

Ella Popely award

Ella and La Boom
jumping in Deauville



Young British showjumper **Ella Popely** will prove an inspiration to riders for many years to come through the launch of a prestigious award in her memory

Ella, who rode for Great Britain at children's and junior levels, died tragically towards the end of last year at the age of 18. She was among the sport's rising young stars whose impact on so many people inside and outside the arena will never be forgotten.

And at this year's Olympia, The London International Horse Show, the Ella Popely Award will be presented for the first time in recognition of a rider aged between 18 and 25 who shows the qualities of being a true sportsman or woman, represent the sport well at all levels, be a team player, encourage others and is focused on their riding without it being at the detriment to others.

Ella's mother Lea, GB children's squad chef d'equipe Clare Whitaker, Lea's close friend and top American international showjumper Lauren Hough and British Showjumping head of communications Maria Haig formed the panel to decide the first winner.

The award gives an up-and-coming British Showjumping rider an opportunity to be mentored by one of the world's best, with Olympian and World Championships showjumper Lauren performing that role for the inaugural Ella Popely Award recipient. The award will be for a talented individual who is competing at 1.40m level who has also →



Lauren Hough and Lea Popely



Ella on team duty

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“She cracked on and always found a way to make the best of everything, no matter what horse she was riding”

shown exceptional resilience and dedication in the pursuit of sporting excellence.

Recounting her memories of Ella, a rider she coached and knew so well, Lauren said: “It is a huge hole and void in our lives that will never be filled again. But the best thing, from my perspective, we can do to honour Ella is to really focus on the amazing qualities she had.

“Besides being a rider, she was an incredible person as far as the team environment was concerned. She always found the best in everything, and she wanted to learn all aspects of the sport as well as riding in the ring.”

Lauren added: “She spent a lot of time with me. She cracked on and always found a way to make the best of everything, no matter what horse she was riding, no matter how good or how difficult.”

And the award will reflect exactly the type of qualities Ella, who lived in Sussex with her mum and brother Jack, mirrored so magnificently.

“We felt the way to move forward was to find someone who has the same type of characteristics that Ella did, and mentor them to be the best at what they want to be in the sport in any way, shape or form,” Lauren said. “It is not necessarily the one that has won or is going to win a gold medal, but the one that is both talented, a true team player, who portrays the sport well and also would benefit greatly from the award.”

“There are a lot of great riders, but it takes more than that to be successful in this industry. No matter where Ella was going to be, she was going to be good at it.

“We are a little bit treading new territory. I will be there in every capacity I can be, but it is up to the person who wins the award to shape it into what they want to get out of it. As it grows over the years, it might be a different situation each time, but it is really to help somebody who wants a leg up.

“If it is an opportunity to spend time at my stables, spend a week in America or come to a competition and watch behind the scenes, it is going to be what they turn it into. It is important for me to do the mentoring in the first year. I want to set a standard. But obviously, anyone who is going to be a mentor will be good at their job, no doubt about that,” Lauren added.

“We have a wonderful facility at Aston Farm [in Gloucestershire], and hopefully the person will have the opportunity to spend a bit of time there and just see what we do on a day-to-day basis and the whole management process involved.

“You have to have a huge amount of work ethic, and I think you really have to love the sport and love the horses. If you don’t love the animals, I am not quite sure why you are doing it! It doesn’t take long to figure out who’s doing it for what reasons. I had huge opportunities in my lifetime. Both my parents

are professionals in the industry, and I got massive opportunities with some of the best in the world.

“I certainly think I wouldn’t be where I am without the opportunities I had as a young rider. What I love about our sport is that I am 40 years old, and I learn something new every day.”

Ella started her international team career in 2011 when she was selected for the children’s Nations Cup team competing in Hagen. She was selected for the children’s European championship squad that same year as a reserve.

In 2012, Ella represented Great Britain on further Nations Cup teams, and was selected for the children’s European championship team where she delivered three consecutive clears with Amaryllis van de Heffinck, and in 2015, Ella had junior Nations Cup appearances at both Hagen and Deauville with La Boom, competing successfully at home and abroad.

Apart from the 12-month mentorship with Lauren, additional benefits for the award winner will come in the form of support from some of the sport’s sponsors and stakeholders, along with ongoing PR opportunities.

More information on this, and on those who are supporting the award, will be announced in the next issue of *British Showjumping*, in which we will also be featuring the inaugural holder of the award. 🐾