



MAJESTY



The Queen's *Glorious Years*



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EXCLUSIVE
TO
WHSmith

Price : £6.99

ISBN 0-9550943-2-1



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FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS

Always a keen and highly competent horsewoman, the Queen developed a passionate interest in racing while still Princess Elizabeth. Since she was a little girl her beloved corgis have never been far from her side but, as Ian Lloyd reveals, they are not the only canines in her life

At the age of 12 Princess Elizabeth confided to her riding instructor that she would one day 'like to be a lady living in the country with lots of horses and dogs'. Seven decades later, the Queen remains a countrywoman at heart, and her hobbies are listed on the official royal website as 'riding, walking in the countryside, horse racing, working her dogs and Scottish country dancing'.

Horse racing may be tucked away in the middle of the list, but it is one of the Queen's chief passions; her expertise in both horse racing and horse breeding is considerable. She has a detailed knowledge of pedigrees and bloodlines and is an expert judge of any horse.

In over half-a-century of flat racing she has won four out of the five English Classics – the only one to elude her is the Derby and it remains an unfulfilled ambition to win this legendary race.

The Queen's abiding passion for horses began at an early age. Her grandfather, King George V, used to take her around the stud at Sandringham and in 1931, when she was just five years old, he bought her a Shetland pony called Peggy. As a

child she would ride over the moors at Balmoral and later on, during the war years spent at Windsor Castle, she learned the basics of stable management and horse care.

Royal riding instructor Horace Smith and his daughter Sybil were asked to improve her skills and to teach her to ride side-saddle, something she would need later on when she came to review troops. Smith also taught her the basics of carriage driving, and in 1943 and 1944 she won first prize at the Royal Horse Show at Windsor for driving a cart pulled by one of her own black fell ponies.

In 1946, at the age of 20, she shared the ownership of a steeplechaser called Monaveen with her mother, Queen Elizabeth. The following year the Aga Khan gave her a filly, Astrakhan, as a wedding present.

The Queen inherited the Royal Studs on the death of her beloved father in February 1952. The next few years were to be a particular glorious period for the young royal owner: in 1953 Aureole was favourite to win that year's

ABOVE: The Queen and one of her ever-faithful corgis in the late 1960s

FAR LEFT: Princess Elizabeth prepares to go riding in Windsor Great Park on her 13th birthday, 21 April 1939

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Derby. The race, due to take place the day after the Coronation, proved a useful distraction during the build-up to the ceremony. 'You must be feeling nervous, Ma'am,' asked a concerned lady-in-waiting after another Abbey rehearsal. 'Of course I am, but I do really think Aureole will win,' came the somewhat unexpected reply.

To her disappointment the horse finished second, beaten by Pinza. The following year, however,

he went on to win the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes at Ascot, as well as the Coronation Cup and the Hardwicke Stakes. Later in the 1950s the filly Almeria gave the Queen several notable wins and in 1958 Pall Mall won the Two Thousand Guineas.

The Seventies proved to be another golden period for the Queen. In 1974 she flew to Chantilly to see Highclere win the prestigious Prix de Diane. Her racing manager, Lord Carnarvon, later recalled the excitement of the French crowd: 'They went bananas, shouting "Vive la reine" when Highclere won.' Three years later and the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations were capped when Dunfermline, another talented filly, won the Oaks and the St Leger.

For many years the Queen regularly featured in the Top 20 list of owners, but in 1991 she decided to cut her string of racehorses by a third. This rationalisation was aimed at improving the quality of the bloodstock and thereby ensuring that it paid for itself. The number of horses in training has since increased.

Another fundamental change occurred a decade later with the sudden death of Lord Carnarvon, followed a few months later by that of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. The latter had always favoured National Hunt racing, while her elder daughter preferred the flat. But the Queen



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE: Elizabeth reaches up to pat the head of a horse, c. 1936

The Queen leads Carrozza, ridden by Lester Piggott, into the paddock at Epsom racecourse after their victory in the 1957 Oaks

Princess Elizabeth wins the Single Private Driving Turn-out class at the Royal Horse Show at Windsor

FAR RIGHT: Accompanied by the Princess Royal and Zara Phillips, the Queen goes riding on Tinkerbell at Windsor on the eve of her 78th birthday





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given to Her Majesty as a present by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1969 and was ridden by her at 18 consecutive Trooping the Colour ceremonies until 1986. In 1981, when blank shots were fired at the Queen as she approached Horse Guards Parade, Burmese was startled and shied. The monarch's skill as a horsewoman was evident in the way she calmed the horse and quickly restored control, enabling her to continue as if nothing had happened.

Horses may mean the world to the Queen but it is another four-legged animal that is most closely associated with her – the corgi. No cartoon of her is complete without a battalion of the sturdy creatures complete with human expressions of bafflement or fear. It has become a cliché that is seized on time and again, and is an endearing and popular image.

The Queen was just seven years old when her parents were given a Pembrokeshire corgi called Dookie in 1933. He was mated with a bitch, Jane, and the royal corgi line was established.



The first one owned exclusively by Princess Elizabeth was Susan, who accompanied her on her honeymoon in 1947 and whose grave at Sandringham is marked with a small headstone.

As with her horses, the Queen meticulously plans the dogs' breeding programme. But something seems to have gone awry in the 1960s when one of them mutinied and mated with Princess Margaret's dachshund to produce Mr Pipkin, the first of the royal 'dorgis'.

The Queen has owned more than 30 corgis over the years. At present she has five: Emma, Linnet, Monty, Willow and Holly. Monty was a gift from daughter to mother to mark the Queen Mother's 100th birthday, but he proved to be too



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boisterous for the frail old lady and was returned to the royal pack. Following the Queen Mother's death, the Queen looked after her mother's remaining two corgis, Minnie and Rush, but they both died in the autumn of 2004.

Besides the corgis, the Queen owns four 'dorgis' called Cider, Berry, Vulcan and Candy. There are also five cocker spaniels: Bisto, Oxo, Flash, Spick and Span, which are kept at the Sandringham kennels.

The Queen is very much a hands-on owner and whenever possible feeds the dogs herself at



4.30pm each day, mixing cooked meat, gravy and dog biscuits before she has her own tea. This ritual has remained the same throughout her reign, as has a daily walk around the gardens. In her absence, a footman has the unenviable task of walking up to nine dogs at the same time.

As the court moves from one royal residence to the next the dogs accompany the Queen, travelling by car, train or aircraft as deemed appropriate, but when their mistress goes abroad they are entrusted to the care of a lady called Nancy Fenwick.

The Queen is excellent at dealing with the occasional fracas between the dogs. Michael Oswald recalls: 'Once there was the most fearful dog fight, and she was far braver than anybody



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: The Duke of York and Elizabeth with corgis Dookie and Jane in July 1936

The Princess with her dogs at a window of Y Bwthyn Bach, in the grounds of Royal Lodge

The Queen returns to London after a summer holiday at Balmoral, October 1969

Her Majesty encounters a corgi that she had bred while on an official visit to Northumberland in 1999

FAR LEFT: The Queen and Prince Philip near the George IV Gateway at Windsor in June 1959

