

Rosalent takes early lead

EVENTING'S chief protagonists carried on where they left off at the last British five-star, with the Badminton winner Lordships Graffalo and runner-up Cooley Rosalent locking horns from the outset.

Personal best scores proliferated throughout the two days of dressage (see box, below), and with Vitali already holding the Burghley record of 18.7, another sub-20 looked likely. But it was Rosalent who danced to the fore on this occasion, her score of 22 short of her own five-star high of 21.1, but good enough to hold off Graffalo, by 0.4.

Bar a rushed mid-test halt, the mare's marks did not drop below seven, yielding six nines.

"I was caught out by the atmosphere; she wasn't as quiet as I'd have liked," said Oliver. "At times she's more like a racehorse than an event horse. But once she'd had her spook and we were into the more open work, she started to breathe."

While Rosalent's hallmarks were harmony, boldness and impulsion, Graffalo produced a different but equally appealing picture, with softness and submission. The judges could barely split the pair: Christina Klingspor, at E, tied them; Andrew Bennie at C ranked Oliver first; and Valerie Pride at M had Ros, who scored the only 10, for the final halt, leading.

Oliver Townend and Cooley Rosalent trump the eventual winners in phase one, as personal bests flood in

"I was thrilled with the flying changes – having missed two at Badminton," said Ros. "He loves an occasion, and thoroughly enjoys the crowd cheering him into the arena. But he's been a pain in the stable, like a pop star who's become a little high-maintenance with all his fame."

Tim Price's hopes of breaking his own record floundered when Vitali lost momentum in the shoulder-in. They recovered to post 23.1 for third, but without their usual plethora of nines.

"We had rideability and relaxation," said Tim. "It's about delivering in the ring what I know he's capable of. Just in that first shoulder-in, he was thinking, 'Are we stopping? I'm like, 'Mate, we've just started.'"

Sam Lissington franked her summer form with a stunner on Lord Seekönig for 24 in fourth. Their highlights were the flying changes, and an overall impression of power and precision.

MAVERICK ON TOP

WHILE the top four came on day two, Piggy March held

Oliver Townend and Cooley Rosalent put in a bold, active test to lead on a score of 22



Tom Crisp and old Dassetts Ros sit in 10th going the cross-country

PLACINGS AFTER DRESSAGE

- 1st Oliver Townend (GBR) on Cooley Rosalent
- 2nd Ros Canter (GBR) on Lordships Graffalo
- 3rd Tim Price (NZL) on Vitali

the overnight lead on day one, above Alex Bragg (28.4 on Ardeo Premier) and Will Rawlin (28.8 on Ballycoog Breaker Boy) who dropped from second and third to ninth and 11th by Friday evening.

Piggy and relatively new ride MCS Maverick scored 25.7 for fifth. The Mill Law gelding is reactive and Piggy spent the week helping him cope with the crowds.

"We've been out a lot, working, loose-lungeing, grazing, seeing people – he's probably sick at the sight of me," she said. "You have to stay with his brain, but in the arena he said, 'Mum, we've got this!'"

Piggy finished 0.4 clear of sixth-placed Emily King and Valmy Biats, who followed Oliver into the arena.

"I'm pleased with how he coped because he is sensitive

HOPES EVAPORATE

VITALI was the first in a rich vein of podium contenders, but three dressage protagonists in a row saw their hopes evaporate. First, dressage leader Cooley Rosalent and Oliver Townend had a momentary blip in an otherwise fabulous round, glancing off a corner in Joules at the Maltings (fence 18b). Their 9.2 time-faults despite the run-out – 11th-fastest all day – indicates they would have finished comfortably on their dressage score.

"She should be in a winning position," said Oliver, who had a second in hand over Ros Canter when leaving the start box. "I don't know what reason there was to run out, probably because she's a horse and horses make mistakes sometimes."

"She gave me a beautiful ride before and a beautiful ride after. She seems to find Burghley well within her scope