

# What Mark Todd taught me

Younger riders were often starstruck and always in awe, but being based on Mark Todd's yard was a career leg-up for some of the world's top eventers, says *Madeleine Silver*

*'The odd thing he'd say to you was like a full lesson with someone else'*

TOM McEWEN



Mark Todd, pictured winning Badminton 2011 on NZB Land Vision, may be a fierce competitor, but it's also his cool, calm temperament, his willingness to put his horses first and his horsemanship for which he is revered

## Dan Jocelyn

*New Zealander who was part of the 2004 Olympic team and rode at the 2018 World Equestrian Games (WEG)*

"I CAME over to the UK for the first time in 1996 to stay with Andrew Nicholson and ended up spending a month with Mark, living in his lorry and travelling to events with him while he showed me the ropes.

"It was all a bit surreal. I got to watch the day-to-day exercising, as well as travelling around Europe with him. I remember him introducing me to his great friends — all eventing icons to me — and I was gobsmacked to be meeting these people.

"One of the biggest things about that time was going to Burghley with him, where he had a ride on a horse called Watkins. I learnt a lot about horses' fitness in the build-up and how they used the gallops. When you see Mark knuckle down and start working the horses, there's no stone left unturned. He has this amazing ability to look so relaxed, but underneath, there's thorough determination.

"Mark certainly paved the way for a few generations of us Kiwis coming over here."

## Warren Lamperd

*Australian coach who has competed at the top level in showjumping and eventing, as well as in dressage*

"I WAS at Poplars Farm, Mark's base in Gloucestershire at the time, for the 1996 and 1997 seasons — it was the best opportunity I could have had from a riding perspective. On the first day, I galloped five horses. It was the first time I'd done that sort of work and I soon realised my legs weren't fit enough.

"We had 30 competition horses in, but it was a pretty good system. You were on the yard at 7am and you just learnt by watching — it was probably Mark's attitude that you picked up more than anything else.

"I was there during the Atlanta Olympics — we took the truck to the airport and loaded Kayem on to the plane. But probably the best experience from my perspective was when Mark injured himself at Gatcombe, so for about three weeks I was riding some of his horses. It meant he was able to sit down and make sure I was doing the right thing.

"There were embarrassing moments, too.

**In 1980, Mark makes his Badminton debut aboard Southern Comfort (pictured and inset), taking the first of his four wins there**

Pictures by Phil Mingo/Pinnacle, Getty Images and PA Archive/PA Images



Mark and Charisma land the first of their two individual Olympic golds, at Los Angeles in 1984

## Ludwig Svennerstål

*Part of the Swedish eventing team at the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games*

"MARK has always been an inspiration to me — when I was 10 years old, I had a poster of him riding at the Sydney Olympics on my wall. When I heard that Kiwi eventer Clarke Johnstone was moving back to New Zealand in 2014 and there were stables free at Badgerstown, I asked Mark if I could move in. I was there with Tom McEwen and some of the Brazilians he was coaching, and there was a great atmosphere. One year we went to Badminton with 13 horses from the yard. How often does that happen?"

"It was brilliant to watch him ride every day — he's a real horseman and I think that's why he's been so successful in showjumping, eventing and racing. He's also a fierce competitor, but he always puts the horse first and has a fantastic attitude towards them. I think being a horseman is something that can get forgotten today."

## Georgie Strang

*British eventer who made her Burghley debut in 2010 and rode at Badminton for the first time in 2018*

"During my first week at Badgerstown, Mark took me on a hack to show me where to go. He was riding and leading with Campino and Leonidas and I was on my Badminton horse who was very excited about the whole thing. Mark was going up and down these hills, tearing around, and I was struggling to keep up — I remember thinking that Mark had more control over two of his horses than I did over one.

"Another time, I got bucked off on the drive and I was lying on the ground with Mark looking over me. But he was never panicked. He was always calm about every situation and that's what his yard was like.

"I moved there in January last year and was aiming for my first Badminton, so I tagged along to his fitness regime which was a real help. He would canter his horses every four days, with lots of hacking and long, slow hill work, so they had a really solid base fitness.

"I was warned that Badgerstown is a really cold place. There were a couple of days when it was freezing but Mark would still be out there, so I thought, 'If he can do it, I'd better do it'. It was amazing motivation." **H&H**