

"He loves competing but can be insecure, so we always make sure that Linzi comes with him because he likes her to be around. He's been a fabulous horse for me and he knows he's a clever boy. He always tries his hardest at competitions, so I don't mind if he's a bit cheeky sometimes!"

Mayhem III, owned by Carina Campbell, the 2008 British Open Champion at the Festival of British Eventing at Gatcombe, has been with Ruth since he first arrived as a "difficult eight-year-old".

"He used to get very cross and wasn't easy, but the more he did he realised it could be fun and he's turned into a fabulous horse."

Other top eventers include Hugh and Ann Lawson's 10-year-old mare Marsh Mayfly, winner of the Scottish Open Championship, and Susan Kerfoot's PC Wilson, winner of last year's Mitsubishi Motors Hartpury Horse Trials.

And then of course there's Ruth's own seven-year-old 17hh dressage superstar Shadowfax, who won his first advanced medium with Judy Harvey last month while Ruth was recovering from her operation.

Shadowfax, who is impeccably bred by Sandro Hit out of a Rubenstein mare, was bought by Ruth as a three-year-old from Andrew Gould and is already on the British Dressage Equine Pathway scheme for horses considered to have Olympic potential.

In 2007, the combination won the novice open title at the winter dressage championships and at the 2008 equivalent were crowned champions of the elementary open music freestyle and medium classes.

"Shadow always wants to be the centre of attention, loves life and loves performing," says Ruth. "He believes he's more special than the others, has a cheeky personality and wants to be everyone's friend."



Shadowfax and Ruth en route to victory at the winter dressage championships

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Shadowfax believes he's more special than the other horses



Ruth on Two Thyme, with whom she was short-listed for last year's Olympics

"I don't have favourites. I genuinely like them all, they're all my friends and I just think I'm so lucky to have so much talent around me!"

Competing in both disciplines is a challenge Ruth relishes.

"You learn by experience and the two sports are quite different but they also complement each other," she explains. "These days in eventing you need to be near the top after the dressage to stand a chance of winning. If you can train your eventer to use his body to help him collect and engage, it will give you a head start in the dressage phase and you won't have to go so fast across country."

"I love training horses and like to get a good rapport with them. We always look at the bigger picture and run them accordingly. I like the two sports equally, but if you made me choose between them I'd have to stick to eventing because that's where I started and I still get that rush of adrenalin."

So has all the success changed this talented rider?

"I would hope I'm still the same person. I've learned a lot but I've still got a lot to learn. Everybody has low points in sports but just because your horse is off work or you've had a few fences down, it's not the end of the world. Horses have made me mentally strong and showed me how to bounce back. I appreciate how lucky I am to do a job I love."