



French proves the home turf Champion

Piggy French wins the open intermediate on Boherdeel Champion, who proved a consummate professional in the cold, wet early season conditions

Piggy French opens the 2007 season by keeping up her outstanding East Anglia record. Martha Terry reports

Piggy French may have moved from Norfolk to Leicestershire, but she remains the one to beat on home turf. You can take the girl out of East Anglia, but you can't take East Anglia out of the girl.

This time with Boherdeel Champion, she won Isleham's open intermediate for the second year running. In fact, in the past year, Piggy has racked up at least one win at each of the six East Anglian events she has entered.

The grey Boherdeel Champion, in the top 25 horses of 2006, was the class act in this small open intermediate class with 320 points already on his clock. He performed an immaculate test to score 24.5, 5.6pen clear of his nearest pursuer Cavort (Virginia Howe) and extended this lead with an economical double clear.

Appropriately enough on this sodden afternoon, greys also took second and third — First Frost (Lisa Maynard) and ODT Iron Brew (Oli Townend) leaptfrogged up the order with the two quickest double clears. No one finished within 10sec of the time, a reflection of the bottomless going.

Boherdeel Champion, whose last run yielded 14th place at Burghley, proved a consummate professional. He was kept standing in the arctic clothing ring for an hour while his stablemates jumped their rounds, and then lost a shoe just before the cross-country.

"He settled down really well — he's come back

in very good form," said Piggy, who clocked the third-fastest time to finish on 37.5pen. "I didn't want to go too fast, as he's very precious, but he's easy to turn."

The horse, owned by Waveney Harriers master and whipper-in Lavinia and James Wells, has Badminton in his sights this spring.

Piggy's 2006 winner Chicago II was in line for a potential runner-up prize with a 31pen dressage and show jumping clear, but suffered a refusal cross-country. Holly Blue Curtis kept the flag flying in fifth place.

Nicola Wilson was a trifle unlucky on Don't Underestimate. They headed out of the startbox in second place on their dressage score of 31 and were going well until being held at the broken frangible Bog Oak Surprise, five fences from home. By the time the mare restarted, she was noticeably cold, and although she jumped the first fence, she refused the next, an offset bounce and Nicola retired. She made amends with sixth place on another mare, The Bees Knees V.

Oli Townend failed by just 1.2pen to catch Lisa Maynard (First Frost) on his first outing with Nick Turner's former ride ODT Iron Brew.

"He's a good horse," said Oli, who is aiming at a three-star, "but he can improve in all three phases."

Oli's girlfriend Piggy had no rides in the intermediate section, and he duly won by 10pen on Waterview — owned, like Iron Brew, by



Oliver Townend and ODT Iron Brew, third in the OI, put in the fastest round of the day



Lisa Maynard and First Frost jump into the first water on the way to second place in the OI

Andrew Cawthray.

"I thought he was slightly harshly treated in the dressage," said Oli, third after that phase. "But he's proper Irish and didn't mind the ground. It was deep in places and I felt like we were swimming around, but I let him keep galloping."

Oli, again, was fastest in the section, finishing on 47.2pen. Second-fastest and overall was Fiona Jonason on Zinzan Tiger, who was bred two miles from Isleham. The part-Welsh grey was a promising young horse — he came 14th in the Burghley Young Event Horse five-year-old final and qualified for the Pony Club Championships at six. However, he has since had two years off with a tendon injury, followed by an early year.

"Fiona broke him in and has always ridden him," said owner/breeder Julie Isaacson of the Java Tiger grey. "He hasn't many miles on the clock, but we'll aim for a three-day this season."

Emily Gilruth finished a close third with Ashdale Cruise Master — yet another grey — and fifth on CS President, both owned by the Hardings.

The eight-year-old Ashdale Cruise Master has been only a handful of events since he started competing last spring, and already has 49 points, despite finishing his season in July.

"I decided he'd done enough by the summer and switched to dressage," said Emily. "The Hardings bought him as a foal to show jump [with

Irish team rider Dave Quigley] but he wasn't good enough. But he's a fantastic eventer — the best cross-country horse I've ever ridden. I took him steady because I don't want him to get cocky."

The show jumping arena was rolled between sections and was never slippery. The track proved easier than many intermediate courses of 2006, with 29% of the intermediates and 55% of the open intermediates going clear.

Problems across country were widespread. The first complex (three), on and off a bank with a sharp dog-leg to a skinny, claimed a few, as did the first water. The second water, approached off a tight U-turn, down a bank and up a steep slope to a hanging log caused several to flounder

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in deep going. Some horses didn't seem happy to be out in this wintry weather and a couple who were held on course failed to warm up again and retired.

The peaty soil at Isleham lived up to its reputation of never cancelling despite atrocious conditions. Riders remarked that although parts of the course rode slightly dead, it was never holding.

As organiser Col Chris Wells said: "I don't know what the peat does with all the rain, but it does something!"

Isleham was run in aid of Epilepsy Action — over the years, the Tompsett family has raised around £100,000 for charity. H&H



Fiona Jonason finishes second in the intermediate on Julie Isaacson's home-bred Zinzan Tiger