



THE RIDE OF HIS LIFE

Rosie Parry meets international event rider Harry Meade to discuss eventing success, scary jumps and his Olympic dreams

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BEST OF BRITISH: left. Harry with his beloved lurcher Snip; below. Harry riding Wild Lone through the water in the CIC three-star cross-country at Belton Horse Trials; right. Harry competing Midnight Dazzler in the dressage phase at Badminton Horse Trials



A cluster of rosettes and placards won and achieved at numerous international events are proudly displayed on the walls in Harry Meade’s tack room at his yard in West Littleton near Chippenham, and quite rightly so. Harry had completed more CCI four-star events by the age of 25 than any other rider and is now recognised as one of Britain’s top event riders. But despite his outstanding achievements and highly acclaimed spot in the horse world, Harry remains charming and modest; his tack room scene a humble display of his commitment and how much it means to him.

Born in Bath and having attended the University of Bristol to study history of art, Harry pursued his first love of competing cross-country and followed in his father, three-time gold Olympic eventing medalist Richard Meade’s, footsteps. He worked as an assistant rider to William Fox-Pitt for ten years before going it alone. His hopes now lie in competing his 11 year-old gelding, Wild Lone, at the London 2012 Olympic Games. His ambition started early, he said: “We had other riders based with my father, one of them was Matt Ryan and he used to read me a bedtime story every night when I was really young – he went on to win gold in Barcelona and it was really exciting to see, they were like brothers and sisters. The Olympics is an incredible competition and a benchmark, there’s a universality to it and it retains its place as a pinnacle in most sports.” When asked what his ‘dream team’ would be, Harry deliberated and admitted it was a difficult choice, but three names came to him relatively quickly; his good friends William Fox-Pitt and Australian Sam Griffiths, and Olympic veteran, Mary King.

Harry is known for his quiet and sympathetic riding style and bringing on young horses. He works hard to give them a routine and, as an outcome, a solid base in all aspects of eventing; dressage, showjumping and cross-country. It is this fundamental way of training that Harry believes produces top quality eventers. “I ride about eight horses a day and the training is varied, I may do some dressage with two of them, jump two, and take a few on the gallops. They need a really solid base so that they are physically capable enough that whatever you ask of them they are in their comfort

zone. It’s also about building up a relationship bank, so that when you ask them to jump, say, the Vicarage Vee at Badminton, you can withdraw credit, but build it back up again. It’s as simple as every fence you jump and every bit of work you do, matters.” And work he does, Harry has around one day off every six weeks. It’s worth it however, as eventing allows Harry to compete at cross-country. “I find it easy to ride in a rhythm, you don’t have to really think about making alterations, it’s about being quite refined, other aspects have a cognitive process.”

It is his favourite phase of eventing but it is also considered the most dangerous, and Harry says there are specifically two jumps that are “daunting and exciting to ride.” One of these is Cottesmore Leap at Burghley Horse Trials. A huge ditch followed by an even bigger brush fence means that a Landrover can sit comfortably in between. Harry said: “A lot of riders won’t walk the fence and avoid it



altogether, I quite like scaring myself a bit standing in front of it.” The second nerve-racking jump is the Vicarage Vee at Badminton Horse Trials – a fence he will no doubt be facing this month – it’s narrow with three ditches, very technical and it must be taken at an angle. Harry adds lightly: “People also don’t realise that the ground falls away before it.” Despite this, as yet another reason to appreciate Harry as a world-class eventer, he has had top ten placings at both Burghley and Badminton.

To say world-class is even more appropriate now, as he has spent the last year on the lottery-funded squad ahead of the Games. “It put an emphasis on developing home teams and a support network so you can specialise on training and competing. Sport is also a business and it taught me how to deal with sponsors, owners, a team of staff and specialists.” The official team for London 2012 is expected to be released later this month or in early June, but Harry says he is staying level headed about it as one of the youngest on the list of those being considered.

The chance of competing in future Olympic Games may take him around the world but Harry’s roots are firmly in the west country. He laughed: “I haven’t strayed at all, I love this bit of the country.” He lives with his wife, Rosie and their baby daughter Lily, born earlier this year, in Luckington. So the question is, when will Lily start riding? “She will probably start on the front of one of my horses at six months old, which is what I did as a child to get used to the movement.”

As a gifted horseman and businessman and with the tremendous support of his family, Harry certainly deserves for his Olympic dream to come true, if not this year then in years to come. Watch this space. ■

To follow Harry’s progress visit: www.harrymeade.com