

"Tokyo is still the dream but Alby has made so many dreams come true" – Ros with her world champion partner Allstar B, a youthful 15-year-old with the Olympics in his sights

Access All Areas Ros Canter

In the past couple of years, Ros Canter has won two world gold medals and had a baby. Martha Terry finds out how she's juggling work and family life as she gears up for Tokyo

Picture by Peter Noon

GREEN, GREEN GRASS

"My horses eat a very grass-based diet," says Ros. "I feed Emerald Green Feeds, which are predominantly grass-based – grass, alfalfa, grass nuts, grass chaff – with an energy mix."

"One of the members of the business in the early days was singing at the band at my sister's wedding. We got chatting about the horses, and he said he was looking for a sponsored rider. That was six or seven years ago, and they became my first sponsor."

"Supplements are kept to a minimum," Ros adds. "Most of the horses don't have them."

LOCKDOWN has its upsides. For Ros Canter, the reigning world eventing champion, it's been an unexpected training boost under sunny skies. Living on the north Lincolnshire coast, where the wind whips icy blasts straight from Siberia, Ros is used to cramming the horses' "homework" into the short, perishingly cold days of winter.

"Our arena is lovely but very exposed, so it's been really nice to have the time to train the horses without the pressure of competitions while the weather is good," Ros says.

"I actually felt lucky at the start of lockdown because all my horses had run at the start of the season – Oasby and Lincoln are quite local so I took my whole string there, and the next weekend everything shut down."

Ros was quick out of the blocks this spring, ready for her first full season after having her first child, Ziggy, last July. Before lockdown, she had competed 21 times on 11 rides, winning four classes, topped by an advanced intermediate win on her world champion Allstar B. Last weekend's resumption at Aske yielded a further two top-five placings from her two rides.

"So I know where every horse is in terms of performance," she says. "Sometimes it's nice

Above: No Excuse and Georgie Frow, one of Ros' two staff, accompany Ros and Allstar B in the cross-country field at Home Farm

Right: "I think riding and motherhood can converge," says Ros, who combines working her string of 16 with caring for her very active daughter Ziggy

to be able to take a step back and not have the pressure of competing. I love winning but I also love training horses and I'm still so motivated to do that."

Ros' philosophical take on the carnage the pandemic has wreaked not only on the national circuit, but also a likely Olympic debut on Allstar B (Alby), says much about her sporting psyche. She is sanguine about Tokyo's postponement.

"There's nothing we could do," she says. "It would have been impossible to run. There were greater issues at the time, and life goes on. The Olympics felt irrelevant at the time, you get a new perspective. I've had family time I wouldn't have had, and I've enjoyed that. Now we can regroup for next year."

This positivity is all the more remarkable

given that Alby, who would have been a shoe-in for the British team in Tokyo this summer, is already 15. However, horses of his age have form – the reigning dual Olympic champion, La-Biotetique Sam FEW, clinched his second title aged 16.

"Alby's not getting any younger, but he's had no mileage for the past two years and gets more supple the older he gets," she says. "What will be, will be. We'll come out next year and give it our best shot. All I can do next season, like everyone else, is to get that result that will make the selectors want to take me."

"Tokyo is still the dream but Alby's already made so many dreams come true – I should be grateful for that. If it doesn't happen, there is life after Tokyo! I have options with my younger horses."

"I love winning but I also love training horses and I'm still so motivated to do that"

ROS ON THE OPPORTUNITIES OF LOCKDOWN



Hands-on approach: Ros tacks up under the solarium. She rides up to 12 horses a day

ROS' calm, upbeat nature transfers to the way she runs the yard, though she laughs at the assertion she's relaxed: "I might look chilled but my partner Chris might say different. I do get nervous, but I'm a big believer in not worrying about things you can't change, so I try not to get too emotionally involved with things outside my control."

Despite Ros riding eight to 12 horses a day, with a young, very mobile, baby in tow, the atmosphere at the stables on her parents' farm is organised and peaceful. All the horses live out in summer, except if their weight needs controlling or in the last six weeks before a CCI* to ensure they are getting the right hard feed. They are allocated a field according to their temperament, with mares and geldings kept separate, and while Alby goes out solo – "he's dominant" – his five-star stablemate Zenshera shares a paddock with four others.

"They have a nice easy life in between competitions, with no stress," says Ros. "Mum [Heather] has grown up on farms with horses and believes they are designed to

be outside eating grass, so that's how we've always done it. The soil is fertilised, and the nutrition checked."

The horses' outdoor lifestyle also pays dividends in Ros' routine. Although she likes to ride all her horses herself, with 15 or

"He's small and doesn't pull – hopefully Ziggy will ride him in a couple of years"

FROM FIVE-STAR TO THE ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ZENSHERA



"He feels as good as ever and he'll compete until he's had enough" – Ros jumps 16-year-old Zenshera, who will hopefully head to Pau again, where he finished fifth last season

16 in at the moment, she won't spend hours on each one.

"During the season, I don't feel they need to be worked six days a week – but they are walking round, stretching all day long," she explains. "I'd rather they spend time in the field and are trained well each time they are ridden rather than exercised for the sake of it."

"Time-wise, I take each session as it comes: I don't have to do a full hour. If the horse has learnt something new the day before, I'll repeat it and if he remembers from the previous day I'd be happy to finish there. Twenty minutes of productive work can be a good workout."

Heather feeds the horses in their fields at 6am – "she likes getting up early" – before the two staff, Georgie Frow and Sonja Brown, arrive at 7.30am. On some days, Ros gets up at 5.30am, before Ziggy's breakfast routine begins, to do all her riding in the morning. Then she can spend those afternoons helping the girls and doing yard chores with Ziggy watching and playing alongside.

"The only issue is that she's already up and running; she was walking before 10 months and is quite a handful!" Ros says with a smile. "She doesn't yet understand not to eat stones and rubber. But my parents will also take her out for a walk so it all works out."

"I'm enjoying being a mother much more than I expected. I prioritise my time and I'm better at saying no, because Ziggy is the most important thing in my life. I used to teach sporadically but now I have a timetable. I teach at set times and people have to fit around me."

"I love being around Ziggy, but I am also a better mother for not being full-time. I want to do the horses, and I think both lives can converge."



All the horses live out, with field allocations decided by temperament, and enjoy an easy life between competitions



The enviably extensive facilities at Home Farm have allowed Ros to capitalise on no-pressure training time in friendly weather this year



From doing the early feeds to providing planning and moral support, Ros' mother Heather is an invaluable part of the team

"I don't find it easy to ride at speed; most eventers love that part, but I'm naturally a slowcoach," she says. "At two Burghleys I had done a good dressage, set out to ride fast across country and been bitterly disappointed with loads of time-faults and missing out on a top placing."

"After the second one, I said to Mum, 'Should I be content with this? Should I accept it's not in my nature to go fast, and I'll never be competitive at top level?'"

Ros' move to train with Chris Bartle and ensuing success is well documented. Although many trainers – particularly Alby's joint-owner Caroline Moore – played their part in steering Ros to the top level, Chris made "the last bit of difference". Over the winter of 2016/2017, he taught Ros to ride with a longer rein and to stare into the distance approaching a fence so as not to get fixated with the perfect take-off spot and kill the speed. But three years on, she still needs to work on this constantly.

"I'm now comfortable riding fast and thrive under that pressure, but I have to practise nearly every day at home, so the horses and I are used to it when it comes to competition," she says. "In lockdown, I've had the time to ride more wobbly babies than usual, and it's been really good for my reactions, to keep my

"Horses are designed to be outside eating grass, so that's how we've always done it"

ON THE CANTER FAMILY ETHOS THAT THEIR HORSES LIVE OUT



"I FEEL I'm really building my string, with some lovely young horses coming up who'll take over from the older boys," says Ros. ● Pencos Crown Jewel (Jas), 11yo mare (Jumbo x Rock King), owned by Kate James and Annie Makin.

"She is a real grafter. She's small but absolutely loves to gallop on the cross-country." ● Zlot Dili (Isaac), 7yo gelding by Zavall VDL x Marion, owned by Alex Moody and Ros.

"Super talented. He's sharp and spooky but so very exciting." ● Lordships Graffalo (Walter), 8yo gelding (Graffenstolz x Rock King), owned by Michele Saul.

"He's a half-brother to Pencos Crown Jewel, who takes life in his stride and can perform in every phase." ● Rehy Royal Diamond (Bling), 9yo gelding (Ars Vivendi x Diamond Lad), owned by Christopher Makin.

"He's just starting to learn to control his power. He is a character but is starting to concentrate and show promise."

eye in and cope with their unpredictability." Ziggy's birth hardly disrupted Ros' form; she was back competing a month later. However, it wasn't as easy as she made it look.

"I did Aston open intermediates with Alby and Albie [Zenshera], but I wouldn't recommend it; I didn't enjoy it," she laughs. "I did have a few wobbles. Psychologically I thought I'd lost it, but now I am back to full strength. I can see just how weak I was physically. I just wasn't ready for the bigger courses at that stage."

By the time of Pau, in October, Ros felt back to her best. She finished fifth on Zenshera. "I rode my best cross-country ever," she says. "Now I'm back to normal, I realise how 'unnormal' I was. But the pressure of Olympic qualification made me get back quickly."

Zenshera was ideal because he's small and doesn't pull whereas Alby is more powerful." Zenshera is 16 and will be aimed at Pau. Covid permitting, again. But he has a serious responsibility on the horizon.

"He feels as good as ever and he'll compete until he's had enough before spending his retirement here," Ros says. "Hopefully Ziggy will ride him when she's a couple of years older. He's just under 16hh and he's like a pet, he wanders around the yard without a headcollar."

That's some first pony... Ros may come across as laid-back, but her eagerness to get little Ziggy riding mirrors her zeal to get back in the saddle after her birth – and winning again. The power punch she laid down at the start of this truncated season gives every indication that she's a girl on a mission. Tokyo beckons. **H&H**