

# Son of milkman vaults riding's class barrier



**Gold medal winning eventing team shows that equestrianism is no longer preserve of upper crust**

By Tom Morgan in Tokyo and Eleanor Kelly

WHEN Britain last won eventing team gold at the Munich Olympics, the Queen's son-in-law was among the upper-crust competitors leading the charge.

Almost 50 years later, those medals are hanging around the necks of a son of a milkman and the daughter of a single mother who juggled several jobs to support her.

Oliver Townend, Laura Collett and their teammate Tom McEwen break the mould of equestrian's often establishment image.

The trio were all making Games debuts, but delivered high-class displays to secure Britain's third ever team crown in eventing.

Townend perhaps demonstrates best the contrast between the Tokyo 2020

team and their gold-medal winning predecessors.

His family's love of horses stems from his grandmother using them to pull her milk float through the outskirts of Huddersfield. His father, Alan, inherited the milk round and a love of horses, which led him to compete at Burghley, three-day eventing's flagship competition.

He previously told an interviewer how his family "might have looked a bit hillbilly to some", but he has spoken of his pride as having to "fight very hard to get where I am now".

Townend had left school at 16, and eventually had to sell his car to set himself up as horse trader. At the age of 21, he set up alone with the £1,400 made from the car, having already seen the potential to make money from his talents as a teenager. His father spent £825 on a pony, which Townend would eventually make a Horse of the Year Show winner. The family sold the animal for £18,000.

"Let's hope we can inspire the next generation," said Townend yesterday. "We are all from pretty normal backgrounds. It shows that hard work and dedication pays off." Collett's mother,

meanwhile, had worked a string of jobs including night shifts to pay for her two children to stay in sport.

Her gold medal also comes eight years after she was left in a coma for a week after falling during a cross-country competition in Hampshire.

"It's been a long road with a lot of ups and down, but the moment like this makes every bad day worth it," said Collett, 31. The heavy fall in 2013 left her

with a punctured lung, lacerated liver, a fractured shoulder and two broken ribs, while she also lost the sight in one eye. "Just to be here was more than a dream come true, and to be stood here, with a gold medal, I look back where I was eight years ago - I knew I was lucky to be alive, yet alone do the job I love," the rider from Salperton, Gloucestershire, added.

Yesterday, after comfortably secur-

ing top spot following outstanding cross-country rounds on Sunday, thoughts turned immediately to celebrations being planned when they leave their Covid bubble in Tokyo.

"As a team we've never struggled to find cause for a celebration," Townend added. "It will involve a lot more than a cup of tea and a biscuit."

The third teammate, McEwen, is the son of a vet who left school at 16 to pur-

sue a career in eventing. He is the only vague link with royalty as his base is on the Princess Royal's Gatcombe Park estate, a stone's throw from the yard of the Queen's granddaughter and fellow eventer, Zara Tindall.

When asked what advice he gets from them, he said: "They are under a lot more pressure than I am. I just learn from them how to deal with it and stay cool and calm and relaxed."

By comparison, Captain Mark Phillips, who would marry Princess Anne a year after the Olympic win, was the star attraction in the Munich team, joined by the likes of Mary Gordon-Watson, cousin to the Duchess of Beaufort, and public-school educated Richard Meade.

After a 49 year wait, gold was never in doubt yesterday. Townend, the final British rider, had the luxury of knowing he could knock four fences down and still win gold, such was the team's dominance. Britain finished on a score of 86.30, and it is a third equestrian medal in Tokyo for Team GB following Charlotte Dujardin, Carl Hester and Charlotte Fry winning dressage team bronze, and Dujardin also collecting an individual bronze.

## Rough ride Hurdles that two of the trio had to overcome on the road to Olympic glory



Oliver Townend, 38

- ◆ Based in Ellesmere, Shropshire.
- ◆ Says he comes from a dynasty of "milkmen,

gritters, farm-machinery dealers and so on".

- ◆ Quit comprehensive school at 16, ignored father's suggestion he learn a trade, instead made his own way in eventing.
- ◆ Started business selling

and buying horses aged 21 after selling his car for £1,400.

- ◆ By the age of 25, he was able to buy a 40-acre farm in Shropshire. He has won every major horse trials multiple times, including Badminton and Burghley.



Laura Collett, 31

- ◆ Based in Salperton, Gloucestershire.
- ◆ Ten years old when her father left, leaving

mother Tracey working multiple jobs.

- ◆ "She worked in a petrol station and taught at schools, she did a bit of everything," Collett has said.
- ◆ From her late teens, Collett has had to run her stables business in order to fund

her costly sporting ambitions.

- ◆ Suffered a death-defying fall from a horse in 2013, enduring a punctured lung, lacerated liver, a fractured shoulder and two broken ribs, while she also lost the sight in one eye.

Tokyo 2020

# Britain end 49 years of hurt and set sights on Paris glory

Equestrianism By Jim White at the Equestrian Park, Tokyo

- Eventers target 'new dynasty' after beating Australia to gold
- McEwen adds to haul with silver medal in individual final

Forty-nine years of hurt were put to rest for Great Britain with a triumphant gold medal in the team three-day eventing yesterday. Olympic debutants Oliver Townend, Tom McEwen and Laura Collett followed in the footsteps of the 1972 British team who won the Olympic title in Munich, with 30-year-old McEwen adding silver to the haul in the individual competition.

And what a story the threesome have. Townend the son of a Yorkshire milkman, Collett a woman brought back from the brink of death five times after a catastrophic fall, and McEwen, a rider who rents his stables from the Princess Royal: that is a cast of characters even Jilly Cooper might consider unlikely. But they delivered the perfect ending to the drama here, symbolising their unity by presenting each other with their gold medals.

Their emphatic win at the Tokyo Equestrian Centre, 13.9 points clear of Australia who took silver, suggested a new dynasty of British success for the sport.

"We've discussed it all week that it's only three years to Paris," said Townend. "And we are a team that wants to stay together. We've definitely got a rapport. Who knows what we could achieve together."

It is a complex business, the Olympic three-day event. After 48 hours of cross-country and dressage, the equestrian triathlon enters its final phase with the show jumping. Except at the Olympics there is an additional slant: unlike Burghley or Kentucky, or indeed any other top-rated event, after the team competition is concluded, the riders go against each other for the individual tally, a shoot-out over the arena fences.

Already in an almost unassailable lead after the cross-country stage,



Clear jump: Tom McEwen and (right) with Laura Collett and Oliver Townend celebrating gold

the British threesome approached the show jumping with the same cool composure they had all the obstacles put in their way across the previous two days.

They were up against the toughest competition, too. Not least from the Germans, whose team included Michael Jung, the winner of gold in the individual class at both London and Rio, and the Australians, whose evergreen 62-year-old

Andrew Hoy was competing in his eighth Olympics.

The jumps they had to negotiate were locally themed. There was one decorated by a couple of cherry trees in full blossom, another flanked by leaping goldfish, a third by cartoon sumo wrestlers. In these times, they surely missed a trick not decorating one of them in masks and PCR testing kits. McEwen, however, was not remotely put off. Nor, importantly, was his horse.

Indeed, he said after his ride that Toledo De Kerser had rather thrived on the environment, particularly enjoying the noise of the shutters from the photographers gathered at the side of the arena. The pair gave a flawless performance, not hitting a single fence.

Collett was up next for Great Britain. She began her round in fine form, looking controlled and organised in her jumping. However, London 52 hit fence four, sending the poles scattering across the sawdust floor. In the complicated dual nature of the competition here, the four penalty points she picked up damaged her individual chances, knocking her down the leaderboard from the bronze medal position she had

occupied going into the round. From a team perspective, however, the lead remained as good as unbreachable. The only chance the other nations now had would be for Townend to fall off his horse, while sending Harvey Smith-style hand gestures in the direction of the judges as he did so. With the clouds glowering like they do over the moors near his home town of Huddersfield, Townend and his 14-year-old grey gelding Ballaghmor Class showed no nerves, knocking down just the one pole, picking up four penalty points.

But it did not compromise the outcome: it was gold for Britain, Australia second and France in third. Germany, the usual masters of the event, were fourth.

There was barely time to celebrate the achievement before the individual round. And the ground staff worked hard, increasing the size of the course, adding fences, tightening the turns, increasing the jeopardy.

Collett was the first Briton off and, after looking as if she might complete a perfect round, she knocked over poles on the last two of the nine fences. It meant she was confirmed outside the medal positions. McEwen, however, gave a flawless round, guaranteeing himself an individual medal.

Then came Townend. A superb cross-country rider, unflinching at dressage, of the three events of the triathlon, show jumping is not his strongest card. And he knocked a pole off at only the second fence. Add to that a time penalty, and he found himself out of the podium positions, obliged to watch as a perfect round from the German Julia Krajewski allowed her to become the first woman to win individual gold at an Olympics.

Not that, with gold in the bank, it muted the sense of achievement. These are a trio with legitimate cause to toast their success. "Not that we're ever short of reasons to celebrate," said Townend. "Whatever we do now, it will involve more than a cup of tea and a biscuit."



### Medals table

Rank	Team	G	S	B	Total
1	China	29	17	16	62
2	US	22	25	17	64
3	Japan	17	6	10	33
4	Australia	14	4	15	33
5	ROC	12	21	17	50
6	GB	11	12	12	35
7	France	6	10	7	23
8	Germany	6	6	11	23
9	South Korea	6	4	9	19
10	Holland	5	7	6	18

Up to the end of day 10