



ONLY IN HORSE & HOUND

'This is the ultimate five-star test'

Mark Phillips on Burghley's highs, lows, challenges and champions

HOW good it felt to move on from the pressure and controversies of the Olympics to savour the quality of Burghley, the five-star that started when it stood in for Harewood in 1961 because of foot-and-mouth.

My Burghley memories start in 1964 at the Pony Club championships when a Beaufort team including Jane Holderness-Roddam and I were beaten into second and then I rode Rock On to fourth in 1968. I then designed the cross-country for most of the next 30 years.

With Martyn Johnson in charge, Tim Henson chair of the Director's Advisory Group and unprecedented investment and co-operation from the Burghley Estate, the event moves forward in leaps and bounds, with the help of Defender sponsorship. The team must navigate the challenges of the internet, social media and declining spectators at outdoor events.

Happily, this year Burghley maintained their

OPINION

numbers and improved spectator experiences so hopefully the future is assured, but this is an ever-changing minefield.

THE WORLD'S BEST DESIGNER

THE presence of three Olympic horses in Ros Canter's Lordships Graffalo, Austin O'Connor's Colorado Blue and Susie Berry's Wellfields Lincoln contributed to making this year special.

This was possible because it's six weeks since Paris and that was a flat track of just over nine minutes, so for these horses, physically, the Olympics was little more than a CCI4*-S. Maybe, because the amazing Graffalo was the only one to produce their true form, the mental pressures in Paris were more than their riders appreciated.

Many consider Derek di Grazia the best current five-star course-designer.



Former Olympic team gold medalist and four-time Badminton winner Mark Phillips is one of the world's leading cross-country course-designers.

Add his expertise to the Burghley terrain and you undoubtedly have the ultimate five-star test.

Half clear and four inside the time appear to be perfect figures. Derek won't be so happy that 22 didn't complete and the statistic of only one horse fall was a little generous as some others were marginal. Having said that, frangible technology worked to perfection and prevented some nasty incidents.

Derek uses the terrain to create the optic of big fences but above all, if you don't get the best stride into his combinations, you have to go to plan B. This was never clearer than at the Rolex Corners – if you didn't ride forward to the first corner, it put you in an ugly place at the second.

WHO IMPRESSED?

THE Brits had a mixed day across country. I felt sorry for Oliver Townend, nursing a shattered collarbone with Cooley Rosalent. With a fit Oliver and Rosalent a year older, they have a great future.

Harry Meade had a stunning day with three clear rounds, but the best news is he looks to have a future championship contender in Annaghmore Valoner.

I take my hat off to Alex Bragg – he gave a demonstration of forward riding on Quindiva. Tom Jackson and Aaron Millar – both super-talented – looked to be riding too much in their comfort zone.

Another talented rider, Wills Oakden will be competitive when he has his brakes sorted on a Class Cooley and Max Warburton gave Deepaire Revelry great preparation for when the horse is stronger next year.

I felt for Pippa Funnell as MCS Maverick looked much more rideable until Pippa was battered following a great save at the Trout Hatchery. Emily King showed her inexperience here, having offered so much promise all year.

Tom McEwen must be shattered having not finished on the final day on two horses last year and now this year on CHF Cooliser, after one of his best rounds.

Ros Canter will want to forget her trip through Defender Valley with dressage leader Izilot DHI, but was as majestic as ever on Lordships Graffalo.

To cap it off with a clear showjumping was just reward for foregoing her chances at Badminton to preserve Graffalo for Paris, only for it to go partly as planned with team gold, but no individual medal.

Ros and Graffalo are world class – we are so very lucky to have two such great champions. **H&H** ● Which riders did you enjoy watching at Burghley? Write to hhletters@futurenet.com



Tom McEwen delivers "one of his best rounds" with CHF Cooliser, according to Mark, but withdraws on the final day