

# 'I want Olympic gold before I'm 30'



Emily Llewellyn is a 21-year-old with big ambitions. But with six eventing gold medals already under her belt, she has a real chance of fulfilling them. She talks to Martha Terry





**'I'm very lucky with Pardon Me because he's as good as any other senior horse': Emily Llewellyn has high hopes in her quest to ride at the 2012 Olympics**



**Emily pilots Pardon Me II and Society Spice (inset) into the top 25 at Badminton this year**



**I**T'S Christmas Eve and Emily Llewellyn's village of Three Cups, East Sussex, is frozen solid. But as I slide into her icy drive, the stillness jolts into bustling activity. Four horses strut around the walker, another is on the treadmill, while two more are being schooled in the manège, which stands out as an incongruous brown square in the crystalline landscape.

"We have an amazing harrow and the horses haven't missed any work," says Emily's mother Cindy. "We've also added one very expensive inch on the surface and it's paid off."

Time, money, attention to detail – the Llewellyns have put a lot in and that outlay is paying off. The snow has been an excuse for many riders to slacken off, but Emily is working harder than ever. She may be the only rider to have won six golds at under-21 level, but, on the cusp of her first year in seniors, she believes there is a lot, lot more to come.

"My dressage is holding me back," she says. "I've gone all guns blazing trying to improve it this winter because I want to be selected for the Europeans next season, so that I have a hope for 2012. I want to win Olympic gold and Badminton before I'm 30 and I feel it's make or break now."

She's trying to achieve this by going back to basics.

"I'm working on my understanding of dressage, as I think that's the key to getting better. At home, I'm experimenting, seeing what works and what doesn't. I want to go away for a week to a dressage yard, but at the moment I'm largely self-taught."

Talking of dressage, there is much about Emily that reminds me of Laura Bechtolsheimer – physically and because they are both hugely talented, very eloquent, rising to prominence in their 20s, have strong family backing... and polo-playing boyfriends.

### **A business sold, a career started**

EMILY'S career plan was hatched in her infancy, as she lay in her pram in the stable of Cindy's retired four-star horse Louis Revere, while her mother was mucking out or teaching.

"I was a bad mother!" laughs Cindy, who competed at top level in all three Olympic disciplines and is still her daughter's biggest influence. "But Emily was so patient and Louis used to keep her happy all day."

By the time Emily was 13 and had proved that she could ride a "tricky little pony", Simply William, the Llewellyns bought the 14.1hh super-pony Ballyduff Rusty. He had already been to the pony Europeans with Ireland and Cindy remembers he had a hefty price-tag.

"We really pushed the boat out to buy Rusty," she says.

But the investment was worth it. Emily's father Tim had a building business which was bought out around this time. He now races vintage cars and is the British agent for Roflex, an electric fencing company.

"[Selling the business] was how they had the money to get me started," said Emily. "Dad buying Rusty kick-started my career. He was an amazing pony – I remember wishing we could find a way to stretch his legs so he could do juniors. He was never the most talented, but he always tried 100 per cent. And we had an incredible bond." »



Emily at home on Junior II, who is 10 this year and well on the way to joining his stable-mates at four-star



Emily's horses haven't missed any work during the recent cold snap — the combination of an amazing harrow and an inch of expensive surface on the school have allowed Emily to continue her mission to raise her game in the first phase

## What do experts say about Emily?



**Gill Watson, junior and young rider eventing coach:** "Emily has shown a quiet confidence and is able to save her best results for the big occasions."



**Mike Etherington-Smith, BE chief executive:** "The step up to the senior ranks is a big one and requires determination and a lot of talent. Emily has proved that she has these qualities."



**Lucinda Green, six-times Badminton winner:** "Emily has been extraordinarily successful in a very short space of time in a sport that normally takes a lifetime to

perfect. After I had won a bit at her age I was definitely guilty of thinking it was all quite easy and I had to be bumped down before I picked myself up and became any real use to the big boys. Of course, it doesn't mean that this route has to be followed. We will see!"



**Yogi Breisner, senior team manager:** "She's not just got potential, she's pretty much all the way there already with the results she's had at four-star. Like all riders, she will need the horsepower, but she's well on the way."

This bond has been key to her success with her second "horse of a lifetime" Society Spice, one of her two junior and young rider rides.

"I'm not sure he'd do what he's done with me for anyone else," says Emily. "Not because no one else could do a better job, of course, but because — like Rusty — there's something special between us."

Society Spice, "Riz", has twice finished in the top 25 at Badminton, but he wasn't always destined for such dizzy heights.

"When we got him he was proven at intermediate, but was never going to do more than juniors," says Emily. "You jump a crosspole and you don't dare put it up, but he always does enough. Mum had to bully me to take him up the levels, but he keeps producing. He pops round a pre-novice [BE100] the same as Badminton."

Cindy remembers the first time Emily jumped Riz after he had gone clear round Badminton: "Emily jumped a crosspole and said, 'No, I still definitely wouldn't take this horse four-star — it's not safe!' He has a terrible technique, he plops over his fences."

"We were all in stitches listening to Tina

Cook commentating at Badminton," Emily adds. "She said what a lovely, scopey horse he was. He's not, he just makes it look so easy because he doesn't do too much."

But where Society Spice flourishes because of his heart, Emily believes his stable-mate Pardon Me II — "P" — is as talented "as any horse in the country". Yet Emily's two top horses are often within one mark of each other, despite their contrasting characters and abilities.

"On his day, P would beat Riz hands down, but it's a lot harder to make him knuckle down every time out," she says. "When it's important, he gives it his all. And he's so arrogant — he stands looking at the crowds at prize-giving thinking, 'Oh, how well I've done again!'"

Emily seems to know her horses' characters intimately: Pardon Me is nosy and vain. Riz "doesn't want to make the first move until you've really made a fuss of him". And three-star horse Junior II is sensitive, quirky and doesn't like holidays. It's surely a big part of the trust factor so crucial in an event horse — and what makes hers go so well for her.

When she introduces me to the 10 inmates in the roomy American barn stables, the relationship she has with each horse is striking. She's playful with all of them; some get tickled, with others she bangs the door or shakes a rope. And they all look inquisitive, confident, watching her every move.

## A secret weapon at the ready

TWO horses at four-star, and a "secret weapon", Junior II, ready for the step up next season. Besides other up-and-coming horses, she also rides two stallions — one her own, Bueno Uno, and another, Extreme Of Cavallini, belonging to her polo pro boyfriend Max Routledge. Yet



Six under-21 outings, eight medals: next stop, the senior team?



## Young riders: has it worked?

THE young rider movement, which began in 1981, celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, writes *Kate Green*. The medal table has long been dominated by British riders.

However, statistics still show the difficulty of bridging the gap with senior competition. In the early days, riders such as Karen Dixon (individual silver medallist on Running Bear in 1983), took their young rider horse to Badminton when she was 18; Emily Llewellyn, who did her first Badminton at 19, is one of a rare band to go there in their teens now.

Over the past 30 years, our young rider squads have produced seven British senior team members: Karen Straker (now Dixon), Rachel Hunt, Pippa Nolan (Funnell), William Fox-Pitt, Kristina Gifford (Cook), Zara Phillips and Daisy Dick (now Berkeley). For others, it has been a fun and useful precursor to other careers.

Maureen Piggott (daughter of Lester), a member of the first ever team, returned to the racing world through marriage to the trainer William Haggas; Polly Schwerdt (team gold medallist in 1983) married a New Zealand farmer; Claire Oseman, individual champion in 1985, is now married to Robert Oliver and immersed in showing and hunting; triple gold medallist Rachel Hunt (1984-86), later a Badminton runner-up and senior team member (in 1987), lives in Kenya and is involved in developing the sport there.

## Britain's young riders have produced:

**17** team gold medals, including the last six consecutively

**11** individual champions

**1** male individual champion (Terry Boon)

**1** rider who took the individual title twice: Polly Lyon, now Polly Williamson (1988 and 1990)

**8** double (team and individual) gold medallists (Claire Oseman, Polly Lyon twice, Terry Boon, Amy Young, Emily Llewellyn, Laura Collett, Emily Parker)

**60** medals in total, team and individual

**2** clean sweeps of the individual medals (Alexandra Ramus, Vanessa Ashbourne and Rachel Hunt in 1986 and Polly Lyon, Lynne Bevan and Jane Little in 1990, both at Rotherfield)

**2** Irish senior team members: Lucy Bywater (Thompson) and Sacha Pemble

**9** individual senior squad members: Mandy Orchard, Polly Lyon (Williamson), Polly Clark (Stockton), Anne-Marie Taylor (Vincent), Lucy Jennings (Henson), Piggy French, Kitty Boggis, Matthew Wright and Georgie Davies

**9** male team members (William Fox-Pitt was the first in 1988)

**1** world champion: Zara Phillips, who won an individual young rider silver in 2002 on Toytown

**4** European champions: Lucy Thompson (1995, for Ireland), Pippa Funnell (1999 and 2001), Zara Phillips (2005) and Tina Cook (2009)

**2** Badminton and Burghley winners: Pippa Funnell, William Fox-Pitt

**1** year, in 30 of young rider Europeans, when the British team has returned with no medals

she's still only 21. And for the past three years Emily has been doing a degree in business and management, graduating with a 2:1 last June, a few weeks after steering two horses round Badminton. How does she fit it all in?

"I was shocked when I went to uni how little time you have to be there — I rode seven horses a day and Mum did the paperwork," says Emily. "I always prioritised the horses but tried not to lose focus on my education."

This ability to focus is instrumental to Emily's success so far. She admits that she hasn't had a "normal social life", spending all her time "between these four walls and the stables". As she talks about her first Badminton, in 2009, her mental toughness stands out.

"I analysed how I would cope and knew that if I did my best in each phase I'd do really well," she says. "I ran through everything so many times in my head and concentrated on each

phase one by one. In the dressage, I could literally see just the boards and the hut, nothing else; for the cross-country, just the strings — no crowds, nothing."

"I think a lot, too much — it gets tiring," she says. "But that preparation I did in my head was invaluable. Before [I rode at a four-star], it felt like some incredible feat that incredible people do, but it isn't."

Maybe not if your goals are far greater than simply reaching the top level, but four top-25

finishes in four attempts is some achievement.

"I've been lucky," she insists. "As much as it's down to preparation and focus, it's down to luck as well."

## Fitness training for an edge

AND she's not leaving much to chance. Her horses spend 45 minutes on the walker morning and evening, besides their ridden exercise; she gallops every five days and schools and jumps all 10 horses herself. She's never had to do any fitness to keep in top shape, but is now trampolining, running and swimming to build up her strength even more.

She wants to improve her dressage "tenfold" this winter and is seeing a big change in Pardon Me, who was already good enough to score a nine for his flying changes at Burghley.

And her second in the final senior trial at Barbury with Society Spice provoked some to suggest that she would have been in the running for last year's World Equestrian Games (WEG). While she was flattered, it never seriously crossed her mind to ditch young riders.

"I know I have to get on to a senior team soon because they won't take someone to the Olympics as their first senior championship," she says. "But while I could dream about going to WEG, they had a strong team. My spot and my duty were to help get a team gold at young riders — that's still a huge honour," she says.

So what of next year? So few of the big young rider fish survive in the big sea of senior competition. But not many have the ammunition of three four-star horses, predominantly self-produced.

"I'm not just ready to move up, I really want it and need it," she says. "I'm very lucky with Pardon Me because he's as good as any other senior horse. His results so far haven't even come when he is at his best, so I'm working out how to produce that on the flat. The pressure for 2012 started at the end of last season."

I put it to her that she will be just 23 when London 2012 kicks off — some of her potential team-mates may be double her age.

"Is 23 young?" she asks. "I don't know. I don't care. I just want to go." **H&H**



Emily with Society Spice, relaxing with a canine friend and catching up on the admin side of eventing with her mother, Cindy

