

DRESSAGE

PLACINGS
AFTER
DRESSAGE

1st

Andrew Nicholson
on Nereo (NZL)

2nd

William Fox-Pitt on
Chilli Morning (GBR)

3rd

Oliver Townend on
Armada (GBR)

Nereo hangs on to lead

An early 37.8 from Andrew Nicholson and Nereo is unchallenged across the dressage days

It is eight years since a Thursday dressage leader has held their advantage at the close of play (see box, p46). But Mark Todd pointed out in his H&H column (7 May) that this year many riders had their best horse drawn first and so it played out, with Andrew Nicholson – the 12th starter – holding on until the bitter end.

Andrew scored 37.8 with Nereo, collecting five nines. Highlights included the extended paces – a masterclass in riding a fit horse for the most possible marks.

"Nereo's very switched on, but knows to be calm," said Andrew. "Avebury (triple Burghley winner who missed Badminton after an early-season injury) is the sort who could go early and get a good score, while Nereo has to work for his marks – but I felt he was judged fairly today."

The judges were not entirely in agreement – while Christian Lindolt (C) and Sue Baxter (H) placed Andrew first, David Lee (B) put him equal sixth. Some of David's flying-change marking was also out on a limb, with Andrew garnering a seven for the first one from him but four and 4.5 from the others.

Jock Paget was second on Thursday with Clifton Promise, on 41.2.

"That was one of his best tests," he

said. "Every foot was where I wanted it."

By Friday night, Promise sat sixth, one place behind his stablemate Clifton Lush (40.8), returning from 18 months off injured.

The youngest rider, 20-year-old German Niklas Bschorer was Thursday's surprise sensation at his first Badminton, scoring 42.1 with Tom

Tom Go 3 for eventual eighth.

"He's like a pony in the stable – he's sneaky, always undoing your zip and playing around," said Niklas.

Flora Harris was the best Brit on Thursday with the talented but tricky Amazing VIII. Her 43.6 gave her 13th. "She's not a horse you can work into the ground or dominate – it's a case of

Above: Oliver Townend scores two sevens and a 7.5 for this flying change with Armada

Below: Germany's Niklas Bschorer, 20, lies eighth after the dressage on Tom Tom Go 3



Pictures by Peter Nilson

Thursday's leaders at Badminton over the years

Year	Thursday's leaders	Placing after Friday dressage
2015	Andrew Nicholson (NZL)	First
2014	Paul Tapner/Kilronan (AUS)	Second
2013	Christopher Burton/ Holstein Park Lellani (AUS)	Ninth
2012	Event cancelled	
2011	Laura Collett/Rayef (GBR)	Third
2010	Ruth Edge/Two Thyme (GBR)	Second
2009	Emily Baldwin/Drivetime (GBR)	Fourth
2008	Clayton Fredericks/Nullabor (AUS)	Fifth
2007	Lucinda Fredericks/Headley Britannia (AUS)	First



Flora Harris shows a strong test on the tricky but talented mare Amazing VIII to be best of the Brits on Thursday

having her connected and straight," said Flora. "Andrew Fletcher, my dressage trainer, has given me skills to train horses, not just ride tests."

Chilli's changes

THE most anticipated test was William Fox-Pitt's, late on Friday. But while Chilli Morning produced some beautiful work, he jogged coming out of the extended walk and was late behind in the first two flying changes – scoring fours from Sue and Christian, but a seven and eight from David.

"Not good enough!" said William ruefully as he took second on 39. "He's usually solid in the changes, but horses are not machines. He hasn't even had a jog walking round the park, so it's annoying he chose the arena for his first break."

Oliver Townend was thrilled with Armada, who relaxed for the first time here for third on 39.6.

"He's an old man now, so hopefully he's calming down," said Oliver.

Germany's Ingrid Klimke took fourth on Horseware Hale Bob, whose only mistakes were in the mid-test walk tour. He hunted as a young horse, and was distracted by hearing hounds.

Paul Tapner was disappointed with pathfinder Kilronan, who was second after dressage last year but pluffed in the halts for equal 27th. But he landed

seventh on Badminton debutant Indian Mill, a thoroughbred from Northern Ireland's Scarvagh House Stud – also responsible for Calico Joe, who slotted into 12th with Andrew Nicholson.

Bettina Hoy was ninth on Designer 10, who "tried so hard" as he is not a natural dressage star, while Aoife Clark and Vaguely North did a four-star personal best (42.9) for 10th. Tina Cook claimed 11th on De Novo News, who was distracted in walk by seeing himself on screen.

"I don't know why he was so vain!" said Tina, who trailed a double bridle to flatter his "big head and weak neck".



Bill Levett and Shannondale Titan, who Carl Hester picked as the best mover, are equal 15th

COMMENT

Carl
Hester

'Some marks needed correcting'

THERE were no 10s this year and few nines, after more "wow dressage" and top marks over the past few years. This four-star test [A 2009] requires more collection than the other one and so many top riders dropped from the top ranks because of the flying changes.

The first change, after the extended canter, sets the scene – riders who can't collect and have a wild change here take a while to recover.

There's almost a need for a judges' supervisory panel – as we have in pure dressage – because some marks needed correcting. A late change should get a poor mark, a clean but boring one an average mark and an expressive change a high mark. Some late changes garnered a seven or eight, while clean ones got 6.5, which is ridiculous.

Nicholson's risks

AMONG the top players Andrew Nicholson had the rideability factor – he took risks, as he does across country, and it paid off. William Fox-Pitt's Chilli Morning has more lightness and he could have led without the mistakes in the changes. And it was great to see Oliver Townend's ride Armada finally become submissive without losing his sparkle.

Ingrid Klimke was impressive as Horseware Hale Bob is not the best mover. Young riders should aspire to emulate her softness and good position. I felt Jock Paget was slightly undermarked on Clifton Lush, but to be fifth and sixth was quite something.

Titan was the best mover

I would take Bill Levett's Shannondale Titan as a horse for the future. He was the best mover and his springy trot, with a clear moment of suspension, deserved better marks. If he could be mistake-free and show better self-carriage he could score in the 20s, something we've not seen for a while.

The young German Niklas Bschorer is a lovely rider and it was nice to see Louisa Milne Home hit the 40s with King Eider after steady improvement each year. Paul Tapner is a top rider – both his horses were between leg and hand and Indian Mill showed lots of potential. Let's hope Laura Collett's Grand Manoeuvre can fulfill his promise and also Flora Harris' Amazing VIII, who showed the best outline in extended trot.

The take-home message? Flying changes have returned as a weakness in eventing dressage, having improved since they were first introduced. The placing of them is difficult in this test and I'm not sure if it's the best arrangement for fit horses, who have to deal with quite a difference between the warm-up and competition atmosphere. H&H