

What dreams are made of



Andrew Baldock meets Ros Canter, a rider at the top of her game and the summit of her sport



When Ros Canter eventually has time to sit back and properly reflect on 2024, she can do so with a huge sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

As dust began to settle on the 38-year-old Lincolnshire rider's title triumph at her local event – the Defender Burghley Horse Trials – so it had statisticians scrambling to find confirmation of a feat that no other British eventer has achieved.

Ros became the first from this country to complete an astounding title collection of Olympic gold medallist, World individual champion, European individual champion,

MARS Badminton winner and Defender Burghley champion. So rare is it, that only triple Olympic champion Michael Jung had previously done it.

Ros's endearing modesty only allowed her to lavish a “that's pretty cool” accolade on herself, but the standard-setting is mind-boggling, especially given the nature of a sport where the only real predictability is its unpredictability.

A run of success that began in Tryon, North Carolina six years ago with the great Allstar B has taken in Badminton, Haras du Pin, Paris and Burghley, not forgetting the three European team golds for Great Britain

collected in Strzegom, Avenches and Haras du Pin, plus 2018 World team gold, the 2023 Pau five-star title, two further Badminton podium finishes and one at Luhmuhlen. Quite simply, it is the stuff of dreams.

“Burghley was massively satisfying,” says Ros, reflecting on her triumph with Paris team gold medal-winning ride Lordships Graffalo (otherwise known as Walter). “It is my local event, I have been going there for many years, and lots of friends go and stay there during the competition. It was just an event I felt that I hadn't quite ticked the box on. I think my best result was 11th place before going there this year, and I felt I hadn't



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got it quite right. It was just an absolute privilege to ride a horse like Walter around an event like that. Badminton and Burghley are where he really thrives. It was an amazing experience, a special feeling.”

On the global stage

That Burghley success continued what Ros admitted was “a whirlwind summer” and came just six weeks after she helped Great Britain retain Olympic team gold in Versailles alongside Laura Collett and Tom McEwen. Back-to-back Olympic titles had previously never been achieved by a British team, but it was a case of domination from start to finish and a first Olympic medal for Ros after she went to Tokyo three years earlier as travelling reserve.

Her individual hopes faded after collecting an unlucky 15 penalties for a missed flag, but she was able to put that difficult, personal disappointment to one side and regroup for the showjumping finale.

“Tokyo had been another opportunity to learn,” Ros adds. “And the biggest thing I learnt was that I really wanted it, and Paris was what I would be going for over the next three years, and this year especially. It was a massive motivation to get to Paris.”

“I put quite a lot of pressure on myself about Paris, and there had been a huge motivation to try and get there. Selection is so tough, and also trying to work out the best route for selection – did we go to Badminton, did we save the horse? – and then you add in the British weather and cancellations. Thankfully, we had a really good year in 2023, so it was about keeping ticking along and trying to show the selectors that we were still on form.

“The gold medal definitely took away from the 15 penalties. If it had cost us the gold medal, then it would have been a much harder pill to swallow. But it was just a massive relief that I was able to hold it together for the showjumping and that we were able to keep a clear gold medal position.

That was what was most important to me.

“The sad thing about the 15 penalties was I never really got that buzz following cross-country day. I look back on it in a slightly different way to maybe how I look back on my Burghley cross-country day. Cross-country is about that massive buzz and something to enjoy before focusing on the next phase. I definitely had a slightly different ending before the showjumping to what I would normally hope to have, and it’s not just me either who has to deal with the disappointment, it’s the owners, the rest of the team. So many people are vested in the whole thing.”

A team effort

And what about the Paris aftermath, which included a return trip after competing during the Games at Little Downham for the

closing ceremony with Laura? “The Olympics are a bit different in terms of that,” she says. “You get invited to different things, such as going to meet the Prime Minister, and things come up that keep reminding you that you have done something very special, which is great.

“The Olympics also has a positive impact on your local community; going into schools and showing your medal. There is more hype around it than anything else we do – and yes, you do get recognised in the supermarket at times!”

So, a year like no other for Ros Canter is drawing to a close, but the hard work will not stop as she looks to retain her place at eventing’s top table after a journey that really began at the highest level a year before she took World gold in the United States.

“I think 2017 was probably my breakthrough year in terms of my confidence,” she says. “I changed my system slightly and found a way of being really competitive. And then the Worlds in 2018 was when I realised that I could do it and I could compete at the highest level. It was definitely a turning point in my career in terms of the recognition I was getting, and I was also able to set my yard up to run slightly differently.

“The work never stops. You have got to stay there and keep putting the hours in. Things like getting the horses ready for their first event and going around BE 100s. That never changes. You can’t slacken off on things like that because it is the work you do in those first years that is so important. You can never stop going out schooling or taking the young horses out and trying to tick all the boxes.”

