

Cooley Master Class

Oliver Townend's Kentucky winner, who thrives when he knuckles down

RIGHT from the start, Cooley Master Class screamed potential.

"I've loved this horse from the get-go," says Oliver Townend, who bought the Irish-bred gelding from Richard Sheane when he was a five-year-old.

"He was sexy in everything he did; an athlete right from a baby. But it's his temperament that makes him exceptional: he has a fantastic brain, beautiful personality and he's cheeky but never with any malice. He seems to smile all the time — he never has his ears back."

But Oliver's unglorious stops short when he remembers the cocky bay's first dressage test.

"I thought, 'Will you ever grow up and concentrate?'" he says. "It felt like he couldn't be bothered — he'd stick his head up and look out of the arena."

"Coolio" is still "extremely lazy" at home, and Oliver had to wait two years until the Ramiro B gelding began to fulfil his potential between the white boards.

"The first test I was happy with was an intermediate at Belton,

By MARTHA TERRY

and I realised he just needed more to do," he says. "As soon as he had to start concentrating on shoulder-in and other lateral moves, he knuckled down."

Such was Oliver's confidence in the horse that he persuaded his owner, Angela Hislop, to take the "huge gamble" of sending him to Kentucky last season.

"I was so convinced he would win and it would be worth the cost of getting him there," says Oliver, whose confidence was rewarded with victory on the horse's debut at the highest level.

Whatever the horse's future holds, Oliver's early premonition has been justified.

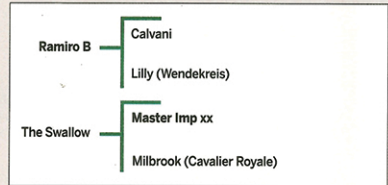
"He's proved every bit as good as I thought he'd be," Oliver says. "It would be lovely if we can take him back to Kentucky this year, but we will see what the spring brings. And when the time comes, we'll be having a conversation between all parties: Angela, me and Coolio." **H&H**

Market CIC3* 2017 and 2016; won Ballindenisik CIC03* 2014, Runner-up at Burgham CIC3*, and third at Blair Castle CIC3* ERM and Jardy CIC3* CCI4* 2018; won Burnham

13yo bay Irish Sport Horse gelding, 16.2hh

Stable name: Coolio
Owner: Angela Hislop
Breeder: John Hagan
Rider: Oliver Townend
Best results: won Kentucky CCI4* 2018; won Burnham

Market CIC3* 2017 and 2016; won Ballindenisik CIC03* 2014, Runner-up at Burgham CIC3*, and third at Blair Castle CIC3* ERM and Jardy CIC3* CCI4* 2018; won Burnham



OVERALL IMPRESSION
"The one thing that stood out for me, even when we had Master Class as a five-year-old, was how well proportioned he is," says Richard. "He's obviously more muscled now, reflecting all the work Oliver has put in, but that excellent frame was always there, with a deep ribcage for heart and lung room, while having plenty of blood. He's just a very correct model. I don't think all my geese are swans, but he has always been good-looking and athletic."

BODY AND QUARTERS
"He looks strong, from his neck through his back to his quarters," says Richard. "He has a beautifully sloping shoulder and his neck is well set-on, which is helpful for dressage, while his quarters look really powerful and well muscled for his gallop and jump. "I first saw him jumping as a four-year-old and tried to buy him then because of that power and the way he is so correctly built, but the owner didn't want to sell. Eventually I managed to acquire him after the winter. You could tell that if he was well trained and had a run of luck, he'd find the job easier than other horses because he's simply built to do it."

HEAD
"His head is the most striking feature for me," says Cooley Farm's Richard Sheane, who spotted the horse as a four-year-old at Cavan Show. "He's very good-looking, with a big star, big eyes and big nostrils, and he gives the impression he's intelligent and bold. "That intelligent outlook is what attracted me to him — he was so cocky and self-assured; nothing seemed to be an issue to him. Oliver has always said he'd be a better horse as he went up the levels, because he needed something to concentrate on in the dressage. Everything's always been so easy for him, you have to keep his mind on the job."

LEGS
"He has a really good set of limbs, almost perfect in terms of length, bone and angles," Richard says. "This, coupled with the way he is naturally built uphill, helps him to be very light on his feet. "His mother is by Master Imp, and they can sometimes have a weak hindleg, but with Ramiro B as his sire, he has inherited an excellent hindleg. He shows he'd have good spring through his hock, but it has enough angle to give him power. "I like his feet, too — they are simply shod, with nothing fancy."

'He was sexy in everything he did; an athlete right from a baby'

Picture by Peter Nixon