

'HE TRIED PROFESSIONAL'

THE plane to Tryon flies without Oliver Townend who, second on last year's winner Ballaghmor Class, finished best of the British again at Burghley, as he has done at every four-star he has contested for a calendar year. He betrayed barely a flicker of the inward turmoil he must feel at being left behind, concentrating on expressing his pride in the trio of horses he rode at Burghley, all of whom went clear across country.

Ballaghmor Class, who, like Ringwood Sky Boy, is by Courage II, may have finished a place higher in 2017 on his CCI4* debut with a similar performance

on paper, but his 2018 showing was much more assured. The flea-bitten grey, owned by Karyn Shuter, Angela Hislop and Val Ryan, was one of only four horses to make the time across country and, although he had one showjump down again, it was a more confident, mature round.

"For me, he turned into a professional this week," said Oliver. "Last year we flew by the seat of our pants; this year we looked after each other and the feeling he gave me across country is the best I have ever had from a horse."

Oliver also finished 12th on Angela Hislop's Cooley SRS, while Tom Joule's MHS King Joules, the highest placed of Oliver's triumvirate after dressage in third place, was withdrawn before the final trot-up.

Kiltubrid Rhapsody's 'wonderful temperament' comes to the fore as Mark Todd heads the pack after the first phase

FOR the second consecutive year, Mark Todd led the dressage. In 2017 it was with Leonidas II; this time it was on Niki Ryan and Dr Elizabeth Donald's Kiltubrid Rhapsody.

Oliver Townend had remained out in front on MHS King Joules with a correct, positive test for a mark of 27.2 from the outset on Thursday morning until the middle of Friday afternoon, when Mark slipped past him with 26.4. The 11-year-old Kiltubrid Rhapsody showed elasticity and elevation in his paces, marred only by a slight loss of balance in the extended trot, and he visibly enjoys showing off in this phase.

"He has a wonderful temperament — he goes into the arena and it doesn't bother him at all," said Mark, who took over the ride on Kiltubrid Rhapsody two years ago. "For where he is in his training, I don't think he could have gone any better."

Mark also piloted NZB Campino into 12th place — but for two errors of course, his mark of

30.8 would have been higher.

Tim Price also edged ahead of MHS King Joules on Ringwood Sky Boy with a graceful and obedient test for 26.9.

"I had high hopes for him, but sometimes he doesn't know how

to contain himself in the halts, and he stood properly still three times," Tim said proudly.

No one looked happier than Sarah Bullimore, who finished dressage in fourth place on Reve Du Rouet with 27.3. The



Last year's winner Oliver Townend holds three top-10 spots after the dressage, including seventh aboard Cooley SRS (pictured)

horse's 14-year-old son of Balou Du Rouet has famously struggled with the atmosphere on big occasions, but contained himself immaculately this time.

"He is genuinely frightened of the crowds," said Sarah. "He's not easy, has his own opinions and is tricky to train, so the key to today's test was not 'training' him. We do a lot of flatwork when we're hacking, for example, and this morning I took him up the gallop track, and we did a maximum of 10-15 minutes in the warm-up area and didn't go into the practice arena at all.

"He was fab today — for once he stayed on side and with me, and delivered."

Oliver held two more spaces in the top 10 with Ballaghmor Class, fifth, and Cooley SRS, seventh. His test-riding on all three horses was exemplary and, if Ballaghmor Class had maintained his connection and sparkle all the way through, he could have led.

"It didn't quite come off, but at the same time I'm thrilled with how level and cool he stayed," said Oliver.

Andreas Dibowski demonstrated his decades of

EVENTING LAND ROVER BURGHLEY

Cross-country



PLACINGS AFTER CROSS-COUNTRY
1st Tim Price on Ringwood Sky Boy (NZL)
2nd Oliver Townend on Ballaghmor Class (GBR)
3rd Piggy French on Vanir Kamira (GBR)

'It walked massive and rode bigger'

Another brilliant Burghley cross-country track produces just four combinations inside the time and a change at the top of the leaderboard

THIS was Mark Phillips' 25th Burghley track. The advantage that bestows is exceptional, in-depth knowledge of every inch of ground and its possibilities, but Mark's real skill is in his ability to produce something fresh and creatively innovative each time.

"I thought his course last year was brilliant, and I expected it to stay broadly the same this year — but it's totally different," said Harry Meade.

One of the joys of cross-country day was that the issue that has dogged the sport this year, the 50-penalty rule for missing a flag, never came up. There were skinny fences and angles aplenty,

and accurate riding was essential — even on the long stretch home without combination fences, as the obstacles were so big and square — but the questions asked were obvious enough to the horses at all times.

"It walked massive and rode bigger — it isn't just the biggest course in the world; it has the most [demanding] terrain and atmosphere," said Oliver Townend, first out on the hard-pulling MHS King Joules. He was clear with 10.4 time-faults, and when Mark Todd (NZB Campino) and Tim Price (Bango) came home with 14.8 and 9.2 time-penalties apiece, it seemed that

Mark Phillips' prediction that no one would make the time, despite perfect going, would be true.

It was also clear that Mark had achieved his aim of making riders think and choose the options that suited their particular horse. Those three riders, among the very best in the world across country, had all chosen slight variations through the challenging combinations packed together in the central section of the course — perhaps the days of "the straight route" are over.

UP AGAINST THE CLOCK TIME was undoubtedly the greatest influence on deciding

the overnight positions after cross-country. Four people proved Mark Phillips wrong and beat the clock, the fastest of which were Oliver Townend and his girlfriend Elizabeth Power, both of whom stopped the clock at 11min 3sec, seven seconds under the time allowed, on Ballaghmor Class and Soladoun respectively.

"The whole of this year has been about preparing for this," said Elizabeth. "He's never been off the bridle before; I think I had this notion that he would cruise round and it felt like hard work. He had to dig deep, and it's nice to know he can do that.

"I only have one horse at this

Oliver Townend's rounds on MHS King Joules and Ballaghmor Class were smoother, but his ride on the less brave Cooley SRS was as masterful, if not more so. The Ramiro B 11-year-old goggled at every ditch and Oliver really had to hold his hand.

Overall: final scoreboard

Final position	Horse and rider	Dressage	Cross-country		Showjumping	TOTAL
			Jumping	Time		
1	Ringwood Sky Boy (Tim Price, NZL)	26.9	-	0.4	-	27.3
2	Ballaghmor Class (Oliver Townend, GBR)	27.9	-	-	4	31.9
3	Swallow Springs (Andrew Nicholson, NZL)	32.1	-	-	-	32.1
4	Reve Du Rouet (Sarah Bullimore, GBR)	27.3	-	7.6	-	34.9
5	Vanir Kamira (Piggy French, GBR)	29.9	-	1.2	4	35.1
6	Away Cruising (Harry Meade, GBR)	29.5	-	1.6	4	35.1
7	Alfie's Clover (Richard Jones, GBR)	34.2	-	2.8	-	37
8	Chance Remark (Willia Newton, GBR)	33.2	-	5.6	-	38.8
9	Soladoun (Elizabeth Power, IRL)	35.1	-	-	4	39.1
10	Bango (Tim Price, NZL)	32.1	-	9.2	-	41.3
11	Star Witness (Tina Cook, GBR)	39.1	-	-	4	43.1
12	Cooley SRS (Oliver Townend, GBR)	29.4	-	10	4	43.4