

Generation game

Mel Rutherford meets a rising star following in the golden footsteps of his famous father



Harry and Midnight Dazzler at Belton in 2008

Flicking through my notes on the way to Harry Meade's Cotswold yard, I get the feeling that this interview is not going to be an ordinary one. 'Protégé of William Fox-Pitt'... 'A hat-trick of 'best under-25 rider' awards at Burghley under his belt'... 'Son of three-times Olympic gold medallist, Richard Meade'... 'Good friend to Will and Harry' – and yes, those are the two princes I'm talking about. Why then, I wonder, is the 25-year-old eventer not one of the most talked about names in equestrianism?

Words: Mel Rutherford. Photos: Horsepix, Kfi Houghton. Thanks to Coolex for organising the photoshoot, www.welfi.co.uk. For more information about Harry, visit www.harrymeade.com





Clockwise from opposite left: Harry takes Jovial Valentino for a wander down the lane; the stable yard at Church Farm is understated and homely; the beautiful Meade residence completes the picture-postcard look; seven-year-old Flying Machine is one of Harry's most exciting prospects and one to look out for; Basil, the farrier's dog, takes a quick nap in the outdoor school.

First impressions

It turns out that Harry is not so different to his charming Cotswold yard. On the outside, Church Farm appears to be yet another exquisite Wiltshire residence. Perfectly manicured lawns slope either side of the wide, stone gateway and a uniform row of trees lines the pristine, gravel driveway – a fitting entrance to the imposing stone house that is the Meade residence. On first impressions, ostentatious is a word that could easily spring to mind – however, both Harry and Church Farm are anything but.

The talented eventer is warm and welcoming when I arrive, despite the fact that the time he's sparing to pose for cameras and answer questions he's probably been asked a million

times over, could be better spent preparing for the upcoming Burghley Horse Trials. "We're going away on Sunday to Gatcombe, then we've got two, three-day events back-to-back," he explains.

"We'll get back from Gatcombe late Monday night, drive to Burghley the following morning and come back late Sunday night. After one day here at the yard, it's then off to Blenheim early Tuesday morning."

To say Harry's schedule is busy is like saying William Fox-Pitt is a half-decent rider, and it's difficult to imagine how he finds enough hours in the day. "There's no way of working the horses in a seven-day routine," Harry admits. "We get the horses out [to competitions] more than most people and we're away quite a few

days a week – either training, out at dressage or showjumping competitions, cross-country schooling or competing. That usually takes up half a day, then we'll come back and ride the other horses – I normally ride seven or eight each day."

Home comforts

Go to any stable yard and chances are, you'll find all manner of different animals making themselves at home. Church Farm is no different – firm fixtures include Labradors, terriers and lurchers. "The Labs belong to my grandmother," Harry explains, "but Snippet [his black lurcher] is mine – and she insists on coming along to all the events with me!"

And while Clive the farrier is busy seeing to the horses' feet, his dog,

Basil, is equally busy hoisting himself into a nearby water trough. "You're not going to get in there – come on, out!" says Harry, with a hint of amusement in his annoyance, as he rushes over to drag the terrier out. "He's always doing that, and it means we have to scrub out the whole trough every time!" Chickens, too, wander around the yard – it all makes for a relaxed atmosphere, and keeps a sense of humour in the busy and hectic environment.

With just 16 stables – including four, slightly makeshift boxes tucked away by the outdoor school – Church Farm is, shall we say, bijou. Fortunately, unlike a lot of professional riders, Harry isn't regimented about keeping his horses under lock and key. "I like all mine to get out, ideally to live out. Some of my top horses are rugged up really well and live out all year, even in snow and rain. They look well, go well and are very happy."

Road to success

It would be easy to presume that Harry has it easy – a yard on his doorstep, a

top trainer on hand whenever needed – but he seems to have gone out of his way to take a less obvious, and arguably more testing, course.

"I started off working with my father," he says, "but I only trained with him up until I was about 18. From then, I worked with other people and I now train with Sandy Phillips, among others."

"It's good to get away a bit from what you're used to and try new ideas," he says. "My father is very supportive and we do still work together. He's laid back and unassuming, so a great sound board to bounce ideas off."

Carving his own path was something Harry was keen to do from a young age. After growing up at Church Farm, he moved out and had bases at two different yards, including that of William Fox-Pitt. Now, Harry is back on home turf, renting his father's old yard – although he still prefers to keep it all at arm's length, choosing to rent a small cottage down the road as opposed to relying on Mum and Dad. He does, however, make the most of it, storing mounds of paperwork in a

Ones to watch

"We have fewer horses than most people," explains Harry – although it's not for want of any more. "I try to keep it to smaller numbers of a higher quality – that means I can put more work into better horses."

"I've got a really supportive team of owners, and a nice spread of horses across the levels, ranging from Pre-novice to four-star," he continues. That includes four-star horses, Midnight Dazzler (Bobby) and Birthday Night (Barney), and three-star mare, Rosalier (Cassie).

On the day of the shoot, Harry put two of his up-and-coming rides through their paces. Seven-year-old Flying Machine is one of Harry's new mounts and an exciting prospect for the future.

Bay gelding, Jovial Valentino (aka Tino) also started competing with Harry last season. He describes the six-year-old as a sensitive ride – but it's easy to see why Harry would get the best out of sensitive horses. He is quiet and patient in the saddle – even the little roller-ball spurs on his boots nod to a 'gentle' approach.

Aesthetics, fancy horseboxes and state-of-the art facilities aren't top priority – for Harry, it's all about the horses



Harry and his team of grooms with (left to right) Flying Machine, Spring Robin and Jovial Valentino

Harry achieved with Midnight Dazzler what Fox-Pitt could not

tiny room in the Meade house. The office – “where it all happens” – is smaller than most.

“You don’t want to come in here!” jokes Harry, although it would be almost impossible to fit more than one person in at once anyway – my head is about all I can squeeze into the narrow room.

The rest of the Meade residence is just as understated and homely. From Harry’s credentials, you might expect his yard to boast brand new, state-of-the-art stabling, an Olympic-sized indoor arena, and a 10-horse lorry with facilities that wouldn’t look out of place at a Champneys spa. But it’s evident that here, it’s not about aesthetics or fancy equipment – for Harry, it’s all about the horses.

The tidy, single row of stables is as modest as he is, and the run-of-the-mill horsebox tucked away behind the yard hints that the rising star isn’t out to make a statement. Not that he has to – his record speaks for itself.

English patience

Midnight Dazzler (affectionately known as Bobby) is the most successful of Harry’s four-star horses, and it was not through sheer luck that the pair finished eighth at the 2007 Burghley Horse Trials. In fact, Harry achieved with Bobby what others could not.

It was while based at William Fox-Pitt’s yard that Harry was offered the somewhat difficult ride. Notorious for his over-sensitive temperament and tendency to jump erratically if pushed too fast over cross-country, Bobby was sent to the five-times Burghley winner. However, the horse proved too much to handle even for Fox-Pitt and, two falls later, he gave up the ride. And so, Bobby’s owners offered him to Harry to play around with.

A lot of patience and hard work later, the pair proved everyone wrong, producing a cross-country round ‘in a class of its own’ according to Lucinda Green, at the 2006 Badminton Horse Trials. Since then, they have had six completions at Badminton and Burghley, and are one of the most established partnerships at that level.

All of this, however, I discovered after much research. On asking Harry about his achievements while he tacked up for the photoshoot, I received the casual reply: “Bobby was eighth at Burghley in 2007 and 13th at Badminton the year after.” The truth is, he’s just not the sort to boast about his achievements.

Team spirit

With such a busy schedule, it’s all hands on deck at the yard and luckily,

Tino is an exciting prospect for Harry



Harry has a solid team behind him. Groom, Ollie is an extra pair of hands during the competition season and head groom, Sam keeps everything in order at the yard. Kate runs things in the office and acts as the busy eventer’s right-hand man, and is “...much more organised than I am!” Harry admits.

Trundling back down the driveway of Church Farm at the end of the day, I am left with a very different picture of the young eventer than what I had expected. With the name Meade comes a huge amount of pressure, but Harry is reassuringly grounded. On paper, he might be a young man with a famous father, royal connections and a shelf full of awards, but Harry has no plans to shout about it – he lets his results do the talking.