

How much hard graft does it really take to event at a high level? Aimi Clark speaks to five riders and finds that there are rarely enough daylight hours



OLIVER SAYS...

"PHYSICALLY, being an event rider is very demanding. You need a huge amount of stamina to keep riding a lot of horses day after day, plus probably doing a certain amount of yard work, depending on what stage of your career you are at and how many staff you can afford to employ. We have had staff who simply can't cope with the physical work and who have had to leave within a short time.

"During the season there is also all the travelling, the driving, the early starts and late finishes, as well as competing in what can be quite a rough sport. I actually feel fitter now than I did a decade ago, when I was riding more horses, especially more tricky ones and fallers.

"I remember when Andrew Nicholson used to have a diary in Eventing magazine and he'd relate stories of getting home at midnight and getting up again at 3am to go to an event. I found that fascinating when I was growing up, and the riders I admire now are the ones who can keep going and being successful season after season.

"There is also the question of prioritising — how many horses do you ride yourself compared to how many the staff ride? How do you fit in updating owners and keeping sponsors happy — or searching for new ones — or teaching to keep the bills paid? Horse sports are unusual because some of the parts of most riders' business which help bring in the cash — teaching, dealing, sponsorship — are not also the elements that drive towards the big goals of winning Badminton or an Olympic medal. Everyone wants to win, but you can't feed your staff red rosettes."



Running Oliver's yard demands stamina and time