

Michael's back on form

**WITHINGTON MANOR,
GLOS**

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By Julie Harding

PAUL TAPNER may not have won Badminton this year, but he ensured that he collected a red rosette six days after that event by piloting Stormhill Michael into pole position in advanced section L at Withington Manor.

The 12-year-old gelding would have been at the great four-star if a slight injury hadn't led to a preparation setback. But Paul was determined to kick on across the country at this popular Gloucestershire venue after a "fantastic" dressage score notched up performing the CIC*** A test and showjumping clear meant that he was in with a real shout of victory.

It also proved to him that the horse, who was 10th at Badminton last year, was firing on all cylinders for a crack at Luhmühlen, where he hopes for a qualifying result for the London Olympics.

"It's great to have Michael back to top form," said Paul, who annihilated the opposition in this 51-strong section, finishing on 33.9pen, 5.1pen ahead of Gubby Leech and Caetano, who were recording their second advanced placing in three weeks.

"He did his first advanced here last year and finished 14th so it's amazing to see how he's come on in that time," said Gubby, who felt that he had relinquished the top spot due to extra penalties accrued in the dressage arena.

"The wind affected him. The arenas were exposed and he made a few mistakes," added Gubby.

If you could stay between the flags and in the saddle on Eric Winter's 25-fence advanced course you were in with a good chance of a placing, so influential was the third of the three phases,

I really rate Eric [Winter]. He has a good feel for a track and you know as you ride round that your horse isn't going to be punished

Pippa Funnell on the Withington course-designer

although penalties were well spread around the track.

"Names" to rack up jumping faults in both advanced sections included Nicola Wilson, Vittoria Panizzon, Mark Kyle and Lucinda Fredericks, with two rides. Zara Phillips, fresh from attending the royal wedding in a Paul Costelloe dress and Philip Treacy hat, was back in her breeches for a ride around this undulating track on Lord Lauries, who accrued 20pen

for a glance-off at the house-shaped Jewellery Box (fence 14).

"I thought the course was lovely and a lot of effort had been put into the ground," said Paul Tapner.

Pippa Funnell, who won advanced section M, concurred.

"I really rate Eric [Winter]," she said. "He has a good feel for a track and you know as you ride round that your horse isn't going to be punished."

Winning turned out to be a

After a setback which ruled him out of Badminton, Stormhill Michael proves his fitness ready for Luhmühlen with a win for Paul Tapner



bonus for dressage leader Pippa, who hadn't set Billy Landretti alight out of the starting gates, merely coming here for a pipe-opener prior to planned runs at Chatsworth and Bramham.

"He's been consistent this year," she said of the nine-year-old, who has finished first or second on his five outings this season. "His only problem is that he's spooky. He notices everything, but that in turn makes him careful."