



Oliver Townend and exciting new ride Dromgurryh Gold get the season off to a flying start with a win in the intermediate

# Townend takes two

A familiar face and a potential future star triumph for Oliver Townend, as the eventing season gets under way

Poplar Park, Suffolk

By PIPPA ROOME

"THE day made the whole winter slog worthwhile," declared David Doel, after a successful outing to Poplar Park.

Top riders and horses enjoyed their first runs of 2025 in chilly sunshine, after early alarm clocks for most to travel to East Anglia for the traditional season-opener.

Three British championship gold medallists divided the open intermediate and intermediate victories between them, with Oliver Townend claiming two of

the four sections and taking second in a third.

"All three horses led the dressage, jumped well and have come out of the run very well. The ground was second to none and I was very happy with the horses' performance," summarised Oliver, describing this as a "box-ticking exercise" on the way to bigger targets.

Four-time five-star winner Ballaghmor Class, now 18, was three marks clear of his nearest rival with his 25.2 dressage test. He increased

that margin to 4.6 penalties as he cruised to an easy victory in open intermediate (OI) section B, ahead of Izzy Taylor and promising 10-year-old gelding SBH Big Wall.

Oliver said: "He seems happier and fresher than ever and I actually think he's improved on the flat – he feels like he's getting stronger every year. He doesn't even sweat at home on the gallops and he seems to be finding things easier and easier. As a young horse, he was a bit of an empty-framed, bony thing, but he looks well and quite fat now."

The rider has a spring five-

star, probably Badminton, in mind for Karyn Shuter, Angela Hislop and Val Ryan's grey.

"We'll take each run as it comes, and he's certainly not giving any inclination of not wanting to go – the decision will be down to him," said Oliver.

Paul and Diana Ridgeon's Cooley Rosalant, last year's Kentucky winner, punched in an impressive 21.8 in the first phase, then was "a little bit lackadaisical" in the showjumping with one down to finish second in OI section A.

"She'll get better for the run and also aim for a spring five-star," said the rider.

Oliver's other victory came in the sole intermediate section with a new ride, Michael McGrath's nine-year-old Dromgurryh Gold, who was previously piloted by Tim Price.

"I'm excited by him – he feels like he could be a very