

Laura's new yard is based in Lambourn, which is known as The Valley of The Racehorse



WHEN THE TOUGH GET GOING

Event rider Laura Collett has had a challenging year, suffering an horrific fall, losing a top horse to injury and locating to a new yard. But if there's one thing all these difficult events have proven, it's that when the going gets tough, she can pick herself up and forge ahead

Laura Collett has, without doubt, had a year that she would rather forget about.

Back in July, she sustained life-threatening injuries in a horrific fall at Tweseldown Horse Trials, which resulted in doctors putting her into an induced coma for several days.

She suffered broken ribs, a punctured lung and the sight in her right eye has been badly affected.

"I have blurred vision in a quarter of the eye and the rest is blacked out," Laura reveals.

But ever the fighter, Laura was out of hospital after only two weeks and back riding the day she got home.

"I have no recollection of my accident at all," she states. "Everyone else was more worried about me getting on a horse for the first time than I was, but it was part of me getting better as it gave me something to look forward to."

"I never really acknowledged what happened because I don't remember. When I woke up, I didn't feel any pain."

"The main thing that bothered me was during the last week in hospital, when I was conscious. I was so bored that having a shower was the highlight of my day. Luckily, I had plenty of visitors coming in to see me."

Barely seven weeks after waking from her coma, Laura won the Open Intermediate at Wellington Horse Trials, Hampshire, on Noble Bestman and was then part of the winning Nations Cup eventing team in Belgium.

"I couldn't have done it without my groom and best friend Flick [Felicity Roberts]," Laura smiles. "After my



Riding Rayef, Laura was eighth at her first Badminton attempt

5 things you didn't know about Laura

- 1 She has a lucky horseshoe charm that she carries in her bra when she is competing at top events.
- 2 She hates spiders.
- 3 Laura has a sweet tooth and loves Ben & Jerry's Strawberry Cheesecake ice-cream. She is also partial to dunking fruit into melted Nutella.
- 4 Her favourite drink is rosé wine.
- 5 If Laura wasn't an eventer, she says she would choose to be a jockey.

accident, it was a Godsend to know she was looking after the horses for me.

"She knew all I'd want to do when I got home was get back on and ride as soon as I could, so she made sure the horses were schooled and tuned up."

A double blow

Laura suffered her second setback when one of her top horses, Noble Bestman ('Steve'), fractured his off-fore pastern on the cross-country course at Boekelo Horse Trials, Holland, in October.

Steve is still recovering in the Netherlands and, sadly, Laura has had to give up her share in the horse.

"I had to sell my share because I couldn't afford to buy the rest of him and his owners wanted out," she says. "It's just one of those things that happen and it's life, unfortunately."

But Laura is now focusing on the positives and what she has learnt from her experiences over the last year. "I've discovered I can come back from a bad time and carry on," she states. "I've learnt to take positives out of bad situations and live to fight another day."

It's this determination and cool-headedness that emanate from Laura when you watch her interacting with her horses and going about her daily tasks. The horses are clearly attached to her and watch her every move.

She is no stranger to the camera, either, having been frequently in the spotlight. And the immaculately turned out horses at Laura's new base, Windy Hollow Stables in Lambourn, Berks, are eager to be a part of the action, too.

Driving across the stunning open planes of Lambourn, known as the Valley of the Racehorse, it's easy to see why Laura chose to relocate here back in November.

The rolling hills continue for as far as the eye can see and, with barely any

"I was so bored in hospital that having a shower was the highlight of my day"



The new yard has miles and miles of off-road hacking

LAURA'S HORSES

RAYEF

Vital statistics: A 14-year-old, 16.1hh dark bay gelding, owned by Jason Houghton.

Laura says: "Rayef has the biggest personality and we definitely have a love-hate relationship – he knows exactly how to wind me up but he has given me some amazing days."



COOLEY LORD LUX

Vital statistics: A seven-year-old, 16.2hh grey gelding by Lux Z, owned by Caroline Paul.

Laura says: "He can be quite a shy character with everyday things around the yard, but he is as brave as a lion across country."



OBOS COOLEY

Vital statistics: A seven-year-old, 16.3hh bay gelding by Obos Quality 004, owned by George and Jayne Apter.

Laura says: "He is very laid back and easy to do. He has one quirk which is shoving his head in the air when you go to put his bridle on, unless you have a hold of his nose."



KAUTO STAR

Vital statistics: A retired National Hunt champion, Kauto is a 13-year-old, 16.3hh bay gelding by Village Star, owned by Clive Smith.

Laura says: "Kauto is a lovely horse to have around the place. He set several records in racing, and won the Cheltenham Gold Cup twice. I have him in to reschool for dressage."



traffic around, it's an ideal location to train eventers.

"It's a cool place," says Laura. "The hacking is unreal. We don't have to touch the roads and we can ride out over the downs. Everywhere you go there is a bridlepath and the ground is unbelievable. It drains very well."

It's fitting Laura is based in an area steeped in racing as she's always had an affinity for the sport.

"I've always been interested in racing because I used to ride out on racehorses," she says.

"When I have a day off, I like to get dressed up and go and catch up with friends at the races."

An eye for a horse

With multiple pony, junior and young rider European gold medals under her belt, plus a top-10 place at her first ever Badminton Horse

Laura and Rayef competing for Team GBR the 2011 European Championships



The horses on the yard are attached to Laura

INTERVIEW LAURA COLLETT



Laura's new yard is a "pretty cool place to be based"

on the key issues, such as the whether last year's Badminton course wasn't the challenge it should have been.

"Cross-country courses vary a lot and that is something that does need looking at," she says. "Badminton last year was not a cross-country test at all.

"When we walked the cross-country course at Bramham, which is classed as a three-star, it was much harder and more testing than Badminton [a four-star event].

"I felt the horses achieved a lot more going around Bramham than Badminton, which is wrong.

"No-one wants to see bad falls but the cross-country needs to be challenging and a three-day event should not just focus on dressage and showjumping."

Laura also believes the type of horse needed to win today's competition has changed a great deal.

"People are learning to ride cross-country courses on slower horses which

"Kauto Star is one of the spookiest horses, which is surprising considering all the things he's done and seen"

are potentially better at dressage and showjumping," she says. "Everyone has realised that now and is buying a different type of horse."

Looking forwards

While Laura confesses that she hates making too many plans because they often go wrong, she is focused on her promising team of young horses and get them out competing in 2014.

"My aims for next year depend on what new horses come along, but it mainly involves bringing on the youngsters and producing them to move up the levels," she says.

"Normally, I have more top-level horses in, but hopefully a year down the line, the young ones will have come through and be ready to move up.

"Top horses don't last forever so you need the youngsters coming through to keep it all going.



5 things Laura can't live without

Barnsby saddles: "Barnsby is good at fitting the saddles to the horses and their service is excellent. If the saddles need tweaking before a big event, the company is always on hand to sort them out."

NAF supplements: "I use Superflex for the horses' joints and Respirator to keep their airways clear. I feel at ease that what I'm feeding is safe for competition."

Dodson & Horrell feeds: "We feed a lot of the competition horses Staypower Cubes and Build Up Conditioning Mix. Build & Glow and Microfeed are great for our fussy eaters."

Ariat boots: "I live in these boots all day, every day and the Monaco Field competition boots are so comfortable to wear, even when they are brand new."

Kentucky Horse Boots: "These offer trustworthy protection and are breathable so the horses' legs don't over heat."

"And if you have them from a young age, you get to know them far better and can build a partnership from the start."

With over 15 horses in to ride and school over the winter, including well-known former National Hunt racehorse Kauto Star, who Laura is retraining to do dressage, she won't be short of things to keep her busy.

"Kauto Star is a real character and I feel privileged to ride such a legend," Laura says of the 14-year-old French-bred horse.

"He's one of the spookiest horses on the yard, though, which is surprising considering the life he's had and all he's seen. But he's great fun to have around."

It's clear that eventing is Laura's life and it is stars such as this young lady that keep the sport going, whatever life throws at them. **EQ**



Laura has 15 horses to keep fit over winter