

THE H&H INTERVIEW FINN & MARY GUINNESS

'We always knew he'd win Badminton'



Tamarillo and William Fox-Pitt win Badminton last year for owner-breeders Finn and Mary Guinness

A home-bred Badminton winner is a rare thing. Finn and Mary Guinness had just that with Tamarillo and, in the process, advanced the cause of Arab blood in eventers.

KATE GREEN visits their stud

BREEDER Finn Guinness reckons that his 2004 Badminton winner Tamarillo's unflinching enthusiasm through the relentless mud owes much to his Arab lineage. While other horses became dejected and bedraggled in the swampy ground, Tamarillo maintained an irrepressible cheerfulness, skipping over the bog, his ears never less than 100% pinned forward.

Finn says that afterwards, at the press conference, he wanted to call out to his rider: "Mr Fox-Pitt, why does your horse gallop round with his ears pricked when no one else's does?"

William Fox-Pitt, who described Tamarillo as having been "bred for the desert, not a bog", wrote about his "dream ride" in *Horse & Hound*: "People have been derogatory about Tamarillo's breeding, describing him as a floating Arab who wouldn't handle the wet, but he has so much confidence and personality that I knew he wouldn't be unsettled. He is an irrepressible character and never lets on if he feels anything less than totally confident."

Now back on the road after chipping a bone at the Olympics, Tamarillo will again be entered for Badminton. >>

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Long-term groom Jo Richardson with Drosera, a filly out of Teasle, by Tamarillo's sire, Tarnik. Finn leads the Anglo Arab three-year-old filly, Giaconda

Finn, who owns Tamarillo with his American wife, Mary, explains: "What Arab [blood] contributes is a lightness of movement and toughness. They have tremendous spring, which should make them a joy to ride — there's nothing like a good one for comfort. You don't get that 'thumping' feeling in trot, though some people, unused to the feeling, will miss that sensation and look for it."

Interestingly, two other prominent Arab eventers of the past decade also achieved their best results in difficult cross-country conditions: the French Anglo Arab Twist la Beige came through a dispiriting mudbath at the 1993 Achselschwang Europeans to win the title, while Gary Parsonage's cross-country machine Magic Rogue produced a great round — best of the British — in the energy-sapping humidity of the Atlanta Olympics. And the British-bred Winsome Adante, the Athens silver medalist and dual Kentucky winner, has a trace of Arab on his dam's side.

Reigning European Champion Nicolas Touzaint was surprised by the aptitude of his dual Le Lion d'Angers winner Joker D'Hetby, a dainty grey by the Arab Kalem, principally a sire of jumping ponies.

"Joker is emotional and full of gas, but he has surprised me with his power and scope," said Touzaint.

It is a little known fact that Tamarillo carried David Barker, the former Meynell huntsman and crack horseman, in the hunting field until David mentioned that he thought the horse too valuable to hunt. But, despite obvious benefits, a snooty prejudice persists against the Arab in eventing.

Breeder and selector Bridget Parker's famous eventer Cornish Gold, an Olympic gold medalist in 1972, plus another top ride, Cornishman, and her foundation mare, Treges, were all out of an Anglo Arab mare.

She says: "That meant they were all 1/4 Arab, but I kept jolly quiet about it because it was considered a bit infra dig in those days!"

William, by his own admission, was less than enthused at first sight of Tamarillo, who looks smaller than his 16.2hh and has a

and jumping ability, there was nothing to suggest he'd make an eventer — he was like this olden floating around in the wind.

"But he's more athletic than all the horses I've ridden put together. You never feel the ground beneath him; he can sail through a bog, making the ground feel like the fairway on a golf course."

The breeding of this Badminton winner traces back to the 1930s when, entranced by the Arab, Finn's parents, Lord and Lady Moyne, began a modest breeding enterprise at their Hampshire home, Biddesdon Manor.

They purchased two foundation mares from Lady Wentworth's famous

Crabtree Stud: one, Daffinetta, is Tamarillo's great-great-grandmother. They liked — and used — Raftan, a well-known

Arab stallion owned by their neighbour, Col Jenkins.

This horse sired Marciel, an influential sire of top show ponies, including the legendary Pretty Polly.

The enterprise never stopped growing.

"The Guinnesses are breeding fanatics," says Mary of the large clan into which she married. "Give them an animal and they'll breed from it."

Finn has a PhD in genetics from the University of Edinburgh, but relinquished academia on the death of his older brother, returning home to run the family estate. He is

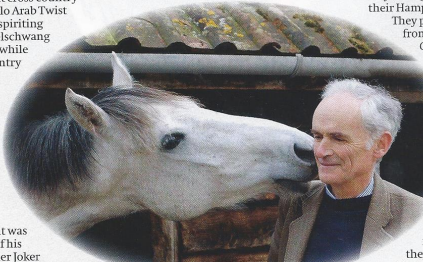
spectacularly vague about how many horses are actually on the place nowadays.

"I always manage to evade this question," he smiles. "Desmond Morris did a documentary on us and my mother watched the programme with great interest to see how I would answer the question. I got away with it then as well. I suppose we've got between 20 and 40 horses."

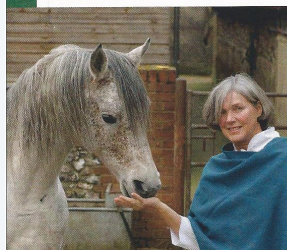
Finn with Scorzonera, another out of Teasle

disconcerting spooking habit. Mary Guinness concedes: "William only took the ride because he had nothing else at the time!"

"Tam looks more like a seahorse than an event horse and the thought of eventing him was a joke," says William. "Apart from being obviously talented with incredible paces



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Mary with the home-bred stallion Sisyriuchim

"More like 70!" snorts Mary, adding: "Finn has the ability to see a horse in a field and remember its conformation and movement forever."

This knack contributed to the arrival of Tamarillo. When Finn once finished runner-up in the Arab Horse Society's marathon, a race he helped initiate — he has won it twice and set the speed record of 1hr 24min in 1976 on the mare Ansty — he was struck by the winning horse, whom he had trailed across Salisbury Plain.

This was Tarnik, a Polish endurance stallion, predominantly Thoroughbred, imported by breeders Anne and Terry Sutcliffe.

"I was impressed by Tarnik's galloping stride and the Sutcliffes lent him to us to stand at stud. He was very like

Tamarillo, but with slightly less glamorous curves. And he was a difficult horse to keep; he would jump out over anything."

"We bred several foals by Tarnik and I wish we could have frozen his semen, but there wasn't the technology then. Unfortunately, we didn't get many people interested in using him because he wasn't famous enough, and he was only 23% Arab."

Tamarillo's dam, Mellita, was by the Thoroughbred Master Spiritus, probably the best eventing sire around at the time, out of an Arab mare. Mary competed Mellita, Canadian rider Diana Burgess rode her at Le Lion in 1993 and Lucinda Green won an intermediate section on her.

"She was a magic little mare," says Mary. "I cried for a year after she got killed [kicked in the hock]. She was fantastic, a push-button ride, and more correct in her movement than Tam. His movement comes largely from his mother — Master Spiritus tended to throw good movers — but you can see the influence of both his parents."

Finn has produced numerous champion Arabs, both under saddle and in-hand; he is a former chairman and president of the Arab Horse Society — and currently its studbook committee chairman — and was instrumental in the birth of Arab racing and the Golden Horseshoe endurance ride.

He maintained an interest in eventing, but the real involvement came through Mary. They met in Ireland when Mary, a ravishing beauty from Baltimore and then married to the writer JP Donlevy, was renting a house from the Guinnesses — Finn's first sight of her was with a mackintosh over her nightgown, changing a fuse in the middle of a storm.

"We're a good combination," says Mary, who didn't learn to ride until she was 32 and began eventing, in a small way, aged 40.

"I'm all action, whereas Finn will think about it for ever and ever. I was so mad on eventing that I was keen to get our horses out doing it, while Finn, being an intellectual, was more interested in the concept."

"I'm the sort of person who makes things happen, but Finn had the brains to breed the horses in the first place."

Finn is not a slavish student of bloodlines. "I've done a lot of judging in the Arab world and there are some real fanatics who fuss about lines that go way back. I've developed some scepticism, though I do like to know who the parents and grandparents were."

"My son, Rory, goads me about bloodlines, but I always reply that it's all about continuity. I'm not keen to chop and change too violently. You can study a horse's bloodlines, but you can only understand a horse once you've handled it. Of course I'm keen to try and improve our stock, but I'm not about to ditch what we've got."

"Before Tamarillo won Blarney [his first three-day, in 1999] our friends said 'he'll never be a crack performance horse as he's so flashy'! I think that's prejudice, and I'm against prejudice in the horse world. People look down their noses at Arabs and warmbloods, but it's like any breed — some are good and some aren't."

Mary adds: "In a way, our best win was actually Blarney, because we didn't know what to expect. William didn't know what he had to ride, it was a formidable course and I didn't sleep a wink the night before. That really was the great thrill."

Finn has always used outside stallions for fresh blood, including the late Primitive Rising and now the Australian Thoroughbred Woodmount Magic. He

also has an "experiment" on the way this spring, having used the frozen semen of a Dutch show jumping sire, Indoctro, on an Anglo Arab eventing mare.

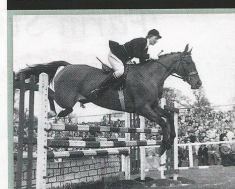
His own stallions include Biddesdon Marengo, a six-year-old intermediate eventer competed by Marcus Reid; All That Jazz, a five-year-old novice by the Arab SS City Lights out of a TB mare — he was found by William in Australia; Grafik, a part-bred Arab imported from Poland, and the home-bred grey Arab stallion Sisyriuchim, who has Biddesdon lines on both sides (by Druv out of Sakantala), and is being used on Thoroughbred mares to produce eventers. His first crop is four.

The Guinnesses accept that Tamarillo is a "horse of a lifetime", but say they are not overwhelmed with the achievement of breeding a Badminton winner because "we knew he would win".

"There was no question that I expected him to win Badminton sooner or later — it wasn't a surprise," says Mary.

And, in a concession to the elusiveness of real breeding success — the right horse at the right moment with the right jockey — Finn wrote in the Arab Horse Society magazine: "We knew that our precious part-bred Arab should be there [winning Badminton], but it is one thing knowing what should come to pass and quite another proving it for all to see." H&H

BRITISH-BRED STARS



Sheila Willcox and the part-bred Arab High And Mighty en route to their second Badminton win

■ **Badminton winners with Arab blood 1957 & 1958:** High And Mighty, a part-Arab (ridden by Sheila Willcox)

1964: M'Lord Connolly, an Anglo Arab (Capt James Templar)

1967: Jonathan, an Anglo Arab by Arrigo-My Fair Lady, bred by Betty Keys (Celia Ross-Taylor)

1968: Pasha, by an Arab stallion (Richard Walker)

2004: Tamarillo, Tarnik-Mellita (William Fox-Pitt)



Pasha, winner for Richard Walker in 1968

■ **Home-bred Badminton winners 1974:** Columbus, bred by The Queen (Colonist II-Tim Ann)

1977: George, bred by Elaine Straker (St George-Winnifrid)

1986 & 1988: Sir Wattle, bred by Jean Maxwell-Scott & Suzy

Lucy; whowska

2004: Tamarillo, bred by Finn & Mary Guinness

■ **Tamarillo's record 2000:** 1st Blarney CCI**;

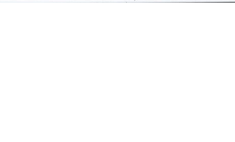
1st British intermediate championships; 2nd

Bienheim CCI***

2002: 2nd Badminton; world team bronze medal

2004: 1st Badminton; member of British Olympic team in Athens

tan Stark celebrates double winner Sir Wattle's first Badminton victory in 1986



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