

A family AFFAIR

Event rider *Harry Meade* shares with us what it's like being part of a family where the horse has always been at heart

Photography *JON STROUD*

A

s the son of Britain's most prolific event rider, the sport is undoubtedly in Harry Meade's blood. "From a young age I was very aware of what my father had achieved," says Harry. "He was a member of the team that won the Olympic gold medal in

Mexico in 1968 and then again in Munich in 1972, where he also won the individual gold." Richard, who was awarded an OBE in 1973, was part of this golden era of British eventing, where everyone knew what eventing was and that Britain was great at it.

"At that time, things were incomparable to how they are now, as so few medals were won. Britain only won four Gold medals at the 1972 Games and two of them were in eventing; every shopkeeper or taxi driver around the country was familiar with eventing and it's protagonists. Anywhere you went, people would ask for his autograph or a photo... and that's quite impressionable on a young child."

However, for Richard it was never about the fame. "He didn't like the concept of celebrity," explains Harry. "He always cared about the sport, much more than about his own standing within it. He put a lot of work in for the good of the sport and horse welfare, and I don't want that to all be in vain. I do feel quite a large responsibility to try and put something back into the sport myself, and I know that has come from my father."



Family time: Harry with wife, Rosie, and children Lily and Charlie.

As you would imagine, there are many things that Harry has taken from his father. One of the main things being a deep-rooted appreciation for good old fashioned horsemanship. "Dad was always a horseman through and through," says Harry. "He was a very good competitor, but never at the expense of horsemanship."

"I don't think horsemanship has changed, but it's becoming an increasing rarity. Many people who ride nowadays don't have a background with horses and that includes some competitors."

Of course, as in everything in life, things have progressed over the decades, but the knowledge that some of those riders and stud groomers had – the people who'd had a lifetime with horses, where the knowledge had been passed down – that's invaluable.

"And it doesn't change – horses are horses and we've been riding them for millennia. There's always ways that you can develop and move things forward, our children's generation will be doing things slightly differently and their children will be doing things differently again, but the values don't change."

Harry certainly appreciated the knowledge his father was able to impart to him, from walking cross-country courses together to assessing young horses. "My father's parents set-up the first Connemara stud in Britain, so he had a showing background. He was a show judge, as well as a dressage and eventing judge, and he had a very good eye for conformation. I think it's all those details that you learn through the experience of shadowing someone older. I miss him hugely but at the same time I'm grateful that I had as long as I did with him."

"He was good at taking a difficult horse that other people hadn't got on with and consistently finding the key to becoming a potential medal-winning partnership at the next Olympics or World Championships. He didn't ride large numbers of horses but he could get the

Beautiful
FOOTWEAR

Crafted in the finest buffalo leather & suede
Guaranteed comfort & protection

CLASSIC COUNTRY STYLE BOOTS

HyLAND Bakewell Long Country Boots | HyLAND Buxton Short Country Boots

HY ARMoured TERRAIN
Hy-Equestrian.com

Instagram Facebook Pinterest

LINCOLN

**FIRST AID ESSENTIALS
BE PREPARED**

PRODUCTS YOU CAN RELY ON

FIRST AID

Lincoln-Equestrian.com

Instagram Facebook BETA

#poweredbylincoln

Learning from a young age: Harry and his son, Charlie, spend time with the pony and below, enjoying time at home



absolute best out of a horse, enabling it to peak for a particular competition. He taught me not to be preoccupied by tomorrow or the next day, but to see the big picture and to focus everything towards the end goal.”

As much as Harry has benefitted from his father’s influence, there are also areas where he is conscious that they differ. “I guess you assume that you’re going to have similar strengths and weaknesses to your parents,” says Harry. “So something that I guess surprised me a little bit, was that Dad rarely produced his horses from youngsters.”

Many of the horses that Harry has been successful with, he has produced from the start of their careers. Both Wild Lone, who he rode at the last World Championships, and Away Cruising, who was long-listed for this year’s World Championships, he produced from four-year-olds. “There is a great sense of satisfaction in shaping horses into the finished articles, and of course the result is a very strong partnership,” says Harry.

Harry has worked hard to create the perfect base for producing horses. “The horses are so happy and settled at Church Farm,” he says. “It has all of the raw ingredients that you can’t build and you can’t buy – the terrain, the air quality (being on top of the Cotswolds) and the soil type (good old turf) – so from that point of view, it’s great.

“I’m heavily reliant on the knowledge that’s being passed down, knowing which bits of ground to use when the going’s soft or when it’s firm, or knowing that the heart rate should have come down by the third tree on the right

when you’re hacking back after fast work... it’s all of that acquired knowledge that, if you go to a new set up, you have to learn by trial and error.”

The yard is close to Badminton; so close that in Richard’s day, having completed his final gallop before the event, he would ride on into Badminton and put the horse in his stable, with the lorry following on and meeting him there.

Not surprisingly, a win at the Gloucestershire event is at the top of Harry’s wish list. “I’d like to win Badminton and I’d like to win an Olympic gold medal... but there are so many ingredients involved in achieving that. I believe it’s a case of working hard, leaving no stone unturned, and continuing to find the right horsepower to start with.”

Things might be looking bright for Harry now, but in 2013 he suffered career-threatening injuries following a rotational fall. Both of his arms were shattered and the right elbow especially was in a lot of pieces – he had over 25 breaks in that arm alone.

After six months of not being able to do anything for himself, it was a huge relief for Harry when he was able to proactively get started with rehab. “It felt much more like my usual life, where I had a target and I could work hard. I could start to plan a training programme, as if it was for one of my horses, and look to exceed the targets.”

“**I’D LIKE TO WIN BADMINTON AND I’D LIKE TO WIN AN OLYMPIC GOLD MEDAL**”

Harry and Spot (right) are heading for Burghley and below, exercises like this Crazy Catch have helped Harry in his rehabilitation.

However, one question remained, would he be able to return to eventing? At one point things looked particularly gloomy and his doctors advised that he would have to find another career. However, he felt that if the sport was something that he was going to walk away from, he wanted to be absolutely sure that he couldn't do it. So that's when he tried riding again.

"I still had my Forrest Gump braces on my arms and I had very little movement but I could close my fist and that's when I discovered that, whilst the hands and the torso are key, the arms are not as fundamental to riding.

"The first day I had a walk, the second day I went onto the gallops and from there, I thought to myself, right, this is it... I'm going to go to Badminton in ten weeks' time! It was a eureka moment and I started to think that a comeback may be possible."

Because he had had so long to think about it, Harry was very aware that he may well have lost his nerve. He hadn't hit his head, so he can remember everything about the fall... and was open to the idea that it may well have affected him.

"The first day I went cross-country schooling, I only took the horses I knew really well. I also entered my first-ever unaffiliated event, so I'd have a run without any kind of pressure, and I dropped all my horses down one level for the first run... But actually, as it transpired, by the time I jumped my first cross-country fence, I instantly knew these precautions had been unnecessary and that my confidence was unaffected. I felt like this is what I do, this is who I am and it was great to be back!"

Just weeks after first getting back on a horse, Harry finished third at Badminton in 2014 with Wild Lone and



then went on to represent Great Britain at that autumn's World Equestrian Games in Normandy. However, the pair had just completed the cross-country course when Wild Lone tragically died. Rarely has anyone experienced a year that better demonstrates the highs and lows that equestrian sport can throw at you, than Harry did that year.

Despite those knocks, Harry remains hugely passionate about the sport and is looking forward to campaigning his top horse, Away Cruising (or Spot to his

friends), at Burghley this year. He is also enjoying introducing his children, Lily and Charlie to the pleasure that horses can bring.

"A lot of my lifelong friends come from riding and the pony club. From the age of about two or three, all I wanted to do was follow in my father's footsteps and try and get to the top in eventing.

"When we started riding, my father was always mindful that as children we develop a natural feel. It's a little bit like when children learn languages – they don't learn about grammar and vocabulary, they just pick it up and start speaking it. He was always wary of training out a natural feel, so we didn't have much input from a training point of a view as children. I think that stands you in really good stead to develop into a natural rider.

"It's great that our children are enjoying it too. Who knows whether either of them will have a career in the sport, I'm just pleased that they love riding and I hope that they get as much pleasure out of horses as I have. I feel very lucky."

● For more information about Harry, visit harrymeade.com