

# 'We're ideally based — more by fluke than choice'



**GINNY HOWE** is dreading the day she gets too old to live with her parents. With her event horses, enviable facilities, plus endless hacking and turnout on her doorstep why would she want to leave?

**F**OUR Winds Farm has been in Ginny Howe's family for longer than she can remember. Her father, Rodney, was raised there and when the land was passed down to him from his parents he and his wife, Liz, built a four bedroom bungalow on it which would become the home where they would raise their two daughters and one son.

"A guy from the local village was responsible for its construction but everything inside was down to mum," says Ginny who, at 23, is the youngest of Liz and Rodney's brood. All equally horse mad, Rachael is 10 years older and has evented at advanced level but is now devoting her time to freelance instructing. Meanwhile 35-year-old Ian, a former jockey, manages a farm for Celia and David Plunkett, the parents of William Fox-Pitt's wife Alice.

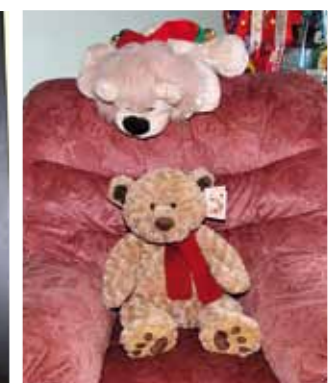
"There isn't much need for decoration in our home because there are so many

photographs of the three of us competing," adds Ginny. "The biggest plus to mum and dad designing the place themselves is that it's exactly the way they wanted it and no extra work has needed doing since."

The modest bungalow boasts a sitting room that is only used for special occasions and a kitchen/living area. It is in the latter that the family spends most of its time.

"It's the one room that I can walk into after a day on the yard and flake out without worrying about being all horsey," says Ginny who runs her eventing business from her family's set up. The 25-box yard is easily accessed through an archway at the bottom of the garden and it can even be seen from her bedroom. "Mum's room is the closest, though, and she can see and hear the horses from there. I don't think she minds."

Liz used to be a regular in the hunting field. These days, however, she prefers to be on the ground.



**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE** The back garden; the Howes like to relax in the kitchen/living area; decoration throughout the bungalow consists of photographs of the family riding; teddy bears in the sitting room; Ginny's Badminton 2009 montage is on show in the kitchen

'The hacking here is fantastic. We can do as much or as little on the back roads as we like'

"Ginny Elliot lives really close so I go over to her yard to use her jumping arena when it's too hard in our field. I'm lucky in the winter, though, as it doesn't get so wet that we can't use it," adds Ginny whose eventing neighbours also include Ireland's Aoife Clark.

Nearby events aren't in short supply with Blenheim, Great Tew and Aston-le-Walls just three of many accessible within 90 minutes. During eventing's off-season the Heythrop Hunt regularly meets within hacking distance of Four Winds Farm and Ginny can usually be found following hounds aboard a youngster.

"We're ideally based for everything but more by fluke than choice," she says. "The hacking here is fantastic, too, and we can do as much or as little on the back roads as we like."

The alternative is riding around her family's 70 acres on which Rodney farms 60 head of beef cattle.

"We also rent quite a bit of land about eight miles away which we cut for hay. It means there's no hassle with last-minute orders," says Ginny whose string is headed by the grey nine-year-old Divilabit and Gamblers Image, a 13-year-old who exceeded all expectations after joining her yard this season when

owner/rider Iona Dent went to university. Both horses are being aimed at Blenheim.

There are plenty of hills within hacking distance to use for fitness work and Ginny regularly boxes up to make the 30-minute drive to racing trainer Paul Webber's Banbury yard where the horses can swim.

"It's new territory for me; my vet advised I give swimming a go to boost Divilabit's fitness."

Ginny is aware that she is on to a good thing living at home. The yard and its setting leave her wanting for nothing and she has a steady circle of friends in the surrounding area whom she grew up with. Nearby Deddington is a local haunt, while Banbury and Oxford are within easy reach for a big night out. A handful of bars in Chipping Norton, where Ginny went to school, are also only a 20-minute drive away.

"Socially I'm quiet during the summer but I enjoy the hunt ball scene in the winter," adds Ginny. "Having the horses on my doorstep is perfect. There will come a point when living with my parents isn't ideal so one day I will move out. I'll go somewhere locally and the horses will stay put. I'd be silly to take them anywhere else." **E**



**FROM LEFT** The archway leading to the yard; the tidy tack room has been relocated to a portacabin to free up an extra stable; Ginny's 25-box yard is currently full of 10 eventers plus hunters and horses on part livery



"She's a mum, driver and groom all rolled into one. The longer journeys are easier now that I've got my lorry licence," smiles Ginny. "Dad is more into the cows but he does oversee the horses while we're away competing which is a big help."

All of the stables are currently full of equines. Ten of these are eventers, while Ginny takes in horses on a part livery basis as well as a number of hunters who are just returning to work following a summer break. There are also eight chickens and a puppy, Nala — "who causes chaos" — the only offspring from the family's dog Lilly that they have kept from a litter of nine.

"The original yard is U-shaped but as more horses arrived we slowly added another block," says Ginny who is sponsored by Kevin McArdle's Saddle Fitting and Juniper PR.

Money was invested in a portacabin and its two rooms are split into tack rooms. Facilities also include a rubber surfaced 25x50m outdoor arena with mirrors, a grass jumping paddock and a five-horse walker sited behind the stables.



The show jumping paddock is used all year round

Pictures by Fiona Scott-Maxwell/Words by Aimi Clark