



Meet IZZY TAYLOR

Event rider Izzy Taylor had her best-ever season in 2014, fourth in the British Eventing end-of-season scoreboard, seventh at Burghley and the only rider to complete Badminton Horse Trials on two rides – in what was recognised as an exceptionally tough year. Horse&Rider went along to meet her and find out how, with an exciting string of youngsters coming through the ranks, Team Taylor is firmly focused on success – and a place on Team GB on the Road To Rio.

Izzy has bemusement written all over her face. Her five-year-old daughter Lily is dashing past giggling in a pretty summer dress and grey tights, Izzy has just schooled four horses – including her CCI**** mare KBIS Briarlands Matilda – and in driving rain she has just given a jumping lesson to working pupil Cara Williams. Now, the sun has come out again and she is being manoeuvred into a series of poses by our photographer, but there are still another four to ride before her day is finished and it's only lunchtime. "Everything okay?" asks assistant Claire King. "Yes, all fine," Izzy replies, letting the chaos wash over her.

This incredible ability to stay calm has played no small part in Izzy becoming a lynchpin of the British Nations' Cup eventing team through its 2014 campaign – being called up three times and on three different rides. At Fontainebleau she rode Dax Van Ternieuwbeke (Pluto) where she finished as best British rider, at Ballindenisk she rode Allercombe Ellie (Team

GB won and Izzy came second individually) and finally at Aachen aboard Orlando – or Ginge as he is affectionately known – where she rode a blistering cross-country round to seal individual fourth place. Seen as a platform to allow the next generation of British eventing superstars to gain valuable international experience, it is no surprise that, despite the disappointment of missing out on the World Equestrian Games in Normandy last year (Allercombe Ellie was selected, but sadly a minor injury during training ruled her out), Izzy is most definitely one to watch for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro – and beyond.

While it might seem that success has come quickly for Izzy, as with any rider trying to stake their claim at the very top of the heap, her results follow years of dedication and hard work. Izzy's childhood was shaped by her family's total immersion in equestrian pursuits. Mum Nicola was instrumental in the Pony Club and, as part of a keen hunting family, Izzy was at her first meet at the age of four. Riding competitively throughout her childhood and into



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her teens, by the time Izzy was offered places at two universities to study sports science, she had already decided that it was a career with horses she wanted and promptly turned them both down.

“I knew I wanted to work with horses, and went off to Hartpury College to work under Sam and Linda Barr of Welton Stud, breaking in and riding their eventers,” she explains. Izzy is now settled on the sofa in her tack room, its walls adorned with rosettes and eventing memorabilia, as well as photos of Izzy and the family in action at competition and on the hunting field.

It was while breaking in and riding the Barr's young Welton horses that she also realised how important showjumping was in the making of a successful eventer. So she packed her bags and headed off to the Netherlands to stay with her great aunt, Anneli Drummond-Hay (winner of the first-ever Burghley Horse Trials), before a spell with Swiss Olympic showjumper Markus Fuchs. All was going well until a fall while eventing in Lummen, Belgium in August 2003 left Izzy with two fractured and one displaced vertebrae.

Bouncing back

It is hard to imagine Izzy being forced to slow down by anything other than this potentially life-changing injury. But back in the saddle within four months, she reckons the fall only focused her on what it was she really wanted to do – event. The following year, she took up a position at John Johnson's Opposition Stud, where she worked tirelessly to get herself back to full fitness – physically and mentally. It was a big challenge, but having undergone surgery and some serious time recuperating flat on her back, it was one that



Izzy was determined to conquer. The hard work paid off when she was selected to represent Britain at the Young Rider European Championships, picking up the individual bronze medal on the very horse she'd been riding when she had that fateful fall, and whom people had suggested strongly she shouldn't continue eventing.

But Izzy is quick to point out that success at under-21 level doesn't mean you will have an easy time once you leave its confines. “It's a hard transition from the comparative security of being a part of a Young Riders' squad and then finding yourself out in the big wide world on your own. The squad's support and infrastructure disappears and setting up on your own can be daunting – make or break, even.” After a couple of relocations of her own, Izzy found herself bringing her horses back home and setting up her eventing yard alongside her mother's livery business. Here she puts into practice the methods she learned

working with other professionals, combined with a healthy dollop of the more old-school hunting sensibilities she was raised on. This straightforward, workmanlike approach to training and stable management resonates through everything Izzy does, and is possibly the key to the successful working partnership she shares with her family. Also invaluable to her success is the support Izzy receives from UK Sport and the National Lottery via the World Class Programme.

"Being at home has so many plus points, but it also has its more challenging ones," admits Izzy, who has her own cottage just metres from the main house and stables. She is the first one on the yard each morning, checking the horses over, hanging haynets and skipping out, while her team prepare the first feeds. After a family breakfast and getting the children ready for nursery, Izzy schools four or five horses while others are hacked out. After lunch, she works the rest of the eight to 10 she rides each day. This includes working the rides of long-time owner Guy Avis, who regularly brings his horses down for schooling. "It's not the most conventional set up, but Guy likes to have his horses at home and we make it work... we trust each other in their event preparation," explains Izzy. It's hard to believe she would allow anything that didn't run like a well-oiled machine a place in her schedule.



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to build my stamina and strength – it was no fun at all! But it was really important to get my core stability and balance back, and to think not just about the muscles I knew I was using for riding, but also the muscles that were supporting those muscles."

Peak condition

Physical fitness is something that Izzy continues to work on under the guidance of Team GB Performance Manager for Eventing and Lead for World Class Programme Coach, Yogi Breisner. "Even though I ride up to 10 horses a day, I have a couple (including Orlando) that need a bit more riding across country, so I use an Equisizer to top up my fitness levels." From the comfort of the tack room sofa she nods towards what looks like a medieval instrument of torture taking up considerable floor space. "A lot of the top jockeys use it and it absolutely kills, but does an amazing job in building my stamina and strength. I tend to shut myself away in the tack room for 20 minutes when I need to put in a session. It's not really something you want an audience for!"

As we talk, Lily reappears, keen to show us her version of the Equisizer – a rocking horse that she duly climbs aboard to show us how she can make it 'buck and rear'. Would Izzy encourage her children to follow in her footsteps? The odds look favourable to it happening. "They're young – I'll encourage them to do whatever they want to do. They have a pony, Minstrel, but there is no pressure. Lily is probably the keener of the two at the moment, but who knows."

So with the 2016 Olympics in Rio firmly in her sights and a string of exciting horses knocking on the door of team selection, is there room for Izzy to indulge in anything other than securing a team place between now and August 2016? "Not really. I am totally dedicated to what I do – I won't even give myself a day off, which can be hard for friends who aren't involved in the sport to understand. But it is a business and you have to be professional. I can't afford to get injured going skiing, for instance. There are always horses that need riding, and I teach and hunt through the winter. I try to stay healthy, I don't drink or smoke. I'd hate to have to tell my owners that their horses were going to have to miss a season because I had injured myself. A lot rests on me being fit to ride."

And with that, there is work to be done. Izzy politely excuses herself and it's back to business.

Family ties

There are, however, always challenges of operating a business within such a tight-knit set-up, when highs and lows can be rightly or wrongly magnified. "It's great to have family around because they know me better than anyone. Team Taylor is an incredible support and there is no-one I'd rather celebrate the good times with. But it can also be hard on the tougher days, when you might need a little more space or time to reflect on things."

But the positives outweigh the negatives, particularly when it comes to balancing motherhood with the pressures and commitments of being an elite athlete on the road. "My family is amazing at making sure that Lily and Freddie always have someone to take them to school, be here at home with them or even to be in the audience on important days in the school calendar if I am away. I got to the nativity play last year, but didn't make the parent's race at Sports Day." You can't help thinking the other mums might have been relieved by this – Izzy was hugely sporty throughout school.

So how does Izzy cope with a packed competition season and two small children?



"For bigger competitions – for example, the European Championships at Malmö in 2013, I left them at home with Mum. Malmö was my senior team debut and it was better for me to focus entirely on the job. But generally I am good at compartmentalising what I need to be doing and where my attention needs to be. Sometimes Mum will bring Lily along to an event for the day."

All riding mums will want to know the same thing – did having children affect the way Izzy rode? "You'll have to ask someone else that, but I don't think so. Psychologically, no – there was absolutely no difference between going cross-country before or after I had the children. But if I was to begin to feel my nerve going for any reason, I would work with someone on that professionally. Right now, though, I don't work with anyone specifically. I've always been self-contained when it comes to the way I do things – at home and in competition. Even when riding on a team. I like to course walk on my own and not get involved with other people's decisions. Team management understands this and even on a team coursewalk, I tend to walk slightly ahead or behind, so I can make my own choices. Physically, though, when you have had children you have to work harder to get fit. After Freddie was born, I went out on my bike without a saddle