his type, the fact that he had lots of blood and that he was a real athlete. He felt very clueless about everything when I rode him, but at the same time he had no end of power and scope."

Oliver believes Thomas is the physical stamp of a top-class horse. "He wouldn't look out of place walking round the parade ring at Cheltenham or in the collecting ring before a

showjumping grand prix," he says.

Thomas's sharpness meant more than one person at Oliver's yard came off him — and Oliver is still careful when getting on him.

"We have worked hard to get him to trust his rider and he is definitely still sensitive. The first time I wore a tail coat on him at a competition, I had to get off pretty quickly and ended up wearing a normal coat to do my dressage test. We then pinned my tails to my breeches for tests; Burghley was only the second time we haven't had to do that."

"Right from the word go, when we got into the arena or ring, he was completely focused on what we were doing and behaved very well. That attitude, and the fact that I just loved him, has taken us to where we are now."

On the ground, Thomas is "a total gentleman."

"He's affectionate, gentle and very straightforward to deal with," Oliver adds. "I'm proud to have produced him." **H&H**

NEXT WEEK

Hunt hero
Lucy Pinney

10yo ISH grey gelding, 16.3hh

Stable name: Thomas
Owners: Karyn Shuter, Val Ryan and Angela Hislop
Rider: Oliver Townend
Form: 531 BE points; seventh
Tattersalls CCI* 2014; first Ballindenisk (1) CIC2*, sixth Tattersalls CCI2* 2016; fourth Tattersalls CCI3*, first Burghley CCI4* 2017.

Courage II

Capitol I

Vamara
(by Cor De La Bryere)

Kilderry Place

Unknown

Unknown

THE HEAD, NECK AND SHOULDER

Ballaghmor Class boasts a reasonable sized head, a slight Roman nose and generous eyes and ears. His ears are pricked forward, showing an alert attitude. "His head is well set on his neck, which is the ideal length and is in proportion to the rest of his body. It's easier to ride a horse that is built uphill like this one," says Jessica. "His neck also connects nicely to his well-sloping shoulder, which means he is in good balance."

THE LIMBS

Ballaghmor Class's limbs are clean and well-formed for athleticism and soundness, according to Jessica.

"I like his foreleg, which isn't back at the knees," she says. "He also has a short cannon bone and a well-angled pastern which joins nicely to the foot."

In terms of his hind limbs, Jessica points out that the grey has very clean hocks with no curbs.

"His hocks are slightly low and his pasterns have the ideal slope and are not too slack," she says of the qualities that signify power.

THE FEET

"The old adage 'no foot no horse' is so true, particularly in the event horse, and Ballaghmor Class is fortunate to have wonderful feet. He possesses beautifully shod, large, healthy looking hooves, with his heels well up off the ground," notes Jessica, who adds that such a good foot means a more level impact with the ground and less likelihood of bruising despite the rigours of competition.

THE OVERALL PICTURE

Ballaghmor Class is an incredibly good-looking horse, a fact aided by his eye-catching flea bitten grey colour, according to Irish former event rider turned successful racehorse trainer Jessica Harrington.

"He's a well-balanced horse, meaning that when he moves he's particularly athletic," says Jessica. "I really like his clean limbs, his high wither, which means that the saddle will sit in a good position on his back, and the fact that he has good length from his hip to his hind quarters — all of which give him great power behind."

Ballaghmor Class also possesses what is termed a "jumper's bump" which is another indication of the power he has for jumping. Additionally, his tail is set nicely high.

"This helps to give him good carriage in the dressage," adds Jessica.

