

# Access All Areas Harry Meade

Harry Meade's phenomenal attention to detail provides each of his mounts with a bespoke schedule, maximising their potential. *Martha Terry finds out how he and his team work*



A family affair: Harry stands with his daughter Lily outside his beautiful Cotswold base

**H**ARRY MEADE'S Cotswold yard is the buzzing hub of activity you'd expect of a world-class event rider. When I arrive at 9am, Harry and his work rider Tim Rogers have already ridden a couple before Tim and two other members of the team headed off to Osberton with three horses. Three more have just arrived back from competing at Waregem in Belgium, and the vet and physio are due shortly for the end-of-season screening of the whole yard. Grooms are busy in the stables, packing up, jingling leas, turning out, mucking out and weighing hay.

Harry's wife, Rosie, responsible for most of Harry's admin — his boss, as he refers to her — is making coffee in the kitchen of her mother-in-law Angeak's 18th-century farmhouse. The couple live eight miles away, near Badminton. "There isn't a typical day here," explains Rosie. "Tomorrow Harry's at Osberton, the next two days he's running hunting courses, and then he's off to Danneberg."

**W**E head out to a 12-acre field, where Harry is warming up Castle Howard Octavian alongside work rider Katie Painter on Brookfield Pointlisse Boy. Both are class five-year-olds bound for Osberton's young horse championships the following day, and will be given a thorough school this morning on the flat. There's a 20x60m arena smartly marked out with white boards and pots of flowers. Harry does have an

all-weather arena, but works on grass as much as possible. "We're lucky to be on an old turf here," he says, trotting in large circles on a loose contact as his horse, Muddle, performs a scorching flyby. "We do 95% of their work on grass from April to November, and the four-year-olds don't go in the school at all."

As Harry practises his heels, he encourages Katie to give him feedback: "I push my work riders into being vocal in their critique — it's helpful to me, and it's good for their education and confidence. They're good riders and I like them to be involved."

Harry's next to head out of the yard — also a five-year-old. At this time of year, he's mostly riding the youngsters as his top horses are on holiday. Away Cruising (Spot) is enjoying fall turnout after finishing sixth at Burgley, while Tenareze (Taz) is winding down after a successful trip to Waregem just before my visit. The horses are let down gradually after their autumn three-day events.

"Their legs are tired three times a day for four days, and they back for a week until we're satisfied everything is normal," Harry explains. "It allows any filling to come to light that you might miss if you turned them straight out."

Tenareze is standing docily in the stable, looking fit as a flea after his Belgian efforts, as head groom Jess Errington wraps Tesco disposable ice packs round all four legs.

I spot a hanging ball in the next-door stable, which Harry installs for head-silly horses, so they get used to something rubbing against them as they move around. Dogs and chickens wander in and out of the south-facing open-fronted stables, where a slat near the roof has been removed to let beams of sunlight in.

"Even the most highly strung horses completely relax here," he says. No stone is left unturned.



Harry and head girl Jess Errington weigh Tenareze: every horse on the yard is weighed weekly



Harry's wife Rosie is a huge support managing owners and logistics helping turn Harry's dreams into reality

**M**EANWHILE, Harry has hacked to the valley, 400m away, with Mombreg loon and Gideon. It's a vast field with a rolling hill, below which is a plateau beside a small stream. Sheep are grazing unperturbed as we head through. The field is owned by neighbour Steve Exell, who has generously allowed the Meades to ride here for 40 years since the era of Harry's father, triple Olympic gold medalist Richard Meade.

"The ground is perfect here, even when it's rock-hard elsewhere; the sheep keep it level and the grass is like a thick mat," says Harry. He and Australian work rider Jamie Hall walk and trot up and down the long slope to 'build core strength'.

"They start going up here aged four or five and once they have that strength they never lose it, even with time off. I don't think of it as fitness work, just learning to work in a balanced way, and as a by-product they get very strong and fit."

Next, Harry heads down to the dried-up stream and monochromatically steps in and out of it at a walk, eventually superimposing over the ditchline on a loose rein.

Then, he ambles up to a stone wall with a sheep nibbling the tops of it. The sheep nudges Harry and Mombreg loon jumps over from walk.

"The four-year-olds do a lot of their cross-country schooling out of walk," Harry says. "They learn not to fear anything, to look,

of which is a warm-up course with fences of varying heights, which means he doesn't have to rely on people to put them up and down. Once he's happy with Norris' warm-up, he tackles the bigger course with immaculately painted poles.

"We try to keep things tidy here, because once courses start to be cut, it becomes a culture," he says.

In winter, they'll compete in pure showjumping weekly, starting at a lower level



The resting place of legendary event rider Richard Meade and of Harry's infant brother are in the neighbouring churchyard — with the isolation box in the background

**N**EXT up is a jumping session, back up on Brookfield Quality (Norris), a nine-year-old two-star ride he has recently inherited. Harry has two jumping courses set up that have changed every month, the smaller





'Once they've got that strength they never lose it': Harry works Gideon on the surrounding hills

than they usually compete at, so that Harry can instil quality before they move up in height. All the horses jump once or twice a week, but each horse has a slightly different approach.

"For Norris, I make things easy because he's a worrier and goes airborne. He jumps a course on a regular basis," he explains. "With Spot, I focus on individual exercises and almost never jump an oxer, because he needs to work on his technique of reaching the highest point over the front rail, rather than beyond the fence."

This fits in with Harry's mantra of giving each horse exactly what it needs, and why he tries to keep a "sensible" number of horses.

out of paddocks. Harry explains his turnout philosophy which, like many of his beliefs, seems fairly time-consuming but is rooted in a great deal of thought.

"Most are out overnight to maximise their time in the field," he says. "But those that would get too fat go out in the day — for an hour in the morning and an hour again in the afternoon. It would be less work to put those horses out once a day for two hours," he smiles, "but that would be too easy, wouldn't it?"

The horses also have four small feeds a day, to mimic their natural habits and ward off colic and ulcers, and the same goes for their

**A MOMENT WITH HEAD GROOM JESS ERRINGTON**



JESS has worked for Harry for more than a decade, arriving as a work rider.

"When I was a child and visited Badminton, I was always most interested in the post-cross-country care," she says. "It's my dream job — hard work but a lot of fun. Harry's such a high profile, popular rider, they're a lovely family and we've been on this journey together."

"I'm as passionate about it as Harry is, and we have a mutual trust. And I love the bond between me and the horses — I've looked after Spot, and many others, since he was a four-year-old," Jess explains.

Harry adds: "Jess' style of leadership is not as a battleaxe; she is a kind, gentle person who leads by example — a genuine compassion for the horses and a passionate work ethic."

*'My ethos is to treat every horse as if it were the only horse in the yard'*

"My ethos is to treat every horse as if it were the only horse in the yard," he says. "It's easier said than done and requires a lot of people. It might seem like overkill to have seven members of staff for a relatively small string, but it means we can give every horse the individual attention it needs. They don't have to fit into a system — the programme for my top horses doesn't dictate what the others are doing."

hay, which is routinely weighed out.

"Grazing is therapy, and this keeps them happier mentally," he says. "It looks nice with a row of horses' heads over the doors, but I'd prefer them to be occupied, not on high alert for long periods waiting for food."

Every horse is weighed weekly and their weight noted on a neat graph against their food intake.

"You still need to rely on your eye to tell you when a horse is the right weight, but this gives you a month's warning before they visibly drop off or start to carry too much condition. It also helps us forecast their feeding the following year, so we're able to pre-empt weight

**W**E head back to the yard, which is still in full flow. The physio and vet are checking over each horse in turn, while others are being led in and

fluctuations, rather than react retrospectively," he says. "I deliberately kept Spot 20kg heavier for Burghley this year, and I felt he had more fuel in the tank."

Harry's yard seems to run with a blend of old-fashioned horsemanship inherited from his father, and modern science. I'm surprised not to hear the whirr and clank of a horsewalker, but Rosie says that Harry prefers them to spend more time hacking with a good rider on the rolling Cotswold lanes — "Each horse hacks out before and after work as their warm up and cool down."

Harry's attention to detail is phenomenal, and a massive contributor to his impressive strike rate at top level. From his small string of horses, he's renowned for his consistent performances at four-star level. He's also had just three non-finishes across country during the past nine seasons of international events.

Some may look at Harry's historic set-up, his big smile and his career trajectory and assume he's had it easy. But, in the past four years he's shattered both elbows and lost his father to cancer and the brilliant Wild Lone at the World Games in Caen.

He rebuilt, with his customary grace and dedication, and his aim to enable each horse to fulfil its latent talent is reaping rewards again. And, with a string of young stars behind the big guns, there's a whole lot more to come. **H&H**



Harry (pictured on Brookfield Pointiliste Boy) prefers to do the majority of his schooling on grass, rather than on a surface: 'the four-year-olds don't go in the school at all'