

Over To You

—a one-off, and a star



Over To You, the world's most highly medalled event horse, has finally retired from the world stage, aged 19. KATE GREEN tells his story

An emotional farewell by Over To You and Jeanette Brakewell at Badminton this year



En route to Olympic team silver at Athens 2004 — a seventh championship medal in seven championship appearances, at that point

AT Badminton last month, Over To You made a valedictory circuit of the main arena in front of an affectionate crowd, the applause swelling as he passed each section of the stands. It marked the end of a remarkable journey by a funny little chestnut horse whose career began as a weedy racing reject and ended as the most capped event horse in the world.

He made a record eight consecutive championship appearances for Britain, winning more medals — eight — than any other horse. And he is the oldest one to complete Badminton, and started there eight times, earning a record seven placings with the same rider. Jeanette Brakewell, his partner of 15 years, confesses: "Everyone thought I looked composed, but all weekend I'd been so conscious that everything we did at Badminton together was now for the last time — the last cross-country, the last trot-up even — and just before I went in the arena I totally lost it and blubbed my heart out."

Over To You was foaled in 1988, in Ireland. Bred by Mary Letts, he was sired by Over The River out of Another Miller. He was brought to England by racehorse owner Tony Clegg, but the planned racing career bombed when he was rejected by trainer Tom Tate's Yorkshire racing yard, having apparently squashed a few apprentices against walls.

He was branded "difficult", earned the sobriquet "Mad Jack", and was turned out.

ROLL OF HONOUR

- 1998: 16th Badminton, individual member of British squad at Rome WEG
- 1999: 9th Badminton, European team gold medal, Luhmühlen
- 2000: team silver medal at Sydney Olympics
- 2001: European team gold medal at Pau
- 2002: fell at the gate at Huntsman's Close, Badminton, world team bronze and individual silver medals, Jerez WEG
- 2003: 3rd Badminton, team gold medal, Punchestown Europeans
- 2004: 7th Badminton, Olympic team silver medal, Athens
- 2005: 5th Badminton, European team gold medal, Blenheim
- 2006: 4th Badminton, 5th Burghley
- 2007: 14th Badminton

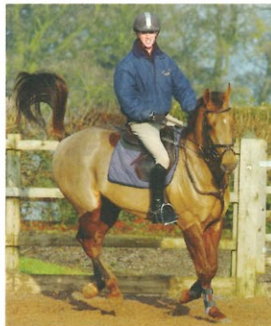


The job of breaking him in properly, as a four-year-old, fell to Irish eventer Jonty Evans. "Jack had acquired a reputation, but he wasn't really naughty, he just hadn't been given a chance," explains Jonty, who worked for the Cleggs and for sport horse producer Chris McGrann, in whose schooling yard Jeanette was also employed.

I blubbed my heart out before I went into the arena at Badminton for his retirement

Jeanette Brakewell

"I long-reined him endlessly around the farm, tied weights to his saddle in the old-fashioned way, and by the time I climbed on him, from a tractor wheel, he was fine. "I said to Chris: 'This little horse will jump anything,' but he was rather dismissive then!" Jeanette's earliest memory of her future dual Olympic medalist was not auspicious. "I'd heard stories about this vicious horse. One day, Tony Clegg's daughter, Fiona, came round the corner with her eye up like a balloon because he'd whacked her in the face," recalls Jeanette, now 33. "But I was young and ambitious and I didn't mind what I rode. I had no idea Jack would be amazing; he was only 16hh, looked 'upside-down' and weak. "He wasn't really naughty; his only fault



A Christmas Horse & Hound shoot where 2005 Hickstead Derby victor Ben Maher got to ride Jack

« was dithering on the edge of water, and I regularly got 20pen until Chris said: 'You let that horse stop again and I'll sell him!' "Then Richard Holdsworth [whose partner, Lindsey Marsh, had horses with the Cleggs] saw me riding him and said: 'I'll back that.' He bought Jack for me to ride and we've travelled together ever after." Lindsey Marsh recalls: "Jack was a sharp little number — and he still is. He once reared up and dumped Jeanette in the middle of a dressage test. "We arrived at Bramham one day and Anne Marshall [with whom Jeanette was then based] said: 'Don't get excited; I'm not sure he's going to do anything in the arena.' But he pulled up to 12th by virtue of his jumping, and that became the story of his life. "The high set of Jack's neck and his 'peacock' way of going was never conducive to a big-moving dressage test and, though nowadays he achieves a mark in the 40s, his extraordinary jumping ability let him catch up. "John Bowen, Jeanette's dressage trainer, explains: "He wouldn't have been the easiest horse to train, even if he were perfectly put together. He's very light in the mouth and doesn't take the contact. "And you only have a window of 10min to get a performance out of him, so that had to be reserved for the arena. "I tried different techniques to make him use his athleticism — the quality he does have in abundance — and his body, and that sometimes involved working him deep and round, which did earn a few frowns from people. "But Jeanette and I have been working together for 11 years and she trusts me to get the best possible results. And I feel that at all the three days we've done the best job we could. "A reliable, no-nonsense approach to cross-country and a wonderfully light style of galloping and jumping became Jack's keynotes. "We got comfortable at top level and then we stayed there," explains Jeanette. "He's so bold, I soon knew that whatever I pointed him at, he would jump. We grew up during a transitional period in course-design — in the late 1990s when the 'skinies' came in — and while at first I was cautious with him, now I just point and fire. "The pair earned a place on the British squad



The individual silver medal performance at the World Games 2002: 'I was glad when it was over'



The cool-headed pathfinders fly round the steeplechase at Sydney 2000, en route to team silver

in 1998 as individuals for the World Equestrian Games (WEG) in Pratoni, where they incurred 20pen for a "dither" on top of a drop. "It was a big thrill to see our horse representing Britain," recalls Lindsey Marsh. "We were watching cross-country on the CCTV and the heavens opened. One drop fence became a running mudbath, like something out of *A Man from Snowy River*. Jeanette's mother let out an almighty shriek when they came down that."

Jeanette first took on her acclaimed team pathfinder role at the 1999 Europeans in Luhmühlen. Britain had to overcome the disgrace of being disqualified at WEG (due to a failed drop test) and qualify for Sydney. "It was all Chris Bartle's [team manager] fault. I'd had a good Burghley on Melford Bell and he thought that I was feeling confident, so he put me first, even though it was my first

time on the team," says Jeanette. "I really was nervous then and I had to set out across country so early, at around 7.30am, that I could hardly see the first chase fence. I hadn't got any feedback to go on, but I had great faith in Jack." Team medals poured in, but it is acknowledged that the pathfinder rarely gets individual glory. It took a quirky competition, the WEG in Jerez 2002, for Jeanette finally to earn a deserved individual (silver) accolade. "That was the moment that got to me," says trainer John Bowen. "Until then, we'd had to get in via the back door. But on this occasion, when Jack did his normal good jumping, he got the recognition he deserved." Jeanette says: "It was one of those old-fashioned competitions where you got rewarded for a good cross-country. But it was a hard round. It felt ragged because it was a quick-fire course with no let-up and the ground was very firm. I was so glad when it was over." Soundness has obviously been key to Jack's longevity — previously, his only lameness was

WHAT THOSE WHO KNOW HIM SAY...



Claiming European team gold at Luhmühlen in 1999. Over To You is third from left

"Over To You has been synonymous with my career. Jeanette is a very, very talented rider, and to have a combination like that available for so long is a team manager's dream. "Over To You is poetry in motion across country. His round at the Pau Europeans was like silk. They threw away the mould when they made him."

Yogi Breisner

British team manager since 2000

"My proudest moment was Badminton last year, when I finally had my name next to a runner. He's a remarkable horse and could probably do a couple more four-stars, but you can't finish on a bad note and it was right to stop this year."

Mark Johnston

Owner

"I loved him to pieces. When I told Lars Christensson [Irish team manager] that I broke in Over To You but Jeanette ended up getting him for the British team, Lars couldn't believe his bad luck. "Jack and I once got thrown out of the first round in a Burghley young event horse qualifier. I'd love to say something to that judge now!"

Jonty Evans

who broke him in

"It's been nothing but a fantastic journey, watching them grow together. The best thing is the unexpectedness of it all. When you buy a horse, you have no idea whether it will do anything. "Jack being part of the British team at the Sydney Olympics and bringing home a medal

"I got terribly nervous watching, especially when he was pathfinder and had to set the standard, but I've always had such faith in the horse. "The most memorable moment of my life was walking behind Jack into the arena at Sydney for the medal ceremony, knowing he'd won a medal, and with the crowds cheering and waving."

Catherine Cawdron

groom at most championships



The elusive individual silver nestles alongside team bronze at the World Games in 2002