

## Scottish Horse (May 2006)

TO COMPETE at Badminton horse trials five years after taking up eventing sounds like a dream, but for 21-year-old Sarra Mayberry, from Thornhill, Stirling, that is exactly what happened.

However, despite a fall early on in the cross country course, and then retirement after two refusals at the water, it has not put her off and she plans to be back next year. “I rode at Gleneagles, but didn’t get a pony until I was 13, so I was quite a late starter. She was quite quirky and I learnt an awful lot from her and I tried to do one-day eventing. “I outgrew her after 1 1/2 years so I got my first horse — George the First. He was quite difficult to keep sound and I think I was only able to do about four competitions in three years. It was quite frustrating, but I learnt an awful lot about veterinary matters through him,” explains Sarra.



“When I left school, I went to work with Gill Watson. I was at a competition and had got eliminated with George and through Gill, and John and William Micklem, they knew of a horse who might suit me. “I came home and went over to Ireland to look at Tell Taragon with Dad. He arrived in March 2002 and that year I did the Burgie two-day novice and Blair one-star — it was a novelty to have a horse that stayed sound. The next year George was sound, but he was retired that year and now lives with a horse whisperer.

“The next year, again in March, John and William found Tommy Pink for me. He had had some time off and was at novice level and worked up to intermediate, and I did the one-star at Burgie. “That summer he cut his legs in the field and was off for the summer. I took him to the Scottish novice championships at Thirlestane Castle, and he was seventh, finishing on his dressage. In the autumn he was first in the intermediate at Aske Hall and was 15th in the under 21s two-star class at Weston Park,” adds Sarra.

The following year (2004) Tommy did the advanced class at Witton, was ninth in the advanced at Burnham Market and sixth in the two-star at Burgie, however it was also a year of disappointment. “The young riders selectors had approached me at Burnham Market and said they were interested in the horse for the team. I made an effort to go to the trials and then they said I was too far north to be considered for the team, but I’d attended all the training sessions. “That year I went to Blair three-star and finished sixth — I didn’t expect a huge amount because it was our first three-star but to do so well was a bonus.”

Last year Sarra and Tommy were ninth in the under-25 class at Bramham. After winning the final young rider trial, they then got the nod from the young riders selection panel to be part of the Great Britain young riders team competing in the European championships in Sweden. They played a vital part in the team’s success by finishing on their dressage score to be sixth individually, and be part of the gold medal winning Great Britain team. “There

were only two horses to finish on their dressage mark and I was first to go for the team across country and was just told to get on with it. "The course was nice and got more technical as it went on — I took all the direct routes. Tommy was competing at three-star level and young riders is at two-star so they require horses that are good at dressage as the course is a step down for them."

Last year Sarra had Tommy entered for Badminton, but a skin irritation on the horse meant she was forced to withdraw. However, she travelled down to watch and walk the course. "Last year I felt it was rideable and was achievable. I think this year it was a stronger course but nothing could have prepared Tommy for the crowds. He does tend to panic in some situations, but at Badminton he wasn't looking at the fences so was jumping much higher than normal and didn't jump like his usual fluent self. He was quite capable of jumping all the fences, but I had planned to take some longer routes. "It was a surprise to come off him as I've never fallen off him before — I remember taking off over the fence and then sitting on the ground and thinking 'how did that happen?'"

When we arrived at the water all Tommy could see was the crowds and was completely overawed. When I first got him he wouldn't look at the jumps and almost reverted back to what he had been like. "He was slightly unlevel, so we left him with vets at Newmarket as they are geared up to treating horses and picking up slight lameness. When he comes back, he'll do a nice intermediate for a fun run and then I may aim for Blair three-star or Burghley," adds Sarra, whose final Glasgow University psychology exam took place on the Thursday of Badminton.