

SHOWJUMPING

CELEBRITY INTERVIEW

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Sue Mott catches up with British Showjumping Ambassador Judy Craymer about her involvement in the sport and friendship with Jennifer Saunders



n a scene straight out of Absolutely Fabulous, the morning after the Nation's Cup and rushing in a hire car for a plane, Jennifer Saunders was strenuously attempting to get her iPhone to translate a petrol pump in La Baule that insisted on speaking to her only in French. Her friend, Judy Craymer, was no use as interpreter at all being helpless with laughter and rather exhausted after their camp-following exploit with British Showjumping, Proud ambassadors of the sport though they may be, two of the greatest names in British show business found themselves reverting to pure teen excitement when surrounded by the best of British rider: and horses. "I do hope we're not drummed out of the brownies," said Craymer, who carries great prestige within the sport for having the courage and dedication to produc the smash hit musical MAMMA MIA! and the movie, starring Meryl Streep.

"It was hilarious in the petrol station. Jen was pressing buttons like mad, but all it seemed to tell her was the stock exchange prices in German. We had a marvellous time with the team in La Baule. It's such a privilege to be involved with British Showjumping again, as part of the support team, and I cannot think of anything more exciting and thrilling than the idea of our Team GB riders and horses competing at the London Olympics."

Humble beginnings

The inspired idea of inviting Judy to become an ambassador for British Showjumping this year stemmed from her long-time love of horses and a career that included being a groom for top rider Ann Davies back in the seventies. "I can't quite remember how it happened, but I heard that Ann was looking for a groom and just said: 'Count me in'. I was about 15 or 16, I suppose, I spent all my summer, Easter and Christmas holidays from school working for her. It was the most incredible opportunity

"We travelled all over the place in the lorry, from Hickstead to Dublin. At first I had a little tent to sleep in. People laugh when I tell them because, of course, I am known for being a little probably my experience with horses that made me high maintenance. The Hickstead showers, the shared toilets, cleaning your teeth in the outside tap water... Now I travel with loads of luggage and only stay at the Four Seasons." She laughs uproariously and often. "Then I got promoted to sharing Ann's caravan, which was filled with other riders and that was huge fun, with people like John Francome popping by.

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Judy enjoys a few minutes in the collecting ring with Scott Brosh and Helio Sanctos "Finally, I hit gold when I was allowed to

"When we met and realised we had this common link with showjumping we were just like schoolgirls"

Downstairs, which was put on by the school." and constantly wanting to improve, gave me

sleep in the horsebox. It was a gypsy life and

all the more appealing for that. I absolutely

loved being where the action was. I always

swore I'd never give up horses for anything

But the reality turned out a little differently

I'd assumed I'd follow in my father's footster

and become a lawyer - to earn the money to

keep me in horses. Yet when it came to making a decision, I suddenly said I wanted to go to the

Guildhall School of Music. I'd always loved

theatre. If I wasn't messing around with horses

I was being bossy and organising the school

play. I remember when I was 10, writing a play

that was a complete rip-off of Upstairs

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The impresario was born, albeit with straw in her hair and sawdust on her boots. As time went by, Pony Club and parties in sunlit fields were overtaken by working as a theatrical production assistant and parties in backstage

300 cities around the world. "Now we're doing shops and buy a pair of riding boots each. She worked with Oscar-winning lyricist, the Spices." By which she means her new And I don't even ride anymore." Tim Rice on Chess, which is where she met Benny and Bjorn (Andersson and Ulvaeus) musical, Viva Forever, based on the songs of the of Abba, who were also collaborating on the Spice Girls and written by her friend, and show. Bjorn and Judy had a shared interest in comic goddess, Jennifer Saunders. The show horses and Judy regularly exercised his horse, launched at the end of June and will open at Oskar, around this time. The joke is that the The Piccadilly Theatre later on this year. hatching of MAMMA MIA! was the story of Judy Craymer and two blokes with beards who kept saying 'no'. When ultimately, they Saunders had never met before their said 'yes', she sold her flat and cashed in

virtually every asset she owned to bring the

Curiously, despite the common thread of their other passion for horses, Craymer and collaboration over "Spices", as she calls it.

"When we met and realised we had this story to the stage. "Nobody really believed in common link with showjumping we were just it at the beginning. Sadly, I'd little time then to like schoolgirls. Chanting out our favourite ride horses but that early discipline of looking women showjumpers' names and discovering after those majestic creatures, along with the we were completely mad for Marion Mould's experience of the riders' dedication to training little horse, Stroller. These women were our role models, they had inspired us. We've bonded ever since, particularly at Olympia last year and now with the team in La Baule The rest is history. MAMMA MIA! is now a People were particularly impressed to discove global phenomenon, has been seen by more that in the time it took for the organisers to than 50 million people, in 14 languages, in over put up the fences, we were able to rush to the

> two-fold though. Perhaps to ride again -"you're at your happiest with a horse" - or if that is impractical when your home is Belgravia, to become the owner of an allconquering international competition horse. "We can give it to one of the good-looking young men like Scott Brash or Ben Maher to ride. Then we'll definitely be banned."

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