



above Piggy French celebrates victory with a lap of honour **below** Oli Townend and Andrew Nicholson help her on to the podium

Piggy's Machine flies to victory

EIGHT- AND NINE-YEAR-OLD CIC***

PIGGY French headed the inaugural CIC*** at Blenheim aboard her eight-year-old Barbury CIC** winner Flying Machine. Second after the dressage, the 28-year-old rider capitalised on the leader Oliver Townend's six show jumping penalties to take the top spot and secure victory with a clear cross-country round six seconds under the optimum.

"For his age he's in a league of his own as he doesn't appear to have a weak phase," said Piggy. "Everything I've ever asked of him he's done."

Runner-up Andrew Nicholson was breathing down Piggy's neck all the way to the wire, the exciting finale of this contest being the cross-country phase run in reverse order of merit. In the end the Kiwi had to settle for the bridesmaid's position by 0.3 of a penalty aboard Avebury.

Andrew recorded two of the four rounds inside the optimum — Oplitas finished eighth — while Oliver Townend was the other to come home on a clean sheet. This left him in third for he had already relinquished his dressage lead with one dislodged pole and two time penalties in the show jumping aboard ODT Master Rose.

"I bought him here to see how he holds up against other eight- and nine-year-olds," said Oliver. "It's nice to know that he's good enough."

Only 17 combinations left all the coloured fences in their cups in a phase

where the biggest disappointment was suffered by Clayton Fredericks, who was eliminated for missing fence 9 with Mr Miller 2, equal 11th at this stage.

Two days of cross-country action ran glitch-free and course-designer Eric Winter confessed himself "delighted" with how his track had been tackled.

"[The CIC] was designed to let young horses have a positive experience and the fences in between the questions were a let up," said Eric. "These horses are being produced for the future so I wanted the eight- and nine-year-olds to go away having had a positive experience."

