



ZARA PHILLIPS IS AN RBS GLOBAL AMBASSADOR. IMAGE: MARY MCCARTNEY

# HER ROYAL *humbleness*

SHE'S ACHIEVED INTERNATIONAL SPORTING SUCCESS AND INJECTED BRITISH ROYALTY WITH A MUCH-NEEDED DOSE OF COOL. BUT, AS **HELEN RUSSELL** DISCOVERS IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW, ZARA PHILLIPS IS TAKING NOTHING FOR GRANTED



ADDING AROUND IN A BODY-WARMER, WHITE JODHPURS AND THICK woolly socks, a small, blonde girl sips tea from a steaming mug. On a closed set in a freezing West London studio, cameras and lighting rigs are assembled to the strains of cool acid jazz and the contented munching of early morning bacon sandwiches. We're at a photo shoot with esteemed photographer, Mary McCartney, daughter of the recently divorced Sir Paul and sister of fashion designer, Stella. But the focus of today's shoot isn't rock royalty. We've got the real thing. ¶ "Do you want smiling or serious?" asks the blonde, flashing the whitest teeth. Zara, 27, looks offensively well, sporting immaculate blonde highlights and a glowing English rose complexion. She is sickeningly photogenic and all Mary has to do is point and fire. ¶ We get some great shots of Zara in front of the British flag, until someone asks whether the Union Jack is being held round the wrong way. There is a debate, and it's decided to consult Zara's older brother, Peter, who is at the photo shoot in his role as sponsorship manager for shoot organisers Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS).

British tennis siblings Andy and Jamie Murray, who, like Zara, are sponsored by RBS, are being photographed by Mary McCartney, too.

Peter looks at his sister and laughs: "That," he says, pointing at the flag, "is upside down!" The chunky white stripe on the diagonal cross has to be on the top left-hand side, apparently. This is verified by examining the Union Jack cufflinks that Peter just happens to have on him (that's serious patriotism...) and the situation is corrected. Peter holds the flag up, just out of shot, while his sister laughs and tries to look serious again.

Zara Phillips is the daughter of Anne, Princess Royal and Captain Mark Phillips. The Queen of England is her granny and she's 12th in line to the throne. But nepotism gets you nowhere when it comes to getting ahead in sport. Zara established herself in the British eventing team, competing with great success in the last two European Championships and the 2006 World Championships, and her hard graft finally came to fruition when she was selected to ride for Great Britain at the Beijing Olympics, the equestrian events of which are to be held in Hong Kong in August. Sadly, her childhood dream was shattered when she was forced to withdraw after her famous chestnut gelding, Toytown, picked up an injury during training.

Zara had been hoping to follow in the footsteps of her parents, but will now have to wait at least another four years until London in 2012 to emulate them. Her mother, who won an indi-

vidual gold at the European Eventing Championships herself in 1971, went to the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, while her father won team gold at the 1972 Games in Munich.

"I've always been around horses," says Zara, "and my parents influenced me a lot when I was growing up." When Princess Anne married Mark Phillips and had children, she made the decision to bring them up with as much normality as possible and insisted that her children should not have titles. This

prompted an outcry in some of the more conservative sections of the British press and when Zara's older brother Peter was born in 1977, headlines screamed out in horror at "the first royal baby to be born a commoner for more than 500 years." Princess Anne's decision meant that both Peter and Zara were unburdened by royal duties as they were growing up and were free to enjoy themselves like any other teenagers.

When Zara left Gordonstoun, the exclusive boarding school in Scotland, she took a year out and went travelling in Australia and New Zealand. She was photographed bungee jumping and enjoying the Sydney nightlife and became dogged with the "party girl" tag. Her on/off relationship with jockey Richard Johnson was also seen as tabloid fodder and, at the Queen Mother's 100th birthday celebration, Zara was snapped laughing by a photographer in a shot that revealed her tongue stud. This was not what Britons expected of their royals, but Zara knew what she wanted then, as now. After a



**FAMILY TIES**  
Princess Anne poses for a family portrait with her children Peter and Zara



year of travelling, she knuckled down at Exeter University to train as an equine physiotherapist before taking up riding professionally, competing with Toytown.

**Z**ARA COMPETES IN THREE-day events, which comprise dressage, cross-country and show jumping disciplines. It's a costly sport. Keeping event horses on the road requires grooms, stables, feed and a hefty budget for transportation.

In 2003, Zara secured external sponsorship to compete internationally and was able to aim for bigger and better titles. In the first year of the sponsorship she finished second at leading international event Burghley Horse Trials in Lincolnshire, before going on to win the European Championships in 2005 and then the World Championships a year later

In 2003, Zara also met a new man, England rugby star Mike Tindall. With brains, beauty

and breeding, she must be a slightly intimidating prospect for many men. So was he nervous? "Ha!" Zara says with a laugh, "No. When I first met Mike, he was in a bad mood because he'd just been dropped from the squad (in the semi-final of the Rugby World Cup). So he wasn't nervous at all." Zara and Mike now live together on her mother's 280-hectare estate at Gatcombe Park in Gloucestershire.

Mike has been credited with having a grounding effect on Zara and encouraging her to stick to a disciplined training regime. But Zara has long been taken seriously by the equestrian world and no one who's ever met her has a bad word to say about her: even journalists love her. With Zara, there's no standing on ceremony; she gets straight to the point, and if she doesn't like something, she says so. Far from being a glamorous, cosseted royal, Zara, seems more than happy to roll her sleeves up and get stuck in.

"I start work at whatever time is necessary to get everything done, so sometimes it can be very early," she says, "Then there's the riding, training and the sponsors to keep happy." Does she mind

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**CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT** A young Zara grooming a Shetland Pony; Mike Tindall by Zara's side at the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award in 2006; the royal family pose for an official photo

## Zara's Awards

**EUROPEAN EVENTING CHAMPIONSHIP** individual gold and team gold (2005)  
**FEI WORLD EQUESTRIAN GAMES** individual gold and team silver (2006)  
**BBC SPORTS PERSONALITY OF YEAR** (2006)  
**AWARDED MBE** New Year's Honours List (2007)  
**EUROPEAN EVENTING CHAMPIONSHIP** team gold, individual 6th place (2007)





having to deal with the commercial side of things? Zara shakes her head and says, "I'm very grateful to have them." Their financial support has enabled her to focus on improving her riding. "Winning the championships was great," she says, "but it does mean that you have to work even harder to stay there." Zara has 12 horses and needs to give time and training to each one if she is to go on competing and ride at the London Olympics.

It's hard, physical graft and can be dangerous at times: Zara was knocked unconscious from bad fall in 2004 and friend and fellow eventer, Sherelle Duke, was killed while competing in 2006. "You do get injuries," says Zara, "but you can minimise the risk, like by making sure you're falling in the right way." She demonstrates, while sitting down, which is interesting if not entirely clear. "You've got to keep your arms in, land and roll, see?" It sounds terrifying.

In 2006, Zara was named BBC Sports Personality of the Year, 35 years after her mother won the same prize. Last year she was awarded an MBE by the Queen for her sporting success – the first senior royal ever to be honoured in this way. "It was lovely," says Zara of the moment her granny gave her the medal. "She got quite emotional and said, 'Well done, I'm very proud.'"

The awards and tributes are "lovely," but they do mean she is seldom out of the media glare. "When I'm out, and when I'm doing what I'm doing, then it's fine. But when I'm working horses, it can be a pain."

**D**OES ZARA FEEL UNDER pressure to look a certain way? She laughs, "I make an effort with my appearance if I'm going out, but then I get photographed when I'm hot and sweaty, bright red and covered in mud when I've just come off a horse. So, I suppose they get to see both sides of what I do."

She has just driven from the UK to Portugal and back, and tomorrow she's driving to France to compete. You can't check in a 17-hand horse with your baggage allowance and this means that Zara and her grooms have to do a lot of driving to get the horses to events all over Europe. "When I'm on the road I just tend to eat junk. It's service stations all the way. And the driving is so boring that you just eat for something to do."



#### MEDAL OF HONOUR

Zara received an MBE from Buckingham Palace in the 2007 New Year's Honours List.



It's nice to hear that royals are prey to comfort eating and traffic jams like the rest of us. "I think the public's perception of royals is very different to what they're really like," says Zara. "A lot of people are very shocked when they meet them, they're like, 'You're actually quite normal.' The way I see it, my family have been born into this role, one of the most difficult jobs there is, and sometimes I just feel like saying to people, 'Go on then, see if you can do any better.'"

Zara leads a decidedly unstarry life. Evenings are usually spent relaxing with Mike and she can often be found kicking back and watching DVDs of *Grey's Anatomy* or slaving over a hot grill. "Mike can't cook, so I do it. He has to have a lot of protein so I do anything with meat in it like burgers, lasagne or steak – you can do this really nice steak with cannelloni beans." At this point we begin trading recipes. Zara also watches

a lot of rugby (especially when Mike's playing) and when not doing that, she's walking the dogs – "We've got Corley the labrador, Sway the boxer and Misty, Mike's bull mastiff."

Eventing is a hugely demanding and dangerous sport and it has already taken its toll on the 27-year-old's body. "In eventing, there are three different disciplines, so muscle-wise you've got to think about lots of different areas. I can't run any more, my ankles are knackered from playing hockey at school, so I train on an exercise bike and go swimming. Our team physiotherapist gives me exercises for my wonky hips – but I hate those!" Wonky hips? In a very matter of fact way, Zara reveals another serious injury she picked up six years ago, "Basically, I got landed on. The horse reared up and fell on me. My hips have been wonky ever since."

Zara has already been competing for almost a decade, and is clearly a tough cookie. But how long does she think she can keep it up? "I take every year as it comes," says Zara, "but eventing's not like other sports, some of the best riders are 35-plus or in their 40s."

"Mark Todd [double Olympic gold medallist and New Zealand's most celebrated horseman, now 52] retired and went back to New Zealand, but now he's making a comeback..." she tails off with an enormous grin on her face. Here is a woman who loves her work and has no intention of giving it up any time soon. In 20 years' time, might we still see Zara Phillips firmly in the saddle? She laughs: "Maybe!" ■

#### OPPOSITE

Zara jumps with her horse Toytown during the European Equestrian Championship in Rome, 2007