

# The White Knight Of The Showjumping Empire

The greatest horse ever seen in the sport of showjumping. Athletic, graceful, bursting with power, Milton has become a legend in his lifetime. In 1992, he became the first competition horse to win over £1 million in prize money. He was born with that magical quality that brings a sparkle to people eyes and makes their heart beats race the moment he enters the arena.

Milton knows he's a star, like a great actor that roars the crowd and the smell of success seems to run through his veins. But the story of Milton the horse was more than paradise lost and paradise gained.

He arrived in the world April 1977; the first foal of a little dark gray mare named "Epolita". She was owned by 'John Hardingrole' who created a stud with a prime object of breeding competition horses. Milton's pedigree was full of jumping blood; his grandam "Penny Volt" won the Foxhunter class at the horse of the year show. His sire, Dutch bred "Marius" winner of numerous top class events when ridden by the late Caroline Bradley.

When Milton was just a foal, Caroline Bradley had no hesitation in buying him. She was convinced from the start that he's going to be a champion. His name was "Silver Marius" and Caroline changed him to "Milton". From the early training of Milton, Caroline and her mother Doreen who was also a rider knew that they have something very special. Caroline said that she doesn't want him to compete because it's too early for him to win. Soon after, he was on the showjumping circuit. Tom Hudson and David Broom recall their first impression on Milton; 'I can't remember the show, it was a novice show, a horse jumping and firing over small fences, I said my God what's that. It was Milton.' Tom Hudson recalls.

'I first saw Milton at a show 8 o'clock one morning, and I saw him jumping and I told Caroline how much do you want for him? but she answered I don't want to sell him. I said Caroline I didn't ask you that, just put a price on him. She smiled and said, I think this will be my Olympic horse.' David Broom recalls.



Six weeks later, the showjumping world was stunned by the death of Caroline Bradley at the early age of 37.

Tom and Doreen Bradley's life was turned upside down, with a problem of what to do with 29 fit horses including Milton.

Paul Schockemohle told them that they mustn't keep more than 2 horses, but they never intended to sell Milton because he was and will always be memorial for them. The Bradley's decided to send him to John Whitaker at the beginning, but unfortunately John couldn't come before 6 weeks and that was too late for the Bradleys, so they sent him to Steven Hadley with 5 other horses. 'I remember the year I rode him, I took him to a pre-Wembley show. I jumped him in the £300 class

against top grade A horses, and he jumped double clear everyday, and he was doing it very easy. I told my groom, take care of this horse because he's the best you'll ever see.' Steven Hadley recalls.

Unfortunately, Steven's groom was clipping him one day in the box, he was scared and just reared to the back and nobody knew if he hit the blade or his other foot, but it cut deep into the front tendon and he had 18 month off.

Following the accident, Milton had a tendon surgery by the well known Vet Geoffrey Brain.

But the accident wasn't a blessing in the skies, as British team vet John Macures explains; 'It's a funny thing, but the accident was beneficial. Very often these super horses, they work too much too young, and with Milton because of his accident he was brought up very slowly and gently. When he was a nine years old, he just had the experience of a 6 years old.'

After 18 month of rest, Doreen Bradley was ready to settle who should have him now. She called John Whitaker, and he said that he's got a box coming from somewhere near by to take him in the load at the time of the Royal show.

Finally, Milton found his way to John Whitaker's yard at Yorkshire at the age of eight. Fat and sound, and ready to begin the most successful showjumping career the sport has ever seen.

There was a little doubt in the showjumping circuit, that Milton has gone to the right man, indeed Caroline admired John's talent and John respected Caroline's early training of Milton.

'First year I jumped him, when he takes off, you felt that you'll never come down.' John said. 'His back is too powerful for his front. You have to give him time and room

to take off because he tends to bring his fronts up and put it out. If you don't give him time to do that, that's when he sometimes knocks a fence.' John continued.

But such a potential Milton was showing at home, he was soon on the road to his first international show, although he went as a backup horse for John.

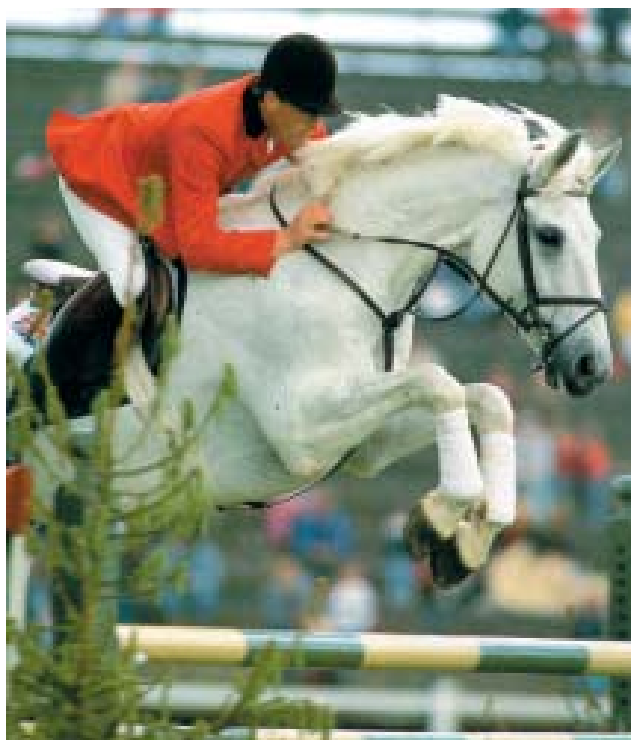
His first international was in Berlin; John took him for the experience. He tried him in the small grand prix and he finished third.

The following year, Milton made his debut in the British Nation's cup team. In 6 month he had gone from a promising novice to a top class performer.

Over the following 7 years representing Great Britain in Nations cups, his record was truly outstanding. Milton jumped no less than 35 clear rounds and 12 double clear rounds. The first of which was on the other side of the Atlantic, at Spruce Meadows - Calgary 1986, on five different Nations Cup appearances, he never faulted once proving what a great team horse he is. 'What a jewel to have in the crown' British team chef d'equipe 'Ronny Mazarella' said. He also won at the same show the Du Murier grand prix, the world richest grand prix.

He won the individual and teams gold medals at the European championships a year later.

1988, Tom and Doreen Bradley made it clear for Whitaker that he's not available for the Olympics, they had their own reasons out of respect to their late daughter Caroline who believed that many great horses were never as good after competing in the Olympics. Accordingly, Milton was banned from competing in any Nations Cup team. The lifting of





the ban at the end of 1988 allowed Milton and John to secure the European gold medal in Rotterdam the following August, and for John it was also a great relief.

Probably the best yard stick by which to measure a top show jumper is the annual Volvo world cup indoor series. In 1989 in Tampa - Florida, Milton was widely expected to win his first finals, but he came against the great 'Big Ben' at the peak of his form who was winning his second world cup in successive years.

'Finishing second gave me a lot of confidence that year, and I knew that we were knocking doors.' John commented.

The following year finals in Dortmund, 'Big Ben' wasn't there because he was recovering from an operation, but Milton had his other great rival 'Jappeloup' to compete against. In the speed section, Milton had an unfavorable early drawn, but he was to overcome his weakness against the clock and was to come up ahead of Jappeloup by 0.2 seconds. That set him for the competition and was never headed, winning his first Volvo World Cup Title.

Just 3 month later after having a double clear round in the Nations Cup at Hickstead, Milton again won one of the most important showjumping prizes 'the King George V gold cup' at the royal international horse show.

'You can't hardly build a course that wouldn't suit Milton, he can jump anything' Steven Hadley comments. 'He is the Absolute hero of the crowd. He's got a wonderful brain, he has a wonderful gift of jumping over great big fences, and he's totally in balance when he lands.'

But his wonderful style of jumping was never better illustrated when competed at "The Horse Of The Year Show" masters. A competition were fences went higher and higher each round and so did the money.

In the three years the masters took place 1988, 1989 and 1990, Milton never faulted once in 15 rounds of jumping and of course he was crowned the winner.

1990 just one month after the masters, Milton went to the overall world Equestrian Games in Stockholm and he was qualified for the final Top 4 competition, along with Greg Best on Gem Twist, Eric Navet on Quito Du Bussy and Hubert Bourdy on Morgat.

"The bigger the occasion, the better he goes. The crowd roars when he enters the arena, he raises himself 6 inches high and he jumps 6 inches higher." Alan

Smith-The daily Telegraph recalls.

On the final Sunday, Milton had his first clear round with John. And that clear round was exactly what John expected from Milton on such a big day. American Greg Best was the first to ride Milton from the other 3 finalists and he had 2 poles down out of the triple combination. French Eric Navet had a wonderful clear with him and he was crowned the world champion.

1991 was a very successful year for Milton winning many top classes, most important was the Volvo world cup finals in Gothenburg by which he retained his crown in 2 consecutive year after beating the great Brazilian Nelson Pessoa on Special Envoy.

Finally in 1992, the Bradley's agreed that Milton could join the British team for the Barcelona Olympic Games.

That decision came just before Milton was going to California to defend his world cup title, but a slight fetlock injury had to put him for rest in order to be fit for Barcelona.

The Whitakers had to do a great team effort to make him ready only at home. And there was no doubt that Milton was in perfect condition when he left Yorkshire for the Olympics and was ready to jump for his life.

Barcelona 1992 - in the team competition first round, the British team had a disastrous start when Nick Skelton and his Dollar Girl were eliminated, but Milton stood to all the pressure and had a clear first round. But 8 faults for



both Nick Skelton and Tim Grubb in the second round, any chances of Medals had gone for the British team.

Milton's results in the team competition as being counted as one of the best 20 results, had qualified him for the finals of the individual competition and in the first round he had no mistakes. Milton was one of four to jump clear in the first round. So when he was in for the second round, the crowd expected.

He had his terrible accident in the double of oxers, by which he slipped inside the double and John had to stop him from jumping the second oxer, and he finished with 15 faults. 'I've played the tape of Milton again and again, don't blame john - blame the ground' French team manager said.

John was very upset for forgoing the medal of his life and he commented; "What do I say, but if I were to be in the same situation again I wouldn't

do it differently. He just backed up a little bit on top of the oxer, I would say he was fractionally hesitated, possibly he was trying to be too careful. I would say that the ground didn't suit him a lot. Afterwards, he gave up a little bit and I gave up a little bit, we lost concentration and we had another 3 rails down."

After the Barcelona misery for Milton's fans all over the world, there were many whispers that Milton cannot come up again and retain his confidence. John gave a short rest and he was back again in

competition first at the masters in Paris. One of his great amazing victories was in the Mercedes classics in Stuttgart 1992, his speed section delighted the German crowd. A few weeks later during the Christmas show at Olympia was the evidence that Milton was still the most popular for everybody.

1993 was his last year of competition. He was qualified for his last Volvo World Cup finals to defend his crown. But two poles down in the final round were too many to win finishing in second place and handed the crown to Ludger Beerbaum and his brilliant Ratina Z.

'Not possible to lose, isn't it? But it happened before...' Doreen Bradley comments.

But Milton had nothing more to prove to anyone. He was still at the Top, still the horse that all competitors feared the most.

'He had given us the pleasure with all his victories, we really enjoyed him. It is of great sadness to me that Caroline hasn't been here to enjoy the greatness of Milton.' Doreen Bradley finally said.

His very last show was at Hickstead in the Nations Cup winning the Gold Medal with a tremendous double clear round for a horse at his age. Milton retired as a sporting horse 1993 and enjoyed his last golden days at Yorkshire green fields, well taken care of, being the pure symbol of greatness until he left our world early June 1999.

*Whatever the future may bring trying to compare to Milton, for his countless fans, for his memorial victories and history records, he will always be "Milton - The White Knight Of The Showjumping Empire."*

