

# Piggy steals the show

ASTON-LE-WALLS (1)

PIGGY French received a pre-Bramham boost when she notched up some impressive placings at the first Aston-le-Walls fixture of the season, sponsored by Mulberry Insurance.

Her prize haul from the nine horses she took to this hugely popular mid-week event included two OI wins, plus a runner-up slot, as well as two third placings, one on the Houghton-bound Flying Machine who "should have won but I didn't put the pressure on across county".

Piggy's OI section 6 victor was Judy Bradwall's prolific prize-winner Lemington Lets Dance, who was Bramham-bound.

"He felt good in all phases," said Piggy, who also steered this horse's stablemate, Envoy, into second place in this section.

Envoy is a relatively new addition to Piggy's Leicestershire yard. The 10-year-old gelding by Lakestreet Envoy was produced from BE100 level by Steven James, who has retired from the sport and the horses he rode for Sue and Roger Wood are now with Piggy.

"Envoy is a nice horse on the flat — Steven has done a good job with him — but it's taken me a while to get to grips with his jumping. He's quite quick over fences and he can get strong across country so I've taken him back to basics. To be honest, he went better than I expected in a competition atmosphere," said Piggy.

Ireland's Aoife Sisk finished on her dressage score to take third place with her Master Imp offspring Master Crusoe, a difficult youngster who came good last season and is now on the development squad.

"It all really clicked with him last year," said Aoife. "He's only 16.1hh but he has a huge heart and he would lay down and die for you. He was tricky in the beginning, though. I wish I'd had one of those Point Two body protectors then!"

## Going into orbit

Piggy finished at the head of affairs in OI section M with Chase The Moon, a nine-year-old who has been in her yard for four years.

"He's lovely although he's taken a while to mature but he's nearly ready for three-star now," said Piggy, who found the going at Aston "firm" on the Thursday despite the watering and spiking that had taken place.

Mark Todd and NZB Gandalf, who had scratched from Badminton, were back in blistering form in OI section L. Dressage score finishers, they beat runners-up Kitty Boggis and General Opposition by 1.9 penalties.



above Piggy French and Lemington Lets Dance, OI winners

Meanwhile, birthday girl Emily Llewellyn — she celebrated her 20th in fine style at Aston — captured the under-21 OI with Pardon Me II.

"He's not the most straightforward horse so I never take anything for granted with him," said Emily. "He's been so fresh this season which has made him difficult to ride and he has lots of quirks. But as he'd never evented before I got him he owes me nothing which means I don't feel any pressure. I couldn't be more happy with him here as he flew round."

The organising team ran so many horses over four days that they lost count but competitor numbers went up to 1400.

"We didn't run that many but we could almost have put on another day," said Ann Taylor. "We had to ballot horses across all levels. It does make

for long days but we had generally finished by 6.30pm every evening, except Thursday when we had a couple of holds."

## JC will be back

One of these was for Jonathan Chapman, the most serious casualty of the event who suffered several breakages in a fall from his novice ride West Side. His injuries included three cracked ribs, a collapsed lung and a fractured pelvis and shoulder. Jonathan was taken to Coventry Hospital and from his bed he updated his website, which ran: "A big thank you to everyone at Aston-le-Walls — the organisers, medical staff and fence judges — for their prompt and professional attendance. West Side is doing fine and JC will ride again."

An extraordinary eight sections of intermediate action were spread over Thursday and Friday and they brought familiar faces, a new name and a blast from the past into the winners' enclosure.

Graham Law, who has been out of the spotlight for some time, piloted the 17-year-old Perfect Timing to victory in section K, while Louise Skelton took the first section with Shiner (Taff), a horse bred in West Wales whom Louise bought at the Malvern Sales.

Emma Castle captured section J with the seven-year-old Castle Larchfield Purdy, while Charlotte Prentice and Cool Decision occupied the top spot in section L.

Lottie bought the 17hh son of Roseberry Avenue, whom she rates as "a very exciting future prospect", five years ago and initially hunted him with the Cotswold.

"He may be big but I ride him in a snaffle," said Lottie. "He's a good mover but we've struggled with expression in the dressage so at Aston I dared to ask for more. I'm over the moon to have won."

Sam Watson took home the Fiona Lees Memorial Trophy after capturing the open novice with Hojo.

Julie Harding

## ALL ABOUT... EMMA CASTLE

INTERMEDIATE winner Emma Castle runs a yard near Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire, from where she buys and sells horses, always giving them a "Castle" prefix so she can follow their progress once sold.

She has in excess of 20 horses in at any one time but the leading light is her Aston victor Castle Larchfield Purdy. He was first reserve to go to the six-year-old championships at Le Lion d'Angers last season and Emma is pinning her hopes on a ticket to contest the seven-year-old class this year.

"I and his owner [Caroline Webb] will be the happiest people on the planet if he gets to go," said Emma. She bought the son of Karistos via the classified ads in *Horse & Hound* from a vendor who had purchased him from Ireland's Cavan Sales. She then sold him to Caroline Webb with the eventual intention of campaigning him herself and when Caroline broke her leg skiing two years ago that speeded up the process.

Emma comes from a hunting family and has ridden horses all her life. "I got to the point where I couldn't think what else to do," said Emma. "But I've got a thirteen-year-old daughter who's started to compete now, so I'm hoping she'll take over and I'll be able to watch from the sidelines."