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Mount St John Equestrian - high quality British stud

Jan 13, 2014

Following Mount St. John Equestrian and owner Emma Jane Blundell on the social medias, we were curious to know a bit more about her background and her business with her horses.

Emma Jane Blundell:

- 27 years old
- Born & always lived in Yorkshire, UK
- From a business family with no horsey connections



"Loved all animals from a small child & had 2 dogs when born, but was most crazy about horses and every holiday I wanted to visit anything to do with horses for day trips etc even persuading my parents to go on a western ranch holiday when I was 7 years old to be around the horses more

Started riding at the local riding school aged 7 in after school classes that soon became 3x a week, then all day at weekends too."

Background/ how did it start?

"After starting at the local riding school I got my first pony a grey welsh sec b aged 8 & did chores around the riding school at weekends and holidays to earn his keep where he was also used in other lessons. We moved on to start competing him in showing classes in the first year & I got 2nd place in my first local charity show, then I was hooked on the competition side & we started to compete more & trained to do better.

I like to think we got close a few times

Within a couple of years I was riding a range of show ponies for other owners on the yard both at home and in competitions and had qualified my own pony for the prestigious RIHS held at hickstead and HOYS then held at wembley arena. On my first attempt there as a complete outsider I was 4th placed in the final as much to my own shock as my parents! Now I was definitely addicted and had proven my parents I was capable and committed so they committed to buying me my next pony and by now both my sister and brother were also riding and doing some competitions.

Over the next 10 years I went on to compete and get top placings in all the national finals every year without fail competing around 40 ponies over this time both owned by us and ridden for others, many of which I would break in too. In the early years in the pony classes my biggest contender and I'm to beat was the legendary Charlotte Dujardin who partnered the legendary 12.2h pony mare Ardenhall Royal Secret to remain unbeaten (I like to think we got close a few times) and claim the HOYS championship 4x consecutively a feat which has still not been beaten or matched again.

Her first foal born in 2009

By 17 years old I was starting to want to do more than the showing so I began to train with John Lassetter on my show ponies, one I was riding at the time showed particular talent &

we trained to a high medium level. Coincidentally he was called Hampton Prince of Thieves and was champion show pony at HOYS at 4 years old also ridden by Charlotte Dujardin! I went on to acquire John's retired GP horse & trained at home after school at 6.30 each evening alone & monthly with John, loving the training but never competing. A field injury retired him permanently around the time I was finishing school and I decided to sell the show horses we have or send back the season rides and travel the world before starting my university studies 1 year later.

I missed the horses terribly during this time but didn't have a particular horse at home to go home to. We then decided to recruit John's advice and look to buy a dressage horse on my return, with the ambitious aim of at 20 years old trying for young riders (having never competed in dressage). With the help of Simon Kohlenbrenner at pferd24 we found Fabiola a former para Olympic horse with an exceptional character & extended trot who would get me back into riding and straight into the arena. After 1 local advanced test we went to our first PSG young rider team test at a premier league show, it was a challenge and didn't go great but we did it and weren't last! I travelled 7 hours each way every Friday after university to train with John at weekends where Fabiola was based and progressed quickly with scores up to 68% PSG within 6 months & then we had a letter asking us to represent team GB at Hickstead as a warm up for other internationals later in the season, it was magic!

1 week later Fabiola was injured & sidelined for the next few months, devastated we started to look for a second horse with serious GP and team potential. We recruited the help of pferd24 again and this time found another mare Deja'vu the former bronze medalist from the young horse world champs & German Bundeschampion.

Unfortunately before we were able to compete Deja'vu she had an accident and did not make a full recovery from her injury but whilst we were trying to rehabilitate her we decided to not waste such valuable genetics & started breeding by ET. Her first foal born in 2009 was by For Compliment in his first year of breeding and is a super filly that we now have in our breeding barn called Front Row. She also had her first foal this year which is an super elite filly by Sir Donnerhall.



I had to be stricter on making something unique

And so it started, while I was away at university studying business management at Manchester business school the horses took the back burner & tried to recover but neither were ultimately successful so instead we continued to breed every year & always got fillies much to our delight. During the time of trying the ET I decided to further research the equine reproductive market as my undergraduate dissertation and so spent 1/3 of my final year working on the title 'The implications of developments in equine reproduction techniques on the sport horse market.' This was a fascinating study where I learnt about AI, freezing semen, working with embryos & the early cloning work alongside how it would impact the industry.

Based on this research project I was offered a scholarship to Complete a Masters in Entrepreneurship where I used my sport horse breeding business as the focus of the course & spent 1 year doing assignments on feasibility studies, business plans, swots & advertising strategies to name but a few. This proved invaluable spending so long researching the market and planning the strategy before commencing the business. Particularly discussing it with non horsey business people meant I had to be stricter on making something unique that worked and encouraged me to focus on staying true to our aims and beliefs without any additional distractions."

Normal winter day

"All our horses now live in barns in the winter time; so we have one barn taking up to 70 mares which includes all our pregnant broodmares and recipients in groups separate to the empty recipients available for the following season and also the empty donor mares, another barn holds the weanlings and yearlings for the winter time in groups up to 5. All have free access to indoor deep straw bedding & ad lib hay and also outdoor hard areas with hay 24/7.

Our normal winter days includes checking and feeding all the horses in the 2 different barns starting with pregnant mares. As needed we put out extra straw and hay by tractor. Then we clean up outside the pens daily on the hard areas to keep everywhere clean and organised. Again in the afternoon we check round and feed all the horses. Between we perhaps have the farrier or dentist to do some horses or catch up on office and paperwork.

Around 2 months prior to the foaling due date the in foal mares come up to the foaling yard into freshly washed & disinfected boxes to prepare for their foaling. Here they go on the walker and get turn out as well as daily checks. At least 1 week prior to the foaling date or as they start to look close the vet stitches in our alarm that will telephone us as the delivery begins. Then the excitement begins!

We have a couple of the older or more dominant donor broodmares in historical stables of the house, close by to the competition horses for the winter time. These mares go daily on the walker and in the fields all year round weather permitting. During the winter time we do more ground work and starting of the young horses beginning with the early 3 year olds and also develop the fitness and strength of the older competition mares in ridden training which we usually have between 4-6 horses. This means perhaps more hacking (weather permitting) for fitness and mental stimulation, and some pole work and small jumping grids with our eventing rider who comes in multiple times per week to increase strength & agility as well as increasing mental capacity of the young dressage horses.

During the summer all mares and youngstock live in the fields in their groups. At this stage they are checked 2x a day and the mares with young foals or during bad weather come into stables at night. The competition horses live in all year round to maintain a more constant routine."

When did it all start?

"The business was officially started in the middle of 2012 so this year 2013 was our first full crop of dressage foals."

Horse parents?

"No they are not at all horsey, although they kindly allow me to run MSJ from their home and my mother (former rehab physio) has been really supportive and is in fact a business partner with me and now loves assisting with foalings and is the HGV driver for competitions."

How many mares?

"We have 25 mares in our breeding programme already with more coming as the youngsters come of age to breed with."

Do we select for not being broodmares or choose some for ET?

"We naturally have to select the broodmares every year otherwise quickly we would be having 40 foals a year! If they are not producing top offspring after trying a couple of different stallions then we have to change and we find good new homes for them. Some of the mares we have are very special to us and will not be sold but fortunately they are also having great offspring.

We breed with the older mares by ET until they don't want to breed anymore, only thing is we have a few into the 20's and none have decided that yet!"

How has your breeding developed?

"We have been very lucky in the past couple of years to acquire some older mares and foals from some of the best European dressage families carrying world class bloodlines. This has helped us step up our scale of breeding and management to supplement the embryos we do from a select number of competition horses. By nature some of these older broodmares and youngsters looking ahead to competition careers only breed by ET so we have dramatically increased our ET numbers as we set up our own facilities in 2012 to do that at MSJ."

Biggest breeding success?

"We are still very new breeders and are producing for sport not breeding classes so we don't really do anything to present the young horses before ridden and we sell all the colts so don't present any to license. In fact in the first years when we didn't breed too many then we had only fillies so we don't have any colts old enough to license yet with their new owners."

I was very happy when Charlotte Dujardin came up to visit us earlier this year and fell for our San Amour x DiMaggio grey filly called Sensation, describing her as 'simply sensational' and asked to buy her, but she is not currently for sale as we would like her to stay with us for some breeding and sport but Charlotte has requested this job so watch this space!



Sensation by San Amour / ET Dimaggio (Diaz)

That would be the ultimate success for us

We hope that our horses will go on to become sport horses competing in the young horse world championships and also later on to compete on senior teams competing at WEGs and Olympics of the future. That would be the ultimate success for us and is what we are aiming to achieve. Of course premium licensed stallions would also be a good hallmark of success from any breeding programme.

Our first homebred dressage filly is coming out under saddle in 2014 to do the 4 year old classes, she called Fascination by Furstenball out of our top sport mare FBW Deja'vu. Watch this space..."

What is a top stallion?

"A stallion that produces consistently good offspring with strong traits in my opinion makes him a good breeding stallion, as then it is easier to match him with mares and have a better idea of what will come. I am a huge D blood fan and am lucky to have 3 direct Donnerhall daughters in our breeding programme.

We also use a lot for example of De Niro and Dimaggio both of which I think are superb producing stallions as well as being serious contenders in their own right. I love their will and want to work combined with the strong hind legs which gives them the engine and mental capacity to continue onto the big sport, it is no coincidence both have an amazing number of offspring at the top of the sport.

Negro I also love as a stallion who again has competed up to GP himself as well as producing a number of top offspring for the same reasons, due to him often passing on the mental capacity and strong hind legs to go all the way. Best exemplified by The legendary no 1 dressage horse in the world - Valegro."

Which stallions are trending?

"I think these 3 stallions I mentioned along with a lot of F blood at the moment such as Fürstenball, Fürst Romancier, Franziskus and Fürst Heinrich are currently trending. Mainly due to their exceptional ride ability and beautiful types both of which makes them a pleasure to own and very easy to sell. These stallions also come from super dam lines and breeders are really paying attention to the mare lines now to guarantee more with breeding. Of course wonder horses such as Farouche and Fürst Fugger by Fürst Heinrich promote such stallions further."

Using jumping blood lines for the dressage breeding?

"We have quite a lot of jumping blood in our mares including stallions such as Conteur and Argentinus directly, as well as many from top jumping producing families. I think this can really help a dressage breeding programme, most often assisting with the hind leg and backs

to produce stronger, quicker and more supple horses, which often really develops the canter & higher work."

What is important for the future?

"For the future standards need to increase all the time as now 80%+ is required to be competitive internationally and that is a quick development in the last 10 years going up 10%. Riders want more rideable and trainable horses to work with & no longer do they have to choose between ride ability and talent, they can and do expect both. Of course 3 very good gaits is also a minimum as a weakness such as a poor walk makes something too expensive to loose marks and remain competitive on now."

Breeding goals

"To produce world championship & Olympic level dressage horses."
