



'Big dreamer' sets

Oliver Townend celebrates winning his first Kentucky CCI4* title on Cooley Master Class, and the second of the three legs of the Rolex Grand Slam



Oliver Townend pilots four-star debutant Cooley Master Class to his first win at Kentucky, raising the stakes for Badminton this week

By NANCY JAFFER

Land Rover Kentucky Three-Day Event, USA

IT'S on to Badminton and a shot at the \$350,000 (£255,000) Rolex Grand Slam for Oliver Townend after an impressive come-from-behind victory at Kentucky on Cooley Master Class. Oliver's triumph ended Michael Jung's winning streak with FischerRocana FST at the Kentucky Horse Park. The German rider's bid to capture an unprecedented fourth title ended with a rail down in showjumping.

The win was an emotional one for Oliver. He moved up from fifth after dressage to third following cross-country and then had a clean showjumping round over Richard Jeffery's course to take the title on his dressage score of 28.7 penalties, as well as finishing seventh with MHS King Joules.

"I've had a rough couple of years one way and another and it's a hard grind at home, but this is an absolute long-term dream of mine," he said, as he stood before an enthusiastic crowd of 21,260. "I just want to thank every

I had an awful lot of faith in Cooley Master Class — it's his first time at this level'

OLIVER TOWNEND

Pictures by Cooley Tetley and Peter Nixon

up grand slam bid

single person here for sharing that dream day with me.

"I'm a big dreamer. I dreamt last year that a first-timer could go to Burghley and win and the dream came true, so I'll keep dreaming," said Oliver, who earned the first leg toward the Rolex Grand Slam on Ballaghmor Class by triumphing at Burghley last September.

He took on Master Class at the age of four, and knows the 13-year-old gelding well.

"I had an awful lot of faith in him. It's his first time at this level," said Oliver.

Coming to Kentucky "took a bit of arm-twisting to get the horses here because there was no funding from Great Britain," Oliver added.

He offered a "massive thank you" to Angela Hildop, who owns Master Class, and Tom Joule, who owns King Joules, for taking a gamble on his chances.

IDEAL CONDITIONS

MICHAEL JUNG was second in the dressage phase and was only one second over the time on cross-country, where his mare hung a hindleg on a brush jump in the water, but artfully managed to stay on her feet and keep going.

After cross-country, Michael took the lead by a very slim margin with 27.5 penalties when dressage winner Marilyn Little of the US had eight time-penalties on RF Scandalous. Second following cross-country was Australia's Chris Burton with Nobilis 18 on his dressage score of 27.9.

Along the cross-country course, Oliver was masterful



Germany's Michael Jung and FischerRocana FST narrowly fail in their bid for a fourth consecutive Kentucky crown, finishing the runners-up

in his horsemanship, bringing both his mounts home without any penalties. That achievement was especially impressive in the case of King Joules. "Trying to stop him is quite a problem, so I was basically run away with for 11 minutes," said Oliver.

"But he was exceptionally honest and put himself between the flags. Basically, I spent my whole round going, 'Whoa, whoa, and just steering.'"

Oliver's mounts were among 11 horses in a field of 43 cross-country starters who were clear inside the time, surprising course-designer Derek di Grazia, who had predicted only three would be



Dressage leaders Marilyn Little and RF Scandalous take third overall



Lynn Symansky and the thoroughbred Donner en route to sixth spot

SUPPORT AND RECONNAISSANCE

"We have a programme that supports our riders when possible," said Britain's World Class eventing performance manager Dickie Waygood (pictured, right), explaining why he and vet Liz Brown accompanied Oliver to the US.

"Oliver has quite a string of four-star horses," Dickie said. "And this is a chance to see how his horses are going first-hand. It's important when you have a rider at Oliver's level, championship material, that we make sure we're doing all we can to support him."

The trip to Kentucky also offered a chance to gather intelligence. "The track out here was built by our 2020 Olympic Games designer, so it's a bit of a reconnaissance to see what he has in mind with the tracks," said Dickie. "It's a great cross-country course and so it's been useful to see that looking ahead to Tokyo."

TEAM GB VIEW



Phillip Dutton and Z move up from 16th to fourth with a clean sheet

was an auspicious one, with more than 71,000 people attending over four days.

TROT-UP TENSION

THE final day of the event started with trouble for both Michael and Chris, whose horses were held at the last horse inspection. There were some tense moments before both were eventually passed on re-resentation.

Their problems continued into the showjumping, where the demanding track caught out both of them. When Oliver went clear with Master Class, he had to wait to see what his rivals would do before he could know his fate. Chris had two rails and Michael was too long at the triple bar,

with 32 finishing the event. Six countries were represented among those who completed. No American has won Kentucky since 2008, with British riders taking five of the titles since then.

The best a US rider could do this time around was third, with Marilyn moving from sixth place after cross-country on to the podium after a fault-free showjumping round.

She actually specialised in showjumping before taking up eventing, and still competes in that discipline. In fact, after cross-country, she rode Clearwater in the first \$225,000 grand prix held in conjunction with the horse trials, but finished out of the ribbons. **H&H**

country course were his "advanced prep". "He started off very green and then he warmed up as he went," Oliver said. "He really dug deep and fought for me. He had a smile on his face, his ears were pricked from beginning to end, and that was very important for me."

Although Master Class had just one serious cross-country schooling session, Oliver said: "He was always on track from a fitness point of view." He joked that for Master Class, the first three fences on Kentucky's cross-

I OWE IT TO...

RESULTS

CCI4* — 1 Cooley Master Class (O Townend) GBR 28.7.0.0=28.7.2; FischerRocana FST (M Jung) GER 27.1.0.4=31.5.3; RF Scandalous (M Little) USA 24.8.8.0=31.5.7; MHS King Joules (O Townend) 31.3.0.4=35.3.

OLIVER TOWNEND'S CONTRASTING HORSES

MHS KING JOULES (pictured, above) and Cooley Master Class are a study in contrasts. "Completely different personalities, completely different everything," said Oliver. "But both are obviously very talented."

He described 13-year-old King Joules as "one of the trickiest ones I've ever ridden in some ways. I'm the last in a long line who's ridden him."

Andrew Nicholson and Mary King were among those who had previously had the ride. Since the Ghareeb-sired Irish sport horse has spent seven years with other riders, Oliver admitted "it's tricky to get on and find the buttons."

"He's a very, very sensitive horse. I actually tried to buy him as a four-year-old and I think you'd see a different horse if I had had him from word go. At the same time, talent is not a problem. He's an exceptionally talented horse, probably one of the most talented I've had."

Master Class is by Ramiro B, a stallion in whom Oliver has an interest though his involvement with Harthill Stud.

"It's good for the breeding side of things. He's a stallion I believe in a lot," Oliver said.

Ramiro B is also the sire of Cooley SRS, who will be making his four-star debut at Badminton, where Oliver's other ride this week is his Burghley winner Ballaghmor Class.

Master Class took entering the vast Rolex Stadium for the first time in his stride, and Oliver added: "He can handle the pressure, and in some ways is probably a little better for the crowd and the atmosphere."

TALKING POINT



Surrey-based Aussie Chris Burton heads for second place overnight on Nobilis 18, only to slide down to ninth after rolling two poles

Pictures by Vignora Productions and Cooley Tetley