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# Burton rules Blair



'Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd win the leg,' says ERM series victor Chris Burton after riding Graf Liberty to the only round inside the time

The Australian claims the Event Rider Masters series in emphatic fashion, while Oliver Townend and Piggy French score for Britain

Land Rover Blair Castle, Perthshire

By PIPPA ROOME

CHRIS BURTON became the first rider to confirm a win in the Event Rider Masters (ERM) series with victory at the final leg.

The Australian — who is also the first non-British ERM series winner — has a reputation as a serious speed merchant. Chris always credits his horses, but he rides the tightest lines in an ever-forward rhythm, as well as training his mounts to be incredibly adjustable.

Here, he was fourth before cross-country with the elegant syndicate-owned Graf Liberty, having added one upright down to his 26.9 dressage score. But as the rain lashed down on Blair's hills, he put in the only cross-country clear inside the time.

"I really did feel the pressure because it's big money," said

Chris, who snaffled £16,000 for the leg win and £30,000 for the overall victory. "I thought I'd try to maintain my lead in the series, but never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd win the leg."

"When you're out on course, it's a case of focusing on the job — you get in the groove. I wasn't really trying to make the time, but Graf Liberty has great manoeuvrability, is light and has a lot of stride."

Clamour about Oliver Townend's omission from the World Equestrian Games (WEG) squad continued as he finished best Brit here in two classes. Even his own tactful demeanour slipped momentarily on the ERM podium when he commented that he doubts the selectors have a television or computer.

Second in the leg marked a

return to form for Sally-Anne Egginton's Cillnabradan Evo, the 2016 winner here.

"My tactic was to get round and after that be as fast as I could," said Oliver. "Although his jump



Ben Hobday partners eight-year-old Shadow Man II to CIC3\* third

got low, I'm impressed with how he galloped. I'd have signed up for this result before I went out, that's for sure."

British rider Emily Philp, 34, was a new face in the top echelons



'She has loads of talent': James Avery and Seaflower top the CCI\*

when she finished third with the second-fastest round. Her mount was the 13-year-old Camembert (by Courage II), bought in Ireland as a three-year-old by her father Nigel and his brother Mitchell.

"He's very opinionated — he loves the job, but in the stable he will tell you to get lost. He's a bit like a mare; you ask him, never tell," said Emily. "My trainer Ian Wills said I had to get going as I often lose a bit of time at the start." Laura Collett stayed ahead of Tim Price to take second in the series, finishing eighth in the leg with London 52.

"After two showjumps down, I tried to stay in the hunt for the series and give him a confidence-building round as he's a horse for the future," she said.

Sixth on the experienced Wesko, CCI3\* winner here in 2013, confirmed third overall for Tim.

Emily King led after two phases on Bramham under-25 winner Dargun, but pulled him up at fence four across country as she

felt he didn't want to gallop. Tests showed he was suffering from a low blood cell count, indicating a virus.

PRICE TAKES CCI3\*

LATER that afternoon, Tim Price showedjumps clear to move up from third and win the CCI3\* on Pats Jester.

"He's really benefited from going on the Spanish jumping tour — even though he was tiring, he's got the confidence," he said.

The 10-year-old by Quintender was bred by co-owner Kate Maitland's family and is named after her late mother, Pat. He is now part-owned by Therese Miller, Jo Preston-Hunt and Philip Hunt.

"He won Ballindenisk CCI3\* last autumn, but had a fall due to rider error in Poland early in the season and then an unrelated fall at Arville. So he had to requalify at Barbury at two-star. He's had a funny year, but I'm proud of him for coming back and getting in the mix at three-star," said Tim.

Tom McEwen enjoyed a confidence boost ahead of WEG with two CCI seconds. Penny and Fred Barker's CCI3\* runner-up Strike Smartly was entered for Burghley, but Tom was happy he'd opted for Blair.

"He tried his heart out at Badminton and I didn't want him to have to do that again," said Tom. "This is a tough three-star and will develop him for Badminton next year."

Tom added that Strike Smartly is "one of the nicest people you could meet in a horse". Owner Penny, who lives next door to the yard, does much of his slow work.

Izzy Taylor claimed third on Jennie Thora's 11-year-old Director General, a new ride for her this year. "He was just class across country and came home well inside the time," she said.



Chris Burton tops the series podium, flanked by Tim Price and Laura Collett

## CHRIS BURTON'S 2018 EVENT RIDER MASTERS WINNING CAMPAIGN

WIESBADEN — eighth on Polystar | ARVILLE — first on Polystar | BARBURY — third on Polystar | JARDY — sixth on Cooley Lands BLAIR — first on Graf Liberty

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The CCI competitors ran across country on perfect ground in Saturday's sunshine and horses from down south were delighted to see so much grass, both for eating and running on. Blair's hills remained tough, though, and only the top three made the time in the CCI3\*.

The most influential fence on Alec Lochore's course across the three-star sections was the Land Rover combination. On the direct route, riders made a sharp left-hand turn after running downhill from a hanging log to two angled brush panels on two strides.

Oliver Townend described this as a championship-level question, saying it was "nigh on overboard".

### 'EXCEPTIONAL TALENT'

OLIVER TOWNEND dominated the CCI3\*. He was first, second and third after dressage on Cooley Master Class, Cooley SRS and Ballaghmore Class, with MHS King Joules sixth. But he withdrew these four after showjumping, with an eye on Burghley, where he will start on three of his five entrants.

This left him with just Tregider in the mix, who was ninth after showjumping. The rider certainly did not expect this eight-year-old three-star debutante to win, saying he was at Blair for "an education".

"He's got to three-star a bit quicker than most of ours, but he seems to find everything easy," he reported after dressage. "I've never found the bottom of his gallop."

This proved prophetic when Tregider was the only horse inside the time across country despite Oliver barely checking his watch, rocketing to first place.

"He's had a few run-outs lately



'He's had a funny year, but I'm proud of him for coming back': New Zealanders Tim Price and Pats Jester take glory in the CCI3\*

and this was one of the toughest three-stars I've seen," said Oliver. "He's an exceptional talent."

Owned by Stephen and Victoria Hazeldine and the Mitchell Fox Group, Tregider was bred by Preci-Spark. He is by Royal Concorde out of the Hand In Glove mare Trewins.

Piggy French landed second on Brookfield Innocent, who belongs to Alison Swinburn and John and Chloe Perry. Produced by Kevin McNab until a few months ago, the nine-year-old was following up on a CIC2\* win at Somerford the previous weekend, so she did not go flat out.

"Kevin did a wonderful job producing him, but he's always been run quite slowly. Going quicker makes him braver, but I'm aware that changing the way a horse runs can result in niggles. It's not always about winning and today I wanted to give him a solid performance," she said.



Emily Philp and Camembert put in a fast round for third in the ERM

Ben Hobday took third on another eight-year-old, his own and Jane Chambers' Shadow Man II.

"I haven't won a three-star yet, so that's on my list and he's definitely got it in him," said Ben. "When you're up against top riders, it makes you hungrier."

### FRENCH AND SAUNDERS

PIGGY FRENCH took first and third in the CCI2\*. Cooley Monsoon, a 10-year-old belonging to Jennifer Saunders, led throughout, staying in his dressage score of 25.1. This was his second CCI2\* win.

"He's got a very big stride and you have to keep him wound up to keep him sharp," said Piggy.

Third-placed Castletown Clover spent the early years of his eventing career at grassroots with his owner Susannah Paybody before competing under Hannah Norvill, who works for Piggy, for



'This will develop him for next year': Tom McEwen and Strike Smartly boast a confidence-boosting run in the CCI3\*



Oliver Townend enjoys a surprise win aboard Tregider in the CCI3\*

two seasons. He is now 13 and Piggy took on the ride this year.

"He's Susannah's pet and now he's our pet," said Piggy. Tom McEwen was sandwiched between Piggy's rides on Vicky Bates and David Myers' CHF Cooler, the British intermediate champion.

"This is a good point for her to finish the year early," said Tom. "She can have a nice break, and then work on her flying changes ready for three-star next year."

Polly Stockton and Drummer were third after dressage, but had a run-out at the Gillespie Macandrew double of corners at fence 11ab. This required horses to hold their line on a committed two strides and caught out two other pairs in this class too.

### SEAFLOWER BLOOMS

ATRIO of seven-year-olds topped the CCI\* and New Zealand's James Avery was the dressage leader and eventual winner on Lizzie Edwards' Seaflower. The Sir Donnerhall mare joined James this season.

"She was set to go to Jonelle Price but Jonelle was away for a week so I said to send her to me," said Hungerford-based James. "She's got a bit of an attitude

so it's a case of containing that, but she has loads of talent."

This was an easy run for second-placed JL Dublin, who belongs to Deirdre Johnston and Jo and James Lambert. He has done two CIC2\*'s and was here to qualify for Le Lion d'Angers.

"We do think the world of him," said rider Nicola Wilson.

Paul Sims moved up from fifth overnight to take third on G Star Van De Klinkenberg, who Sharon Bayston has owned since a foal.

"He gets stronger every month and has had an educational week," said Paul. H&I

### RESULTS

CCI3\* — 1. Pats Jester (T Price) 28.5, 0.0-28.5; 2. Strike Smartly (T McEwen) 26.9, 0.4-30.9; 3. Director General (T Taylor) 27.7, 0.4-31.7. ERM CCI3\* — 1. Graf Liberty (C Burton) 26.3, 4.0-30.9; 2. Cillnabradan Evo (O Townend) 26.4, 4.2-33.2; 3. Camembert (E Philp) 31.5, 0.2, 4-33.9. CCI2\* — 1. Tregider (O Townend) 33.5, 0.0-33.5; 2. Brookfield Innocent (P French) 27.9, 0.7-35.1; 3. Shadow Man II (B Hobday) 29.4, 0.8-37.8. CCI2\* — 1. Cooley Monsoon (P French) 25.1, 0.0-25.1; 2. CHF Cooler (T McEwen) 28.7, 0.0-28.7; 3. Castletown Clover (P French) 30.7, 0.0-30.7. CCI\* — 1. Seaflower (J Avery) 25.2, 0.0-25.2; 2. JL Dublin (N Wilson) 28.6, 0.0-28.6; 3. G Star Van De Klinkenberg (P Sims) 28.8, 0.0-28.8.

Photos by Jim Clifton, Trevor Hill/Kingsley Media Services and Benjamin Clark Photography/Event Rider Masters