

Be a groom - where 24/7 beats 9-5

Liz Daniels tells us about working as a groom

When I was at school all I ever wanted to do was ride and work with horses! I started working part time with horses at 13-years-old, and by 18 had experienced a number of yards including hunting/breaking and schooling, classical dressage and had worked with Paralympic dressage gold medalist, Lee Pearson.

On finishing sixth form, I got offered what turned out to be the most amazing opportunity. A friend of mine, who worked for Richard Davison, had heard that Olympic show jumper Geoff Billington was looking for a groom to cover two weeks as his groom was off work.

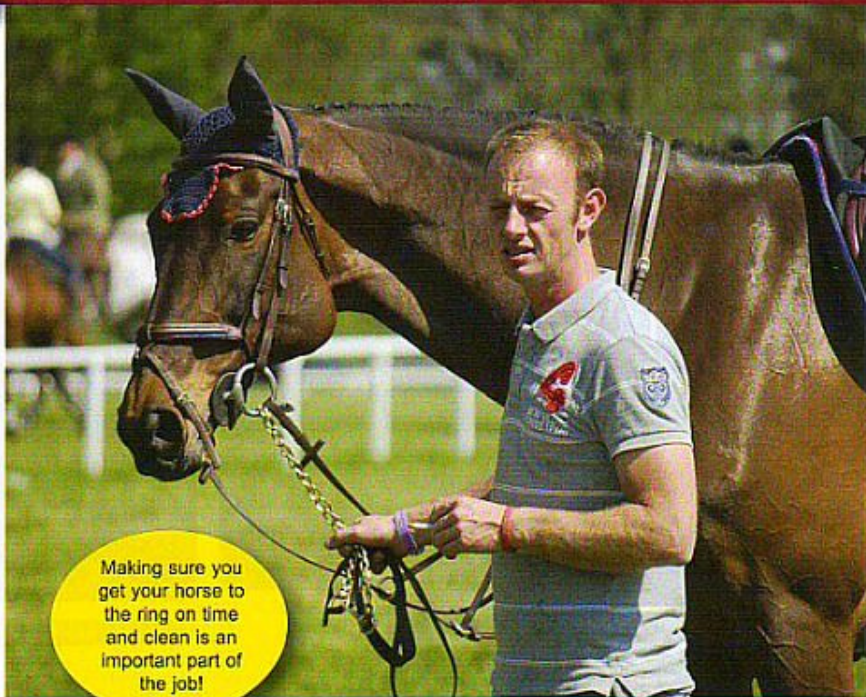
I arrived thinking I was a 'good' groom, but I quickly realised that I was way out of my league and these were fine-tuned, highly spirited top quality horses! I remember my first day and feeling very intimidated by Geoff and his highly experienced groom (who is now a good friend and one of the most highly regarded professionals in the industry). Having to ride in front of Geoff felt like the worst 'exam' ever, the only thing that kept me going through the first week was the thought that I only had to do one more week!

Through the guidance of Geoff's experienced groom, I learnt more in those two weeks than I ever have - and I started to love it.

At the end of two weeks, Geoff asked if I would stay and of course I said yes! It was at the time that Geoff was on top of his game with It's Otto. Working with and riding Otto stands out as one of the most amazing highlights of my life so far. Riding world-class horses is a big perk of the job.

Within a few months, I was travelling all around the UK and abroad to international shows. Life as a travelling groom is hard work, but very rewarding. The hours are unsociable, but it's exciting watching the horses perform and the friends you meet are lifelong. Expect to work long hours under pressure, but be sure to enjoy the social side too.

I loved the shows, but after a



Making sure you get your horse to the ring on time and clean is an important part of the job!

while I enjoyed being at home more. For me it meant more riding and working with the youngsters - something which I have always found rewarding. Working at home usually means a more structured day and more sociable hours. It really depends on what area you are interested in as to where you might like your career to develop.

I developed a lot of skills that are transferable to many other areas of life. Time management, efficiency, communication, working under pressure and organisation skills are just a few. To work with horses you have to be passionate, dedicated and have a love of horses. I remember there being times where I was literally exhausted, but these were easily outweighed by times of elation and achievement.

The job created a lot of opportunities in the equestrian industry, but I decided to use some of my transferable skills to complete a degree, and during this time I still continued to work part time as a professional groom.

I am very proud of what I have achieved

and the experiences I have had; grooming has given me some of the best days of my life.

Want to get into grooming?

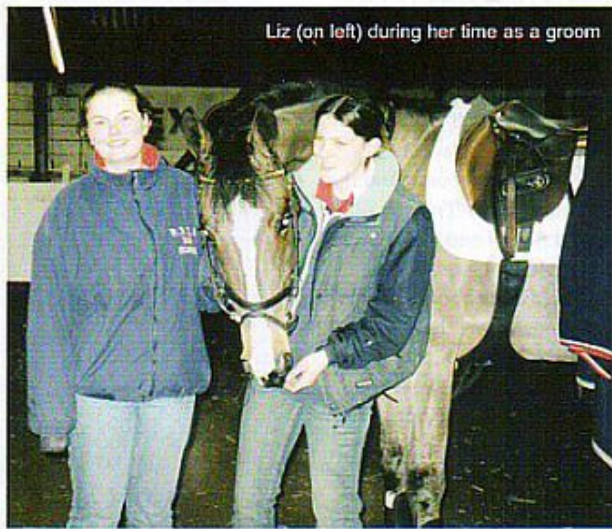
Grooming is an excellent career choice. There are many different areas to get into, so follow a path that fits with your passion, eg dressage, eventing. You will learn lots of skills, meet lots of friends and experience things that many people only dream of.

Grooming is not a nine-to-five job, and we are never going to be millionaires, but there are some great packages out there. Jobs that include accommodation, bills, use of car and livery for your horse, plus a wage, usually work out as a decent salary. Always make sure you have a written contract of employment, stating all of the above.

Word of mouth is a great way of getting a job; otherwise there are lots of positions advertised weekly in Horse and Hound and through agencies, such as Yard and Groom. Always go and visit the yard before starting and don't be afraid to ask questions such as daily routine, holidays, pay, what is expected of you.

Speak to other employees at the yard as it's a great way of sussing what the job is like. It is important to have realistic expectations, don't expect to start in a job and immediately be doing the London 2012 Olympic Games. But if you work hard, are dedicated and truly passionate about horses then you never know, you could be there as part of Team GB!

I am proud to be a groom and proud that we now have The British Grooms Association, an organisation that recognises that grooms are the backbone of the equestrian industry.



Liz (on left) during her time as a groom

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The British Grooms Association

Mission Statement: "The British Grooms Association exists to enhance, promote and support the careers, working conditions and reputation of grooms both as individuals and as part of a respected profession". The BGA is essential for anyone working with horses.

There are lots of membership benefits, such as discounts and membership magazine, but more importantly the BGA gives grooms a united voice.

Alongside this there is a network of support, offering help and advice, as well as a free legal advice line.

"By having a Grooms Association we at last have support, advice, a voice and most importantly a sense of belonging.

"For decades the sport has had the benefit of our passion for our job for very little reward. It's time to move into this Century. All grooms *must* join this association designed for us", says Olympic Groom Jenny Ellis

For more information on the BGA go to www.britishgrooms.org.uk or call 0845 331 6039. Membership costs just £17.50 per year.