

# 'This is all I dreamed of'

**The HORSE & HOUND Interview**

Scott Brash topped an amazing 2012 with an even better 2013. How did he get there — and where does he go next? Catherine Austen finds out



Well travelled: Scott pictured in Aachen — 'It's tough and tiring but I wouldn't change it,' he says of life on the road

**S**HOWJUMPERS aren't known for their emotional outbursts. "Yeah, he jumped great" is their usual response to overexcited pleas to describe their winning rounds. But when Scott Brash admits: "It will be hard to top 2013," it may be an understatement, but it's bang on.

In the slipstream of that magical Olympic team gold in London, a solid 2013 would have been enough to cement the 28-year-old Scotsman's position among the world's elite. Instead, he finished the year as world number one, with victory in the final of the Longines Global Champions Tour on top of team gold and individual bronze at the European Championships.

After a relentless 12 months jumping in upwards of 15 countries, Scott loved being back at home in Peebles, south of Edinburgh, over Christmas, when *H&H* caught up with him.

"It's great to be home. It gives me a chance to think about and remember the year and spend time with my family. I'm in a very good place at the moment," he says.

## A family effort

FAMILY is very important to Scott, and quite possibly the reason he seems so grounded for a young man who has achieved so much. His father Stanley owns a building firm and bought Scott and his sister Lea ponies — Stanley had worked in a racing yard before starting his business and remained keen on horses.

"He took us to the Pony Club, but we loved jumping and he got us registered with British Showjumping and we started going every weekend," Scott says. "Dad was right behind us — we had about three ponies each — and it escalated from there."

Scott and Lea were very successful, qualifying for Horse of the Year Show (HOYS) each year and jumping for Scotland at Home Pony Internationals, but never quite making it on to European teams. While Lea trained as an accountant and is now a company director in Edinburgh, Scott left school at 17, committed to a life with horses.

"My sister got the brains," Scott laughs. "I just loved the horses — that was my number one aim in life."

He worked for showjumper Paul Barker and Brendon Stud's Cyril Light, before starting his own yard at home aged 19.

His father bought a couple of horses to start him off — and helped Scott buy Intertoy Z, the horse who was to make his name — but it wasn't long before he was attracting owners.

He is still based at home, although he is abroad competing most of the year. But sister Lea and Kelly Fitzgerald produce the young horses for him. Despite the obvious disadvantages of being based so far north when the Continent is your principal workplace, Scott insists Scotland is a great place to produce horses.

"Some of the best indoor venues are in Scotland, and I can trust Kelly and Lea totally with the youngsters and any of the older horses who need to be at home," he says.

Lea keeps an eye on the financial side of his business, too.



Golden shot: Scott Brash and Hello Sanctos competing at the London 2012 Olympics, where he joined forces with Nick Skelton, Ben Maher and Peter Charles to win team gold

"I book the flights and that sort of thing, but I have a great team behind me," says Scott. "I'm not the best organiser, and I probably do a lot of people's heads in, chopping and changing plans."

He continues: "I will eventually get a yard down south — probably southern England rather than Europe, although that is an option."

For a while he ran a small breeding programme, but the intensity of the past couple of years has put it on the back-burner: "I simply can't give it the time I need to when I'm at a five-star show every weekend."

**A life-changing call**  
SO, when many talented British riders are struggling to make ends meet, how has Scott hit the jackpot?



Above left: at the European Championships, where he claimed individual bronze. Above: with sister Lea and his father Stanley, very much part of Team Brash

**“A lot of my top rounds have been under intense pressure — it strengthens my focus and raises my game”**

He modestly puts it down to luck. Shortly after Scott had jumped Bon Ami and Intertoy Z in Toronto a couple of years ago, David Broome phoned him.

"He said that Lord and Lady Harris and Lord and Lady Kirkham were interested in purchasing a horse for me with the Olympics in mind. Would I go and see the horse?" recalls Scott. "The next day I flew to Germany, rode Hello Sanctos — and the rest is history. I'm a very lucky guy."

He is — but it is his talent and work ethic that have made him lucky. Lords Harris and Kirkham didn't pick Scott's name out of a hat; they carefully chose a young man who might help them fulfil their dream of winning Olympic gold.

"That's the thing I'm happiest about — for Lord and Lady Harris in particular, who have put so much into showjumping for nearly 50 years — that they have achieved their ultimate dream," says Scott with a huge smile.

"I'm thrilled that they have got something back from a sport that owes them so much.

"They're amazing," he continues. "I'm not just saying that because they are my owners — if we went our separate ways tomorrow, I'd have utter respect for any one of them."

Pictures by Jan Stradtmann, Peter Nixon, Jon Stroud Media and www.trevor-meeks-photography.co.uk



## The horses — in Scott's words



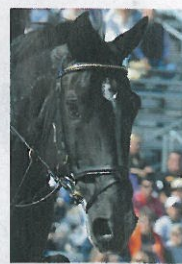
**Hello Sanctos:** He's quite grumpy in the stable — he wants to be fed and left alone — but he knows exactly when it's important. He's really easy to travel and to fly. He'll flop about at home until I have to get after him to get him working properly, but once he's in the ring... He's so clever and talented — the horse of a lifetime.



**Ursula XII:** She's the sweetest horse. She loves a fuss, has a lovely attitude and is a joy to ride.



**Bon Ami:** I've had him since he was five — he's an out-and-out winner who gives his whole heart to the job. He's a little bit like Sanctos — lazy at home, but he knows his job and comes alive at a show. He's a touch scared of flying and has to have a bigger stall.



**Intertoy Z:** He's now been sold to Nina Barbour, and he'll have a lovely home for life with her. He put me on the map and I hope he can help her in the same way. He's a friendly giant who loves attention — you can do anything with him.



**Hello Annie:** We're a new partnership. She gets a little stressed and is a bit of a worrier — she takes all night to eat her food, that sort of thing. I think she's good, though.



**Hello M'Lady:** She's an eight-year-old and a real cracker. She's off to Florida this month, which will hopefully be the making of her. She's quite sharp and sensitive, but talented.



**I am 100% honest and straight [with the Harrises and Kirkhams], and I'm always upfront and give them my opinion. We trust each other totally**

What they do for so many people, not just me, is incredible."

He explains his relationship with them, saying: "I am 100% honest and straight, and I'm always upfront and give them my opinion. We trust each other totally — and I feel like they are part of my family."

### Reading what horses need

HELLO SANCTOS, Olympic and European team gold medal winner, was the first, but there are several of the Harris and Kirkhams' "Hello" horses jumping for Scott now, such as the mares Hello Annie and Hello M'Lady.

"I've had the best year I've ever had, but it is all down to the horses, the owners and the team," he insists.

But it is down to him to nail it in the ring. "You can be a great rider, but without the horses and team, you won't make it. It's different for footballers or tennis players — their talent comes through. Our sport is unique in involving another creature, and it's all about management.

"You need to be a good horseman, to understand them and be able to create a partnership, but a horse must feel on top of his game to be able to deliver, and that's down to the team," he says.

He will allow that he is good under pressure. "Yes, I do thrive in that situation," says Scott. "Sometimes I need that to bring out the best in me and in my riding. A lot of my top rounds have been under intense pressure — it strengthens my focus and raises my game."

Has life changed since he, Ben Maher, Nick Skelton and Peter Charles were the

golden boys of Greenwich?

"I do get recognised sometimes," he says, slightly uncomfortably. "But I'm still the same person I was when I was ranked 300 in the world. It's amazing to know you are number one, but I wouldn't like to think I have changed."

He says he hasn't bought anything special to celebrate his new status, and isn't even sure how much money he's won in the past year. Let's hope Lea does...

"People says it must be a million, but if it is I don't know where it's gone," he smiles. "It all goes back into the business anyway."

### A life on the road

DOES the thought of spending 90% of the year travelling and jumping at shows all over the world still appeal as much?

"It's a great life — it's all I dreamed of doing," he says. "It's tough and tiring, but I wouldn't change it at all."

He used to do a lot of teaching — and still does the odd clinic or private lesson when he can squeeze it in, which is rarely.

"I really enjoy helping people who want to learn," he says. "And I love seeing horses learn. That development from a horse going to its first show, perhaps not having travelled before, watching it change its technique and develop



Globetrotting: competing Bon Ami in the Monte Carlo leg of the Longines Global Champions Tour

## WHERE WAS SCOTT IN 2013?

**January:** Basel, Zurich, Offenburg

**February:** Bordeaux, Hong Kong

**March:** 's-Hertogenbosch, Doha

**April:** Antwerp

**May:** Madrid, Hamburg, La Baule, Rome, St Gallen

**June:** London, Cannes, Monte Carlo

**July:** Estoril, Chantilly

**August:** Hickstead, Dublin, Valkenswaard, Herning

**September:** Lausanne, Vienna, Barcelona

**October:** Oslo, Helsinki

**November:** Lyon, Verona, Stuttgart, Doha

**December:** Paris, Geneva, London

confidence and enjoyment in what it is doing is fascinating."

Scott says he never stops learning from his fellow riders.

He has great admiration for the Whitakers and Nick Skelton and all they have achieved.

"At Olympia [in December], it was great to see that John's hunger for the sport after all this time is still so strong," he says.

### A mandatory month off?

AFTER jumping in Basel this week, he is off to Florida for two months with six horses. Being based in one place for such a long period means he actually gets to relax somewhat — and even play the odd round of golf with his friends. For the rest of the year, it's eat, sleep, jump, repeat.

"There are so many top contenders in the sport now that it's important to have lots of big shows for them," he says. "But I have been wondering whether there should be a rule that it is mandatory for international riders to have one month a year in which they cannot compete at international shows."

"It would give riders — and in particular horses — a break, and if it was the same for everyone, it shouldn't affect rankings, which is why no one dares take time out now."

"The horses always come first for me. If I think a horse is tired, I won't go to a show — and if that takes me back down the rankings, so be it. That's horsemanship to me, but I'm not sure everyone's like that."

And life on the circuit isn't anything like *Riders*, he insists.

"Courses are trickier, there is more competition," he says. "Top showjumpers now are 100% dedicated to the sport, and if you want to beat them, you have to be totally focused. I definitely don't party much, if at all — but that's the way I want it."

"So many people have put so much into me — it would be wrong not to be 100% committed to the job."

What will 2014 bring for showjumping's golden boy? The focus will be on the World Equestrian Games in France — can our world number one become world champion?

"I'll give it my best shot," he promises. H&H



Relaxing: Scott says he performs better when under pressure

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