

EXCLUSIVE
Horse&Rider
interview

AT HOME WITH: Ros CANTER

In an exclusive interview, Ros talks about her 2025 goals, horses set for stardom and dealing with mental barriers

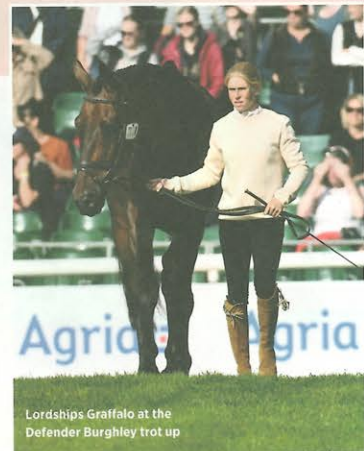
On a glorious spring day, daffodils nodding along the verges and not a cloud in the sky over the beautiful Lincolnshire Wolds, I arrive to meet Ros Canter.

Since her first GB senior squad call-up in 2017 (when she helped the team take gold at the European Championships), the team spots and 5* podium placings have kept coming.

We sat down at her parents' kitchen table (the horses are still at home on the family farm, although Ros, husband Chris and daughter Ziggy live a short drive away) to discuss plans for 2025, her current stable stars – and future prospects – and the importance of prioritising your mindset.

Reigning champion

Even though there's a chance I might be able to retain my title at the Agria European Championships at Blenheim this year, I've not thought about it all that much yet. I've got to get my spring aims out of the way first, plus I might not even get selected! It would be fantastic to try to hold onto that title, but, for me, it's always about the team, so I don't think I'll feel much pressure individually. It would be more about doing my job for the team and about Great Britain retaining the gold medal. Right now, though, I'm focusing on getting some good performances under my belt.



Lordships Graffalo at the Defender Burghley trot up

Goal getter

My main aim this year is to just enjoy it! Last year was quite high pressure, which I did enjoy, but I was one-track minded on trying to get to the Paris Olympics, whereas I do feel a little more laid back now. It was all performance based in 2024, so it's nice to just ride and train and get the horses feeling their best.

Izilot DHI (Isaac) and MHS Seventeen (Vinny) are aiming for Lumühlen in June, and then I've got some lovely young horses just building experience.

Perfect partnerships

Lordships Graffalo (Walter) is incredibly special to me. I broke him in and I've loved him from day one. The way he comes into a fence is an amazing feeling – he approaches with his eyes up and nose out, but he never pulls me or runs. That's something I don't enjoy the feeling of, so he suits me down to the ground.

The things Walter finds more challenging, like the flatwork, are my stronger points, so we really complement each other. He's also quite a laid-back character, so life for him is generally quite relaxed. He might start building

up six to eight weeks before a big event, but the rest of the time, life for Walter is pretty chilled!

Allstar B (my World Championship winning ride) used to get a bit nervous with the adrenaline at big events, but Walter laps it up. He loves it and isn't fazed by the crowds! He's just an out and out event horse – it's like he was made for the job. He probably wouldn't be a pure dressage horse or a pure show jumper, whereas Isaac could do either.

Isaac is a different kettle of fish because he's very spooky with a real flight instinct. He's a very different

character to work with and, like Walter, is so genuine. He does make mistakes and have run-outs, but it's usually because he's genuinely spooking at a flower or something! If he's seen the jump, he will do his utmost to get over it. He's never running past a fence because he wants to – it's because his flight instinct has kicked in from something else. He's a very different horse to train and manage, which sometimes catches us out on the big occasions, but the mechanics of his body and his natural movement make everything feel so easy – he's a very special horse, too. ▶



INTERVIEW



Full focus with Lordships Graffalo

Rising stars

I've got a whole bunch of the next generation, but aside from Vinny, who stepped up to 5* star in 2024, I've got a bit of a gap between the babies and the big boys. Vinny's been a little bit slower to come on the flat, but it's starting to click and I absolutely love riding him – he's like an overgrown pony, so he really fits me size wise!

I've got two lovely horses, Graffalo (Vito) – who has similar breeding to Walter – and Broadstone Lion Man (Leo). Already this season, Vito's won his first three Novices, and Broadstone Lion Man's won two and come second in the other! They're just cool horses to ride, careful jumpers and brave. Neither of them is likely to be the biggest of movers, but they're nice horses, so who knows? I'm enjoying it, and they've definitely both got the natural talent.

Take your pick

If I could ride any other horse on the current eventing circuit it would probably be Shadow Man. He looks really uphill, but also polite. I don't like horses who pull hard cross-country, so I think he would be fun! Austin O'Connor's Colorado Blue looks really cool, too!



Izilot DHI at Pau

“I used to feel guilty when I allocated time just to the mental side”

Mind matters

Competing at the highest level comes with a lot of pressure, but, over the years, I've learnt that it's all about knowing yourself as a person. It gets easier as you get older because you start to recognise who you are and that you can't change that, so I just always try to be the best version of myself.

With the help of my sports psychologist, I've implemented some really useful techniques that anyone can try – no matter their level or discipline. When I'm gearing myself up for a big event, I allow myself time to think and to analyse. If I've walked the course and I've a spare 10 minutes, I like to sit by a tree, close my eyes and visualise my ride,

but then I draw a line under it and do something completely different.

It's the same process the night before Badminton cross-country – I get into bed, allow myself 10 minutes to think about the course, then open my book and read. Distracting myself is my key to avoiding overthinking!

I used to feel guilty when I allocated time just to the mental side because I didn't want people to think I was being lazy by taking myself off when my staff were busy getting everything ready. Now I write my day out on a board and send it to everybody in my event WhatsApp group so they know that I don't want to be disturbed at that time and I'm actually doing something useful. ▶

INTERVIEW

Full focus

Life with horses is rarely straightforward and there are so many factors outside our control that can have an effect on our own performances, but it's about learning to control your thoughts.

If there's a delay on course, for example, I might allow myself a moment to be distracted (so I don't overthink), but then I've got to be selfish and compartmentalise what's going on to stay focused on my job.

I don't mind it when things go a bit wrong sometimes. The year Walter won Badminton, for example, he sustained a small cut on his hindleg and kept feeling a bit sore, so I didn't even know if we'd make it. But, in a way, that was quite good because when we did get to Badminton, the pressure was off. I hadn't worked him as hard in the run-up, so I thought if he's fresh in the dressage or not quite fit enough, then I have a reason. But I just went for it and it turned out to be a pretty good week!



Behind the scenes

I certainly couldn't do this job without my whole team, but my family has been pivotal in helping me achieve everything I have in my career so far. My mum is amazing. Not only is she a great mother, she's also a great yard manager. She oversees everything and takes a whole heap of pressure off me to enable me to not just be a great rider, but to be a good mum myself and to have time away from the horses, which is massively important. She's always up first, feeding the horses at 5am and doing late-night checks – which makes life easier for my grooms, too!

My daughter, Ziggy, is amazing and my husband has always been a huge support and a voice of reason. He's very good at living with the bits when I'm not so nice and reminding me of who I want to be.



Izilot DHI at Lumühlen



Scan the QR code to find out more about how Ros prepares her horses for a 5* and what it's like to ride at Badminton.

Ros is sponsored by Agria – the UK's only lifetime equine insurer, agriapet.co.uk

NEXT MONTH: ROS SHARES HER TRAINING TIPS