



EMILE FAURIE

# World class horses are hard to come by

Words Rebecca Gibson Photography Matthew Roberts

**E**mile is in a pensive mood. He's just returned from competing in Germany where his top horse Max spent his time in the ring showing the judges what a hot head he can be rather than what an exceptional mover he is. Emile is worried this will damage his chances of team selection.

Max is Emile's only GP horse. If Max is discounted, so is Emile. The days when riders of his calibre had owners queuing up to offer world-class rides are long gone. "These days people with a lot of money want to have a crack at riding at Grand Prix for themselves rather than buying a horse for a professional rider," he says. "They've been inspired by the likes of Laura Bechtolsheimer and Fiona Bigwood." These riders come from very wealthy backgrounds. "It's great for the sport in that it gets people involved and excited, but it does make it more difficult for the most exceptional riders to end up with the most exceptional horses."

Emile also admits that he hasn't done himself any favours by avoiding any opportunities for self-promotion. He's probably one of the least known of all the British Dressage team riders - that's despite having represented Great Britain at two Olympic Games, three World Equestrian Games and four European Championships.

While other riders have been quick to develop themselves as brands, Emile has shunned the limelight. This perhaps harks back to childhood insecurities.

At school he was a "real loner, a complete outsider" and he still worries about how people view him. "Both in terms of coming forward with horses and also in terms of coming to me for lessons, I think people view me as unapproachable," he says.

Emile wants people to get to know the real him. Here he speaks candidly about the highs and lows of his 30-year career, and he reveals his most private fears as well as his future hopes.

**Turn over for Emile's answers to your questions**

## How difficult is it to make a living as a professional dressage rider?

People think when you have a place like Heath Farm (Emile's Oxfordshire yard) you've made it and that's it, but it's an expensive place to maintain and it's a real struggle every month to pay the bills. I teach six lessons a day, five days a week, and have to fit that around training liveries and riding my competition horses. It can be a tough life and when things aren't going well competitively it becomes even harder.

## Have you ever wondered whether the sacrifices are worthwhile?

The beginning of last year was probably one of my lowest times. I suddenly found myself with very few competition horses - I lost four in the space of four weeks. Very quickly you start to lose influence as a rider and trainer - it's a very fickle industry. I suffered a slight dip in horsepower and found pupils were going to train elsewhere - I did begin to wonder whether it was all worth it.

## Why is it so tough to get top rides when you've already proven yourself as a rider?

I'm not someone who goes round approaching people for horses, so perhaps owners just don't know that I'm looking, but the economic climate has certainly made things more difficult. Two of the horses I lost at the beginning of last year had to be sold because the owner needed to release their investment. I'd just taken the nine-year-old Lusingando to do his first Grand Prix and had won, and then he had to be sold. That was a devastating blow. And the six-year-old Simeon had world-class potential but now he's gone to Germany.

There are also fewer owners out there because these days people with a lot of money want to have a crack at riding for themselves. They're buying a young dressage prospect and sending them to someone like me for two or three years for training. Then, once they're at Prix St Georges level, they take them back hoping to get a shot at riding at Grand Prix themselves. It actually works out cheaper to do it this way because it's so much more expensive to buy a Prix St Georges horse - you'd be looking at paying anything upwards of £150,000. When you're buying a young horse with the raw material, you can invest in several years of top training and still end up with a horse of the same calibre for less than half that.

## Is the sport elitist?

If you want to start off riding the world's best horse you're going to have to pay an awful lot of money, but the possibilities are there for anyone. I didn't have two pennies when I started out.

## How difficult is it to hand each horse back when you've invested so much in their training?

It's sometimes tough when I come across a particularly talented horse but that's part and parcel of the job I'm paid to do. It's much more difficult when I'm expecting



Emile with his dog Macy



Relaxing at home

to keep a ride but circumstances mean it doesn't work out. Having said that, I have a five-year-old right now - Dream of Joy - who's only been here for a couple of months but I'd very much like to keep him, he's showing bags of ability.

## Who is your greatest horse so far?

Without a doubt Virtu. He wasn't an easy horse to ride in the beginning, he was lazy and had been written off but with the right training he became my best friend and won me a medal, too. Every horse is special in

their own way, though. Unless you're lucky enough to get to ride an incredible freak of nature like Totilas then I don't think there's really such a thing as a horse of a lifetime.

## If you could ride any horse, past or present, who would it be?

Milton, because he was an incredible genius of a horse. As a dressage rider I should probably

say Totilas, and I would chew off my own right leg to ride him, but Milton just exuded such incredible charm and jumped with so much grace. The image of him jumping is burnt into my mind, his jumping style was truly poetry in motion.



Emile with training liveries Bo, Darli and Dream of Joy



Dressage is one of the few sports that you actually get better at the older you get

## DID YOU KNOW?

Emile has trained with a number of Germany's 'greats' - including Klaus Balkenhol, Conrad Schumacher and the late Herbert Rehben

## Describe yourself in three words

Patient, compassionate and misunderstood.

## What's the funniest comment you've had on a test sheet?

I've just got back from competing in Germany where Max took real offence to the hospitality tent lining two sides of the arena. He's known for being a bit of a hot head but it really was disastrous. One judge summed it up on the test sheet by writing 'Oh dear'.

## Do you have any competing superstitions?

I'm not a very superstitious person. I used to be but as I've got older I've started to take a more scientific approach to my riding. It's more about being well prepared. You can't afford to be competing at the Olympics and have some superstitious routine where you have to walk three steps backwards uphill in order to ride a good test - what if there's no hill?

## Do you still have the same drive that you did 10 years ago?

Dressage is one of the few sports that you actually continue to get better and better at the older you get.

So much of being a great dressage rider is about being able to listen and interpret the horse under you, so the more experience you have, the more complete a horseman and rider you become. And as I get older doing well becomes more precious because I've dedicated my whole life to dressage.

## What's the best thing about dressage?

The constant strive to achieve perfection. Because you're working with a live animal you can never be consistently perfect, but the constant strive for perfection becomes an addiction.

## Should it be compulsory for all riders to wear safety helmets?

It certainly should be at the lower levels - for young horse classes and from Prelim to Medium level. It has been in Holland for some time and is going to be soon in Germany. Everyone riding on my yard wears a hat - Heath Farm is my home and I don't want to be witness to a horrific, preventable accident. At the higher levels I think people should be able to make a decision for themselves - I can't quite get my head around riding a GP test wearing a helmet with my tails.

1992	1993	1993	1994	1997	1998	2000	2003	2006
Rode Virtu at the Barcelona Olympics as part of the British Team	Won individual bronze and team silver at the European Championships	Crowned British National Champion with Virtu	British National Champion for the second consecutive year riding Virtu	Part of the British Dressage team at the European Championships riding Legrini	Part of the British Dressage team at the World Championships riding Legrini	Rode Rascher Hopes at the Sydney Olympics as part of the British team	Won a bronze team medal in the European Championships on Rascher Hopes	Set up the Emile Faurie Foundation with the aim of opening up the sport to all



### *Can a riding school horse be retrained to be sensitive to subtle aids?*

Yes, it's just a case of systematic and correct training. My first horse was an 11-year-old ex-show jumper who'd never done dressage before but went on to do Grand Prix - of sorts!

### *How do you stop your horse from tensing up in lateral work?*

When people have a problem with their lateral work they think it's the lateral work they need to focus on, but actually the problem probably lies in the basic training, so you have to go back and make sure the basics are 100% correct. When the basics improve everything else should improve, too.

### *Tell us about the Emile Faurie Foundation*

When I was a growing up I lived in the city and went to boarding school. I was a real loner, a complete outsider, I never fitted in. But after much pestering my parents agreed to let me have riding lessons and I finally found somewhere I wasn't judged. I think it's incredible how horses have the ability to level the playing field for kids.

In Sweden, horse riding is government funded and the country has the highest percentage of children who ride. It also has the lowest teen pregnancy rates, lowest crime rates in Europe and highest school attendance rates.

The benefits of horse riding have been well proven, but here in England more and more riding schools are being forced to close because of idiotic health and safety rules, insane insurance bills and extortionate business rates.

England seems to be quick to see the terrible plight of

children starving in Africa and various disaster zones around the world but not so aware of the struggles of some children on its doorstep.

Horses had such a powerful effect on my life and I realised they could do the same for other children struggling to fit in, with nothing else in their lives, or displaying behavioural problems - that's why I set up the foundation.

At the moment the foundation is funding 9,000 children to ride on a weekly basis and the feedback is that the school attendance and behaviour of these kids has improved dramatically.

• For more information about the foundation, go to [www.emilefauriefoundation.org.uk](http://www.emilefauriefoundation.org.uk)

### *What do you think you'd have done for a career if you hadn't become a pro rider?*

I've done a bit of acting so I probably would have pursued that more heavily. I did a couple of plays in London and it was a fantastic experience, but juggling my riding commitments with learning 197 pages of lines and commuting to London to do eight performances a week for nine weeks, nearly killed me.

### *What are your plans for the future?*

More than anything in the world I'd love to ride at the London Olympics, but Britain has a lot of incredibly good horses and riders right now. I'd say at this stage there's a good 12 to 15 horse-and-rider combinations in with a chance, but you can name the obvious candidates and then all of a sudden out of the blue someone else could come along with a great horse. I think it's an open game right now - anyone who can produce the right quality horse with the correct riding has a chance. 🐾

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