

Wills Oakden, 34
GBR

It will be a third Defender Burghley for British rider Wills Oakden (34) who is based north of the border in Perthshire where, with his wife Stephanie, he runs a competition and training yard. In 2023 Wills scored two top-10 places at Burghley, finishing fifth on Oughterard Cooley and eighth with Arklow Puissance.

Wills is a former British Young Rider team medallist – he won team gold in 2011 at Blair Castle (Button Clover). He worked for Ian Stark for two and half years before setting up his own yard. In 2015, with the mare Greystones Midnight Melody, Wills rode as an individual at the senior European Championships, also at Blair Castle, and has represented Great Britain in Nations Cup competitions. His aunt Frances Hay Smith previously competed at the top level and is now heavily involved as an official. She owns and breeds horses ridden by Wills. His father James has also completed Badminton.

At the last-ever running of Blair Castle Horse Trials recently, Wills won both the CCI4*-L and the CCI2*-L.

A Class Cooley (Fortunus-New Year's Clover (Clover Echo)) is a 12-year-old grey Irish Sport Horse gelding owned by Frances Hay Smith and Bridget Mazdon and bred by Norman Watt. He has been ridden by Wills throughout his career, and the pair won the CCI4*-L at Blair Castle and finished second in the CCI4*-L at Ballindenisk in 2023. They started at Badminton this year, but did not complete.