

Keeping riders on track...

As time, money — and even daylight — become less plentiful, *H&H* salutes the unsung heroes who help give riders an edge and finds out what inspires them to do it



Polly Gould enjoys the role she plays in keeping Andrew and their business on track

INTERNATIONAL dressage rider Andrew Gould and his wife Polly have been together for over a decade and have two young children — Oliver and Louis. And theirs is a relationship that works in business, too.

When Andrew set up his own yard at 18 he quickly established he had no enthusiasm for any aspect of the work that required him to sit behind a computer.

Polly says: "With only four of his own horses and eight stables he could manage to do the bills by hand, but when we moved to Priory [their former base] we had 30 stables so I started getting more involved with the business, doing the livery bills and organising shows."

This freed Andrew's time to teach and ride more. And as the business grew, Polly took more on. She now runs Andrew's diary, books his clinics, arranges his flights — the list goes on.

"Paying salaries, registering horses, doing show entries, ordering feed and bedding, booking the farrier — she does anything that involves a phone or computer," adds Andrew.

"Nobody can train and compete full-time and do all of this on their own," he believes. "Polly learned a lot working in PR and that helps her now with what we do. She's always coming up with new ideas to move the business forward and is quick to update my website as soon as I get back from a show."

All of which gives Andrew an edge — he's doing something right to be in demand for 60 lessons a week.

Until recently, the pair also bought and sold horses.

"When it came to advertising the horses for



Organised and dedicated, Polly drives Andrew on

sale, Polly would write adverts that came across really well and encouraged people to call up, which made us a lot stronger," reasons Andrew. "If I'd written them they wouldn't have been in English and wouldn't have made sense — not a good first impression."

Polly explains: "We complement each other well. I used to ride, but I rarely do now and don't miss it. But I love being involved with the horses still and before we had good grooms I'd do all the plaiting and tidying for shows. I got my HGV test two years before Andrew did, so I did the driving."

Polly organises everything by Blackberry: "People email or text me about lessons every day, so I'll be in the playground sorting out bookings. Andrew teaches seven days a week — I never want to say no to people so we sacrifice our own time a bit. He can only blame me for never getting a rest as I just keep booking him in," she admits.

"I couldn't cope without her though," Andrew adds. "She's certainly not allowed to take on anything else!"



Melanie Richards gets confidence to compete from husband Ian (inset)

'Ian's my moral support, my confidence'

MELANIE RICHARDS would never have won the novice restricted music championships at the dressage winter finals back in April had it not been for her husband, Ian.

In fact, she would never have made it to Hartpury at all.

"The day before we were due to leave I drove to my trainer's yard for a final tune-up," she explains. "But when I got out of the lorry I noticed liquid spurting from underneath."

Melanie's diesel pump had developed a leak and the contents of the tank were emptying themselves on to her trainer's yard.

"Ian works in car sales and was on the case straight away, phoning garages to see if any of them had the part we needed," she recalls.

Melanie had given up hope of getting to Hartpury, but Ian continued to make phone calls into the night until the mechanical part in question was located and installed.

And Ian is not only a good man in a crisis. He is, his wife says, the reason she is able to compete so successfully in the sport she loves.

"He's my rock. I've had a couple of accidents and I get the wobbles — Ian's my moral support, my confidence. And he supports me practically in every way he can. I'll often drag him to listen to my new dressage music as he comes through the door, before he's even had a cup of tea."

Ian had ridden most of his life, but when he met Melanie he took up eventing. He is now a regular on the southern circuit, competing at BE90 and BE100 level.

"If you get involved with a horsey partner, you have to accept a certain lifestyle," advises Ian. "It does help if you're horsey yourself."



Dee says she couldn't have affiliated without Mark (below)

'He's my sponsor'

EVENTER Dee Chamberlain says husband Mark is the main reason she can compete.

"I guess he's also my sponsor; without his funding, I wouldn't be able to afford it," says Dee, who owns Dutch warmblood Volante.

According to Dee, a teacher from Lancashire, Mark has no real interest in horses, but is continually supportive, accompanying Dee and "Vrin" out hacking on foot or bike and helping at farm rides and schooling days. Mark is a consultant anaesthetist and also supported Dee when she was first considering coming out of full-time employment in 2008, so she could try to achieve her competitive goals when affiliating for the first time.

"He was the first to encourage me to stay on as a supply teacher this year, rather than return to full-time employment, so I could enjoy another season," explains Dee.

And what does Mark make of it all? "The family that plays together stays together," he says. "I just sometimes wish Dee had chosen rally driving!"

