

COVER STORY

The H&H interview HOYS winner Jenna Tyldesley

Living the dream

Every amateur in showing dreams of winning a class at the Horse of the Year Show. This year a 27-year-old unknown from Glossop, Jenna Tyldesley, beat the professionals to take two prestigious hunter titles. Gill Kapadia meets her



Jenna shows off her Tudor Minstral (Billy) side saddle in the supreme championship to look different to other competitors.



Jenna takes a rare break for a cup of coffee in a day that begins at four.

TWO weeks ago, Jenna Tyldesley was a relatively obscure amateur competitor in affiliated hunter ranks. Then she won both the hunters and the ladies' titles at Horse of the Year Show (HOYS) on her nine-year-old lightweight Tudor Minstral, beating many top names in the process.

So where did she come from? How did she get here? And what's next for showing's latest rising star?

As you drive through elegant wrought-iron gates and along the immaculately tarmacked drive, it becomes clear that Jenna's home and base, Haggar Hill near Glossop, Derby, is not your average equestrian centre.

Beautifully maintained verges, dotted with cast-iron statues and stonewalled planted young trees, elegant paddocks and lakeside gazebos, would suggest you are entering a stylish country retreat, rather than one of the largest and most successful equine training establishments in the north-west.

And there was nothing average about Jenna's historic victory either.

'I'm still in shock'
"I thought it would be great to get into the final nine," says Jenna. "When I was called forward to win the lightweights and then as champion I simply could not believe it."

That night I couldn't sleep, so I got up at 3am to start getting Billy [Tudor Minstral] ready for the ladies' class. When we won that, too, it was like a dream.

"People have asked me what it was like riding down that center line, but I honestly don't know. I was totally focused on keeping Billy straight and not allowing him to spook at the spotlight. I think I am still in shock."

As we talk, another bouquet arrives, this time from her farrier Gareth Winstan. This is added to the bank of flowers, cards and balloons that have greeted this inspirational young rider's success.

Outside the back door, in an airy brick boxroom, Billy is relaxing after his victories. The bed is hunkered up to either bright as this very laid-back character likes to sit on his stable wall — he demolished it a few weeks ago.

The thoroughbred-Irish draught by Greystone Pathfinder was bought five years ago as a just-broken four-year-old from showing producer Julie Hellswell, following a tip-off from working hunter specialist Michael Cooper.

“That night [following her lightweight hunter win] I couldn't sleep, so I got up at 3am to start getting Billy ready for the ladies' class. When we won that too it was like a dream.”

"We bought him originally to do intermediate work, but he just kept growing," says Jenna. "He stands about 16.2hh now and has had no trouble upgrading into the weights. We have had several people asking if he is for sale, but that will never happen. He is part of the family."

Asked how the horse coped with the atmosphere at HOYS, Jenna says, "He is so easy to do at shows, never needing much work. He takes everything in his stride and he certainly won't fazed by the International Arena."

"The only things he objects to are being clipped and having his tail pulled. I think we can forgive him for those."

The duo were also crowned inaugural TAGG La Liga lightweight points winners for overall consistency this season. They returned from HOYS with a booty including three Master rags.



Regular hacking plays an important part in Billy's training.

Showing interview

MOONDANCE ROYALE is a three-year-old home-bred Hanoverian by Medoc, out of Jenna's former show mare Rabine Royale. She has been broken and is in light work prior to making her ridden debut in novice classes next year.

She will be aimed at small hack or small riding horse classes, depending on how she matures over the winter.

"What I love about this mare is her length of stride," says Jenna. "Although she is only small, she can outpace the bigger horses in trot already. I have great hopes for her."

"She is well put together with a good front, a pretty head and a slowly outlook for a young horse."

and the impressive Bill Bryan Memorial Trophy, awarded to the hunter champion.

An apprenticeship served
BUT it took a while for Jenna to get this far. "When we first started in hunter ranks, our well-established showman joked that we would have to serve our apprenticeship and that has certainly been the case," she recalls.

The pair had their first big break in the 2010 SEB Search for a Star series, where they finished runner-up in the hunter final at HOYS. Jenna says the experience gained through this popular series was invaluable, and she makes particular mention of David Bartram, who was an early mentor.

The following year, Jenna returned to HOYS to contest the open and ladies' classes, but was unplaced. So to what does she attribute her incredible success this season?

"Sheer hard work and perseverance," she says. "If you have a bad day, don't give up. Watch the professionals and don't be afraid to ask for advice, as they are always happy to help."

Jenna has also had lessons with Katie Jerrom and Louise Bell, from whom she bought her other competition horse, the working hunter Out Of Sight — no relation to Louise's much-missed superstar who bore the same name — 18 months ago.

"Their insight has been tremendous," says Jenna. "Louise suggested that I change Billy's bit to a portsmouthed pelham before the ladies' class at Moreton-In-Marsh, which was the last qualifier. I did and we won."

"She has also suggested I ride him to draw reins with a loosening snaffle to teach him to lower and stretch, as she felt he was coming against me."

Jenna only began riding side saddle two years ago when a mix-up over her Lincoln County entries resulted in her taking a chance in the ladies' class.

"I only had two weeks to buy a saddle and a habit and get some practice before making my debut," she recalls. "At first, it felt really strange not having any support on my right, but Billy took to it as though he had been doing it all his life. He has made it so easy for me."

"I have lessons with Linda Cadman and she is an inspirational trainer," adds Jenna.

Clearly, there is plenty of natural talent that must be factored into the equation, as Jenna has beaten riders who have been competing in the discipline for many years. She is totally at home in the medium and opted to ride Billy side saddle in the atmospheric hour.

The H&H interview Jenna Tyldesley



Purchased for Intermediate work, Billy, now 10, has kept growing

supreme at HOYS, as she felt they would look different to everybody else.

A great place to work from

HARD work and dedication are clearly the cornerstones of this young rider's success. But there could be no better platform than Hargate Hill Equestrian Centre.

Purchased as a derelict ruin by Jenna's father Mike in 1972, it is his vision and tack-breaking work – supported by his wife Diane – that has transformed it into a thriving business.

Set in the heart of the Peak District, it boasts a cross-country course and hacking along the Team Pennine Trail. There are 130 attractive red brick stables, split between the riding school and livery, a horse-walker, shower and solarium, two outdoor arenas and a spacious indoor one. The Glossop branch of the Pony Club, where Jenna began her riding career, also has its base on site.

Jenna, who holds a British Horse Society assistant instructors certificate (BHSIA), took over as centre manager seven years ago. She combines running the business with teaching private showing clients and schooling her own horses.

A typical day begins at 5am, when she will exercise Billy and her novice worker Out Of Sight (Marley), an Irish sport horse by Classic Vision out of Lochnavar Lady. Then it's on to supervising the livery yard and riding school clients, accounts, paperwork and teaching, not finishing some days until 9pm.

So how did it all begin?

JENNA comes from an equestrian background. Her father Mike ran a doeling yard for a while, as well as becoming a master of the North East Cheshire Doghounds for six years, to which Jenna whipped-in.

The young Jenna was first tempted into the competition arena by showjumping with the Pony Club, until one year she qualified a pony



Flowers, rosettes and ribbons are proudly displayed

for the Ponies (UK) Summer Championships at Peterborough.

"From then on I was hooked," she says. "It was like another world and I wanted to be a part of it. We didn't book a stable and I slept in the back of the lorry with the pony. Mum and Dad slept in the front.

"We were freezing and every time the pony moved the lorry rocked. After that, Dad said we were doing it properly or not at all."

The next purchase was the 168cm show hunter pony Fair Nobleman, who came from the late Jane Bewick and gave Jenna her first showing success.

"I won the riding club pony class and went reserve champion at Birchley Manor. I was over the moon," said Jenna. "The next acquisition, also from Jane Bewick, was the 152cm, Doodie Dandy II, who was very spooky and taught me to ride.

"After that, I have been making my way up in bridle ranks. I got there in the end," she laughs.

Jenna's biggest wins prior to HOYS with Billy were topping the line-up in the ladies' class at Great Yorkshire last season, and two major championships at FURK this summer.

Training insights

IN the showing season, Billy is exercised daily but with plenty of variety.

"I always try to do something different so the horses don't get stale," says Jenna. "We are fortunate to have plenty of hacking and sloping fields where I can do hillwork. Billy will happily pop a fence end, of course, he is schooled regularly.

WHAT HER TRAINERS SAY

David Bartram

DAVID has been the ride judge for the SEIB Search for a Star qualifiers for the past 12 years. He was instrumental in Jenna's success in the series at HOYS in 2010, giving help in the run-up to the competition and beyond.

"What stood out about this young lady was her determination," he recalls. "She never gave up and she listened to everything I said and took it on board. Her parents are delightful and, as a family, they have worked as a great team.

"What a fantastic story this has been and Jenna so deserves this success."

Louise Bell

"IN life, people are either bricks or sponges. Information bounces off the bricks, so it takes them longer to go forward, but Jenna is a sponge and absorbs it. Her horse is a lovely stamp – the type that is the 'must have' of the season.

"I have always said to her that if she goes well, he is better than the rest in his class. We have worked on his way of going and Jenna is riding beautifully. Her results are a major pay off for a very hard-working girl and one of the nicest families I know."

Linda Cadman

"JENNA was a complete natural from the start and very few people could have achieved what she has riding side saddle in such a short time. She has balance, confidence and sheer determination and this is what enthralled me about her.

"She is a superb rider to teach because she takes everything in, goes away and works on it, then comes back the next week having bottomed it. She is a wonderful girl and for an amateur to achieve what she has is just incredible. I am so proud of her."

"After exercise he goes on the horse-walker for an hour, then back to bed. He is turned out twice a week, weather permitting, and I travel to Louise Bell's for lessons. She is near Scarborough, Cumbria, so I usually stay overnight in the lorry and return the next day."

Things haven't always gone according to plan and Jenna is not afraid of addressing schooling issues as they arise.

"I felt Billy didn't go particularly well for a couple of ride judges in the ladies' classes this year, so I put in extra work to make him 'give a ride'," she reveals. "I ride him with lots of leg, with very little leg, with a light contact and a heavier contact, and if he didn't go forward he got a smack. It has definitely helped."

Future plans

SO, will this talented young rider be resting on her laurels next season? Not at all. She plans to be back on the campaign trail with Billy and to expand her already bulging equestrian portfolio.

"I want to produce horses for clients," she says. "I would love it if an owner rang me up and asked me to show a horse for them. That is my next big ambition."

Don't stray far from your mobile, Jenna. It could be ringing very soon... (16/1)



With her stack of awards, Jenna returned to Hargate Hill EC and a very warm welcome