



Harry in his signature red jacket

Against the odds

Despite being told he may never ride again after a dreadful fall while competing, eventer Harry Meade proved anything is possible with an amazing comeback at this year's Badminton Horse Trials

Taking third place at what has been described as the "toughest" Badminton Horse Trials for years is a huge achievement in itself. Yet event rider Harry Meade's success was made all the more incredible by the fact that it was just weeks after he returned to the saddle following a dreadful riding accident.

The 30-year-old shattered both of his elbows in a rotational fall at Wellington Horse Trials in Hampshire last August and the injury was so bad, he was warned he might never ride again.

Doctors described the bones in Harry's elbows as being similar to grains of sand they were so badly shattered, and he was told there was a 90 per cent chance he wouldn't ride again.

"I didn't hear that bit," says the positive rider, whose glass is always half full. "I only heard there was a 10 per cent chance I would ride again, so that was always my aim."

He had to endure four operations to fix the damage, followed by five months of 'box rest'.

It wasn't until January that he first climbed back on board Wild Lone, the horse he was aiming for Badminton – and while his arms were still in medical braces!

"Just to get to Badminton was emotional for me," states Harry. "I didn't put any pressure on myself to do well as I was so relieved to be there at all."

"OK, it was sickening to have a pole down in the showjumping, as otherwise I would have won, but I hope my result might secure me a team place at the World Equestrian Games." ▶

Galloping to a clear cross-country round at Badminton



Words: Nicky Moffatt; photography: Jon Stroud

Harry's horses

Wild Lone (Alf)
Vital statistics: A 16.3hh, 13-year-old Irish Sports Horse gelding owned by Charlotte Opperman.

Harry says: "Alf is quite the introvert and worries a lot. He's incredible across country, but needs a lot of reassurance from his rider."



Shannondale Santiago (Stan)
Vital statistics: A 16.1hh, nine-year-old Irish Sports Horse gelding, owned by Mandy Gray.

Harry says: "Stan is the horse I was riding when I had my bad fall. He's a real winner and a true professional with a great jump."



Away Cruising (Spot)
Vital statistics: A 16.3hh, seven-year-old gelding at Intermediate level, owned by Charlotte Opperman.

Harry says: "Spot is a lovely Irish horse with old-fashioned blood lines. He's really good in all three phases of eventing and is an exciting prospect for the future."



Vrolijk (Dude)
Vital statistics: Owned by Anne Chapman. Dude is a 16.1hh, 13-year-old Intermediate level gelding.

Harry says: "This horse is extremely smart on the flat and over showjumps. While he's not the bravest on a cross-country course, he is growing in confidence all the time."



All of Harry's horses get plenty of turnout time

Early life

Harry is the son of Richard Meade, who won three Olympic gold medals and took the Badminton title twice during his successful eventing career.

While Harry is the first to admit that his parents have been a fantastic support to him over the years, he says they made it clear they were never going to buy him horses – if he wanted to event, he would have to make a go of it himself.

"As a child, I went to Pony Club and hunted a lot," he says. "I never had smart ponies and rode for fun, rather than competitively at first."

"When I was 18, I won the Pony Club Eventing Championships and was later selected for the Junior European Championships, and it was then I knew I wanted a career in the sport."

Harry was inspired by the top riders who came to be based at his parents' yard in

Gloucestershire, where his own horses are stabled today.

"Matt Ryan and Lucinda Fredericks were among those who came to my father for training," he recalls. "It was fun to have them around and they became kind of surrogate siblings to me."

"It was great to watch them progress to the top of the sport, and it encouraged me to want to do the same."

Alongside studying history of art at Bristol University, Harry trained as a working pupil at William Fox-Pitt's yard in Dorset for a couple of years.

"I love the quiet way in which William produces horses and gives them all the time they need to develop," he says. "He always looks at the bigger picture and this has shaped the way I train my horses now, too."

"William is a great friend to me and I still give him a call if I need advice about something."

"I didn't hear doctors say I had a 90 per cent chance of not riding again. I just heard there was a 10 per cent chance I would ride again"

A difficult ride

Harry's first serious competition horse was the dark bay gelding Midnight Dazzler, who had been ridden by several other top riders and had a reputation for being tricky.

"William advised me not to take him on, because he was hot to ride on the flat and erratic over fences," remembers Harry. "However, I figured I had nothing to lose and was prepared to put in the time and effort the horse needed."

Harry started to ride the gelding with no great ambitions in mind. "He had come to me aged 13, towards the end of his career, with the idea I would compete him at a lower level for the rest of the season before he retired," he says.

"I did find him difficult to ride and we had some terrible falls, but one day everything clicked into place."

Midnight Dazzler went on to complete Badminton four times and Burghley Horse Trials three times with Harry, finishing in the top 10 at both events before retiring at the age of 20.

With his business head on, Harry started to look for owners to help him progress with his career.

"I was riding fairly average horses for owners at first, and one of them was a mare who I was training to be sold, with the idea that the owner and I would split the profits," he says. "We sold her for £20,000, which enabled me to buy Wild Lone, who I found at a dealing yard."

"I needed to make money if I was serious about my career, so for a long time it was a process of riding average horses, selling them on and using the money to invest in better horses for the future."

"As I started to make a name for myself, I was offered more talented horses to ride. Some of them were quite challenging, but it was always rewarding when they came good."

Shattered dreams

Surprisingly, it was not a difficult horse that Harry was riding when he fell at Wellington last summer – he describes Shannondale Santiago (Stan), as a "true professional".

"Stan has always been wary of jumping beneath anything, though," Harry states. "Fence two on the course was a straightforward one, but it had a beam over the top of it."

"We were coming in on a good stride, but then Stan backed off and he dropped his front end on take-off."

"I was speared into the hard ground like a javelin. It was either going to be my neck or my arms that hit the ground, but like anyone, my

natural reaction was to put my arms out which thankfully saved my neck."

Harry describes the pain as "excruciating".

"William Fox-Pitt was the first person to get to me and assured me Stan was OK," Harry recalls.

"I, on the other hand, had two arms facing the wrong way and was aware I was badly hurt."

Harry was rushed off to hospital immediately in an ambulance.

At hospital, the severity of the damage was revealed. Harry's arms were pinned and plated in an attempt to 'knit' them back together. However, doctors weren't convinced this would happen, as the bones were so badly shattered, and four months of uncertainty was to follow.

"It was terrible," says Harry's wife, Rosie, who was six months pregnant at the time. "Poor Harry literally couldn't do a thing for himself."

"From the moment he got up, he needed help getting dressed, eating, washing, shaving – everything you take for granted when your arms are working."

"I tried to put as much effort into my rehab and physio programmes as I would normally do with my riding," adds Harry.

"After four months the bones in my right arm weren't mending and I was booked in to have a prosthetic replacement fitted at Christmas." ▶

Lurcher Snip is Harry's loyal canine companion



5 things Harry can't live without

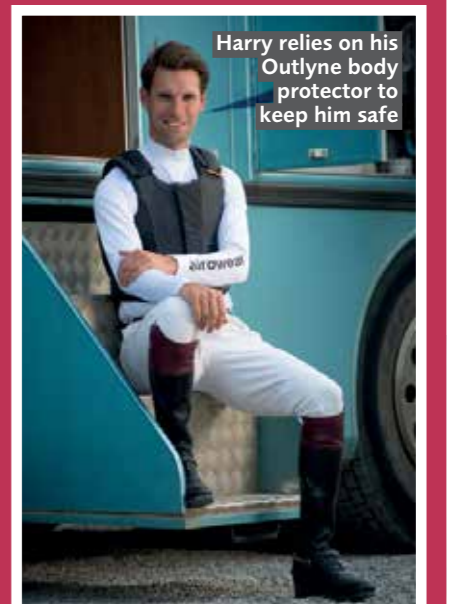
1 Airowear Outlyne body protector: "I rely on this to keep me safe all season and am grateful for the protection it provides, preventing further injuries during my fall last year."

2 Winning Edge supplements: "All my horses are on supplements from this range, to ensure their magnesium levels are correctly balanced, enabling them to perform at their best."

3 Back in Action Mobiliser: "It's a portable electronic massage bed that keeps me fit and supple, and I would thoroughly recommend it to all riders."

4 His wife Rosie: "Rosie was a star during my rehab. As well as looking after me, she kept the business going."

5 My owners: "They have been so supportive throughout my career. We have had a lot of fun."



Harry relies on his Outlyne body protector to keep him safe



“My confidence hasn’t been knocked by the fall. That would have been a terrible blow after all my hard work”

“Fortunately, when getting a second opinion, I was advised that it was too soon for such a major operation and we cancelled at the last minute.

“Finally, four months later, there was evidence of some healing beginning to take place. I still go for regular x-rays and continue with the physio to keep them working.”

When Harry remounted Wild Lone for the first time in January, his arms were still in braces and he still had fractures.

“I got on to see if I could pull on the reins and fortunately I could,” he says.

“On realising that I could use my arms, I got on the next day and the day after that, always with Badminton in mind, and fortunately I made it.”

For many riders, a fall like this would result in a huge confidence loss, and Harry believes you don’t know whether your bottle has gone until you get back on.

“People had suggested this might be the case,” he says. “Fortunately for me, I discovered that my confidence hadn’t been knocked at all by the fall.

That would have been a terrible blow after all my hard work.”

The horses come first

Harry strives to do the best for his horses and pays attention to every aspect of their lives.

“They all go out in the field twice a day to keep them mentally relaxed,” he says. “I do the vast majority of the riding at home as I like to produce the horses myself.

“I’m the one who has to ride them at events so we need to know how each other works.” It’s not just looking after the horses and training them.

“Owners, understandably, want to be kept in the loop and discuss their horses’ needs, which takes up a lot of time.

“There are ways I could cut corners to make life easier, but that would be going against my instinct and I don’t believe I would get the best from my horses if I did that.”

While the yard is a modest set-up with a row of wooden stables and an outdoor school tucked away

5 things you didn't know about Harry

1 The doting dad of two delivered his son Charlie at home. “I dialled 999 for an ambulance, but the operator told me I would have to deliver the baby myself as there wasn’t time for help to get to us.”

2 Harry trains with childhood friend Olympic dressage rider Laura Tomlinson.

3 He is the youngest rider to be awarded the Armada dish, which is given to riders that complete five Badmintons. Harry needs one more completion to gain his second trophy.

4 In a rare, spare moment, Harry likes to draw and has a degree in history of art.

5 Harry’s father Richard is a triple Olympic gold medallist.



at the back, it’s clear Harry’s routine is successful, as the horses appear happy and content.

“I have two goals in life,” Harry concludes. “One is to win Badminton and the other is to win an Olympic gold medal.

“I am fortunate to have a great support team and fantastic horses to ride, and with my injury now behind me, I believe these are both possible.

“I’m certainly going to give achieving my goals every ounce of effort I can.” ■

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