

Words by ELEANORE KELLY  
Photography JON STROUD

# GIFTED and GROUNDED

Despite the emotional roller coaster of top-level eventing, Ros Canter is renowned for keeping her cool. Eleanore Kelly finds out more about how Ros balances family life with delivering fault-free performances under pressure.

It's easy to see why Ros Canter is so successful. Beyond her innate horsemanship, a self-motivated rider, Ros has the ability to train horses from youngsters to international champions. The 36-year-old from Llangollen has a large dose of calm and a philosophical outlook. She certainly knows how to take the rough with the smooth.

that included her wedding. I'd arranged to interview Ros for British Horse via an early-morning phone call while she was competing at Bingham she went on to win the 3<sup>rd</sup> 5 and at 6.20am she messaged to postpone our call a little, as her three-year-old daughter Ziggy was - for once - still fast asleep.

This 'be-in' is something of a decade for Ros, who acknowledges it's tricky juggling motherhood with eventing at elite level and that she couldn't do it all without her mum and some long-standing staff members, who keep her system in place. Ros's normal routine starts around 5.30am, and with between 12 and 20 horses in the yard, she will ride at least 10 of them each day, in addition to fitting in a gym session twice a week. "Childbirth does funny things to your body, so I feel going to the gym keeps me in check."

She also manages the nursery run and ringfences family time, commenting that having Ziggy has made her more efficient. "I try to finish early some days so that I have the afternoon with her - it's double."

## Stable superstars

Horses tend to find their way to Ros without her looking for them these days and her current stable is packed with talent. Having finished 12th on Altair II at Badminton 2022, finishing 2nd with Lendbigh Castle (aka Walter) was an unexpected result for Ros. "We wanted Walter to have a good experience at Badminton and he just loved every minute of it which was so encouraging. I didn't seem to take too much out of him. All our horses love to go and so we went back in the field that night - and by the next morning, just looked like he hadn't been around Badminton. He was so happy and relaxed."

Ros describes Walter as an interesting character. "He's in a paddock with not much grass because he's a very good doer and he's a little bit untrainable when it comes to manes on the floor. He shows the reins, puts his head in the air when



you want to put the bit in and throw headcollars across the yard. He's a practical joker but he's not sharp to ride." Walter's half-sister, the diminutive Penrose Crown Jewel (aka Jani), has also been long-listed for the World Championships. Ros has ridden both horses throughout their career, having backed them too. "She's an absolute superstar and tries her hardest all the time. It takes a little longer to get the top level than Walter but she's been a consistent performer, and she's built on the cross-country. Although she doesn't quite have the conformation - she's naturally a bit croup high - her dressage gets better and better. So we have to work at the balance and we have a different routine, she predominantly backs on a long rein."

## Patent producing

Ros is a prolific rider, meaning just 58.2, yet has ridden some tall and very powerful horses in her time - Altair II was 17.1hh.

"I have definitely had some help, particularly in my cross-country, and



Empire World Champion. Ros has been long-listed for the squad to defend the title at the FEI World Championships on Prato next month. Earlier this year she won the Leinster Gold Cup, and at first of her season at Badminton she finished second, so she's winning the CCI-S at Bingham and finishing second in the CCI-P-2 with a planned wedding to her long-term partner Chris McAlister, she must have felt on top of the world - but in July, tragedy struck, when Altair II (who was competing at Aachen as part of the British squad) had a tragic accident on the cross-country. The 12-year-old, who was owned by Ros and Caroline Moore FBIS, had to be euthanised.

"Poor Altair," reflects Ros. "It was extremely sad. In riders, you have to be resilient and when he had his accident it was clear that we had to do the right thing

for him - and at that time, I tried to stay motivational about it. It's our role to make the right decisions for the horses we look after. Altair really gave me peace and now, and that's feeling sad, I can only look back and enjoy all the things we achieved together. He had a great life."

## Diary management

Ros doesn't have moments of free time to spend reflecting. Although she took time to start a family following the 2018 World Equestrian Games, she returned to competition a month after giving birth in July 2018. As one of the most successful owners on the circuit with a full coaching clinic schedule, in addition to mothering three-year-old Ziggy, her professional and personal schedule is relentless, and finding time to shut her brain off - particularly during a week



**"I NEVER BELIEVED I COULD BE GOOD ENOUGH OR CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO GO AROUND THE BIG EVENTS"**

have learned to allow the horses to be clever and do it themselves, without losing control. As well as keeping my body position up so that I feel my legs to plan, but, for example, I always know how a horse is going to feel when I start to feel out of control on the gallops. I go back to the dressage and remind myself of the basics - and that's massively important for me, because I

don't have the strength and size that other people do. The horses have to be very in tune with me all the time. I also don't ride competitively and fast at a one-day event. I use those environments for training and if a horse tries to get away with me, I have no problem with putting a halt transition in."

Ros reinforces the importance of patience and good practice with horses, whatever your objectives. "Walter went to Badminton aged nine, while Altair, who's nine, won't be ready for a 5<sup>th</sup> next year - it will be more of a process with him. If he comes out and is too spooky, I will slow down whatever the cost. It's very important it doesn't go wrong, because he's quite a habit former."

"With the horses I've had from a young age, I know what to expect when I get on them. That doesn't mean to say it always goes to plan, but, for example, I always know how a horse is going to feel when I go to touch shoulder. In because the positioning work has already been done by me. Whereas with a horse that I take on later, I might get a different response."

## ROS CANTER

Ros grew up on her family farm, and was a keen hockey and tennis player as well as bringing on her young ponies. Ros juggled her education with hockey and swimming, studying sport science at Sheffield Hallam University before going on to spend four years working for event horse producer and judge Judy Brabber. Ros made her senior championship debut at the 2017 Europeans at Strömmen when she and Altair II finished fifth individually, and helped the British team secure gold in 2018. Ros was selected for the World Equestrian Games in Tryon, where the British team won gold and she and Altair II were crowned individual world champions. The partnership was named up as training partner for the Rio Olympics 2020 games in 2021 - never as easy ride, but an amazing experience nonetheless. Ros finished second at Badminton 2022 with Lendbigh Castle, who was competing in his first 5<sup>th</sup> event.



## A coaching career

Ros is a qualified Stage 4 BHS coach and her talent for coaching others emerged at a young age. "I would earn pocket money by buying project ponies and bringing them on, and then teaching the local children to ride. I've always enjoyed this. I did all my Pony Club exams and my BHS qualifications were just a natural progression for me. Long term, when I stop riding, the coaching will take over, so it was all part of thinking about the future."

Ros certainly takes her own training seriously and BHS Fellow Caroline Moore, who part-owns Altair, has been a big influence on Ros's career, both as a trainer and a mentor. BHS Fellow Chris Bartie has also had an enormous impact on her cross-country riding. "I used to get quite nervous about the cross-country," Ros says. "The obsession was always there but I never believed I could be good enough or confident enough to go around the big events. Chris has made huge changes to the way I think, and I walk the courses now with a real system. Instead of looking at the jump, I look at the object behind it that I am going to focus on when I am riding it and that helps me. With a combination I am always looking to the next part, or if it's a big table where I might start overthinking it, I'll look at the object behind it instead. I write all that down on my phone. I also now try to ride with a slightly longer rein so that I can stay more upright in my body, which makes me feel safer."

## Tactics and turnout

When considering what gives a good ride from a great rider, Ros states that the job involves quite a lot of thought. "I put a lot of time into analysing and watching videos, questioning what I do on a horse each time and whether I got it right for them. I have a system, but it's always developing and adjusting, depending on what horse comes in and how best to ride them - and that's what makes the sport interesting. We all have to get over the hump, but some horses just are a bit different and it's my job to be able to adapt any way of doing things and

## HORSE OF A LIFETIME



Dutch-bred Altair II was a 17.1hh, big-moving Warmblood of immense talent.

"There are no words for the love and respect that I have for Altair," Ros commented after his tragic accident at Aachen. "Time after time, he's shown his generosity, kindness and love of his sport."

Caroline Moore, who bought Altair as a five-year-old, called him "the horse of a lifetime." The most generous and brave horse that I've ever had the pleasure to work with."

While Altair's character was everything an equine could dream of, Ros highlights that there is no such thing as a 'perfect' horse, even a World Champion. "Altair was a big horse and a bit of a stiff horse. He had the vet as a youngster and his legs weren't perfect, but he was always sound and did a great job. Many top horses might not sell as youngsters because they're not straightforward or because they had a vetting. The important thing for the rider to be in need is how to perceive and find the right way to partner and get the best out of that horse - and maybe make a superior out of something that someone else can't."

improve all the time to cope with all these individual horses. Just because they're different, it doesn't mean they're not going to be top level."

Ros believes some of the key to her success with a variety of horses is keeping them happy and relaxed with a simple system and natural approach. "I keep horses out as much as possible. They come out to be ridden then they go back into their box."

Ros's yard has numerous post and rail paddocks offering lots of turnout options for pairs or three. "For any horse owner, it should be about trying to keep them happy and relaxed while building fitness up and training methodically - and dealing with whatever they throw at you along the way."

time and if the groom's hand I walk and trot up hills and even do bareback on the hills. So far it's worked. You have to be realistic: horses do go lame, and accidents happen. Fortunately, we've not had too many freak accidents but when you own horses, you have to be prepared for things to go wrong. They can do anything, at any moment, and sometimes you can learn from it but often it's out of your control."

Ros's final advice for owners is something we can all relate to. "For any horse owner, it should be about trying to keep them happy and relaxed while building fitness up and training methodically - and dealing with whatever they throw at you along the way."

© Ros and Altair at the World Equestrian Games, Tryon, 2018  
© West Badminton 2018, where the partnership went on to finish 2nd