



After a disastrous fall last year left his Eventing future uncertain, **Harry Meade** is returning to The Land Rover Burghley Horse Trials this year in miraculous good health. *Catherine Austen* spoke to him about the road to recovery

MEADE FOR SPEED

In the first week of September 2013 Harry Meade was not, as he had expected and planned, competing at Land Rover Burghley. Instead he was lying in a hospital bed in a great deal of pain with no idea whether or not he would ever ride a horse again.

A week earlier, Harry had fallen with one of his best horses at Wellington Horse Trials in Hampshire. He hit the ground with his arms outstretched and smashed both elbows to smithereens, incurring over 25 fractures. Fortunately for Harry he was wearing his Airowear body protector, which protected him from further serious injury.

After painstaking surgery to rebuild the shattered elbows, Harry had to endure an extremely frustrating autumn and winter. He was told there was a significant chance he would never sit on a horse again. And, totally without the use of both arms, he had to rely entirely on his wife Rosie to dress, wash and feed him. To add to the complications, Rosie and Harry had a one-year-old daughter, Lily, and Rosie was heavily pregnant with their second child, Charlie.

“Rosie has been a total star,” Harry emphasises. “She took unpaid leave from her school teaching job to look after me 24 hours a day as well as run my business.”

But come the start of the Eventing calendar in March, he and his horses were ready and the rosettes came flooding in. Sheer determination – and the exceptional support of his wife, family and owners – meant that he was able to start the season “as normal”.

He and his top horse, Wild Lone, made it to Badminton as planned. The cross-country track was the toughest seen at the Event for many years, and an

extraordinary number of Eventing’s most celebrated riders failed to complete.

In a brilliant display of bold riding and horsemanship, Harry piloted Charlotte Opperman’s horse to a fabulous clear round. On the Sunday the tough showjumping course took no prisoners, and Harry’s four-fault round was good enough to thrust him into third place. It was a fairytale brought to life, and attracted a great deal of media attention.

“You always want Badminton to be a tough challenge which separates the field, and I like courses where you really have to attack and ride by the seat of your pants. I was delighted with Wild Lone’s dressage and we performed as we normally do in the jumping phases, but were able to stand out because of the nature of the competition.

“Wild Lone felt brilliant cross-country, and came out very fresh and well on the final day. I was disappointed to have one fence down, but from a confidence point of view it was well within my grasp to jump clear and have won Badminton. →

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LEFT:
HARRY MEADE
RIDING MIDNIGHT
DAZZLER AT
BURGHLEY

“The feeling afterwards was overwhelming, and I was blown away by the reaction of the crowd and public.”

Harry’s end-of-season goal with Wild Lone was Burghley but his exciting World Equestrian Games (WEG) call up has intervened.

There is no doubt that Harry is riding as well as, if not better than, ever following his accident – and perhaps the hidden steel of his determination has become a little more exposed.

“Over the winter I didn’t even know if I’d have a season – or anymore seasons,” Harry explains. “There was real uncertainty – but that really focuses the mind. In a sport where competitors tend to have long careers and are very busy all the time, one season blends into another. I had a lot of time to look at things from an outside perspective. The prospect of your career to date being your entire career makes you think about what else you want to achieve, and I had the opportunity to focus and develop a strategy of how to make it happen, assuming I would be able to ride again.”

He has, perhaps, his father Richard’s career in mind. Richard won both Badminton and Burghley – and three Olympic gold medals, as well as multiple medals at World and European Championships for Britain.

Richard retired from competing in the mid-1980s, not long after Harry was born. Indeed Richard worked several of Harry’s horses after the accident – as did Angela Tucker.

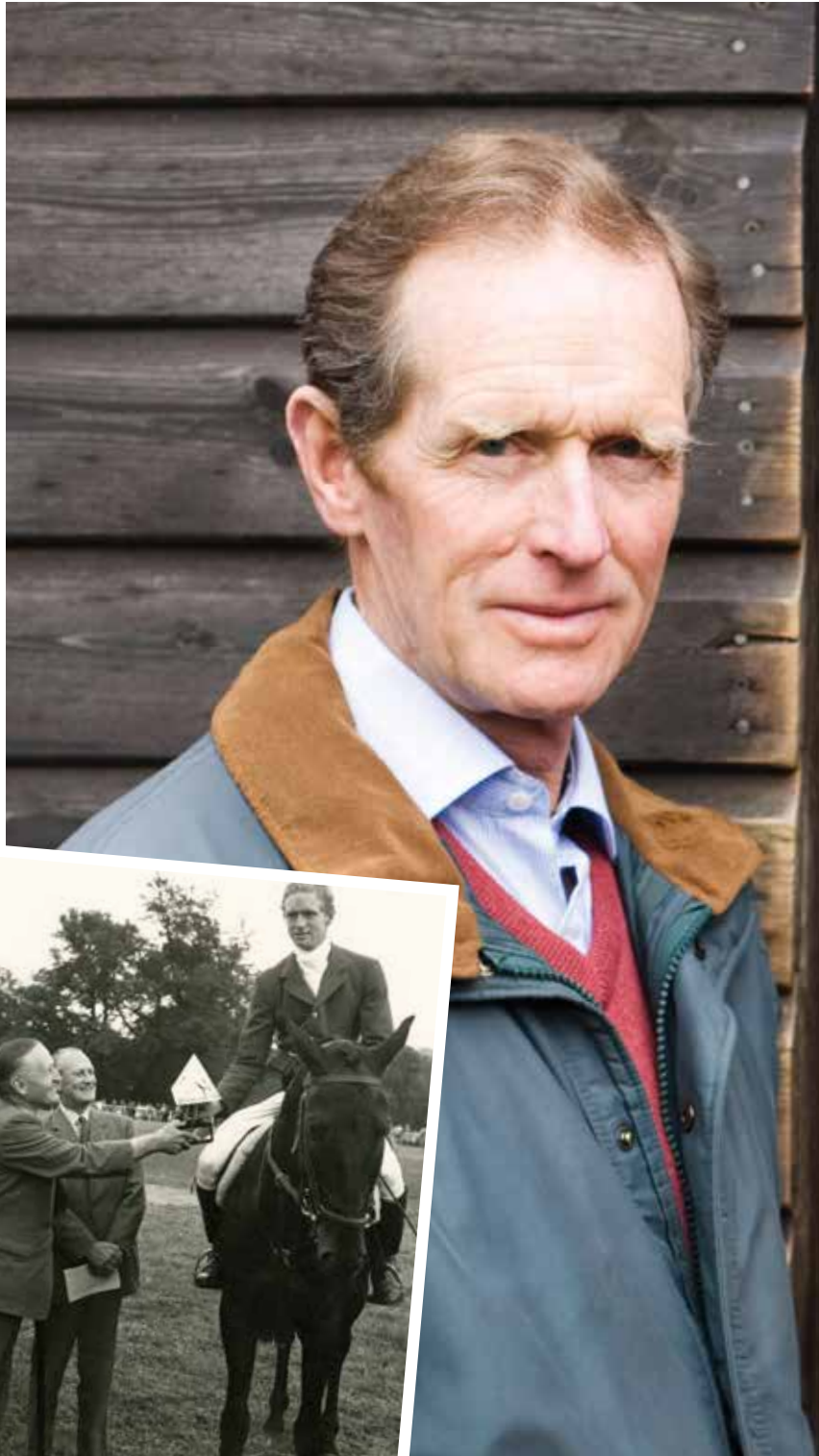
“I didn’t want my injury to do anything to hinder the horses’ normal routine, so they both helped my head girl Jess Errington keep things on the road,” says Harry. “My father really enjoyed it and joked that he was coming out of retirement!”

Harry, 31, has certainly inherited his father’s talent, but the modern sport of Eventing demands horse power at a level to which Harry has rarely had access yet.

His partnership with the Lissacks’ Midnight Dazzler, a horse who came with a reputation for being difficult, put him on the map.

“He came to me aged 13 with a chequered past,” says Harry. “We had a bumpy start, and I went to my first Burghley in 2005 without any expectations. Now, I would have waited a year. But I was very keen to go and I thought that every Event might be his last.

“But Burghley was the start of his transformation from a pretty inconsistent horse to one of the best four-star horses of his generation. Burghley 2005 was one of those rare Events when everything all week went to plan.



“Midnight Dazzler was very hot in the dressage, but he did a good test. I expect all my horses to go clear across country, but that’s the one time I didn’t have the same confidence – we’d had a few falls together. I had a brilliant ride – we finished and I remember thinking, ‘that was easy!’”

The pair showjumped clear and finished 13th – a result far beyond expectations.

The following autumn, having jumped clear around Badminton in the spring, Harry and Midnight Dazzler were faultless across country and took 20th place, and in 2007 they completed on their dressage score at both Badminton and Burghley, finishing eighth at the latter. →

ABOVE: HARRY’S FATHER, RICHARD MEADE

INSET ABOVE: THE MARQUESS OF EXETER PRESENTING THE BASS CHALLENGE TROPHY TO WINNERS RICHARD MEADE AND BARBERRY IN 1964

“Burghley was designed for him, and he was made for Burghley. He was a very fast, quality horse who relished a really big track and an endurance test,” says Harry. “And being so hot meant that on the third day, when other horses were tired, he was still totally fresh and up for it.”

Harry has 10 horses to compete this season, and points out Away Cruising – a seven-year-old Intermediate horse who Harry describes as a “proper three-day horse who will come into his own at the higher levels” – and Shannondale Santiago, a nine-year-old Advanced horse, as ones to watch.

Harry has ridden his current four-star hero, Wild Lone, since the Irish-bred gelding was a four-year-old.

“He’s very genuine, and I felt early on that he was a four-star horse through and through,” says Harry.

The combination have been clear across country at each of their five CCI4s to date. Their only trip to Burghley so far was in 2012 when, on a very wet day, they ran relatively steadily towards the end of the afternoon in deep ground.

“Burghley was my first four star and it has been somewhere I’ve had good results, so it has a positive feel to it for me and I love going there,” he says. “The Burghley team is great at making everyone feel special – riders, owners and spectators – and that’s why we all love going there.

“The park always looks stunning. Mark Phillips [the Course Designer] is brilliant

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at designing something that looks very new and challenging when you walk it, but you trust his instinct and experience to get it right.”

Harry is living proof that every cloud does indeed have a silver lining.

“I’m sad not to be competing at Burghley, but thankfully it’s for a good reason this time having recently had the call up for the British team at the World Equestrian Games. The next plan is to have a strong team of horses to get me to the European Championships at Blair Castle next year, and Rio in 2016, and not to fall off! That was my first fall in four years and I’m hoping to keep the next one at bay for as long as I can,” he says with a smile.

Sometimes, Events that seem like a disaster at the time have the ‘domino effect’ of pushing someone to achieve even greater things than they may have done otherwise. The many admirers of Harry’s riding certainly hope so – and the rewards are sure to taste even sweeter. ?

Harry is always looking for new horses, owners and sponsors to join his team. For more information please visit www.harrymeade.com

BELOW: HARRY
AND WILD LONE

