

Left: Jack Whitaker, with his father Michael and William Funnell, has been steeped in showjumping from birth. Below: with his father, uncle John and cousin Robert at Royal Windsor

in a horsey family already," she says.

For Jack, one of the biggest advantages he experience was access to top-class horses at an early age.

"I probably had better horses when I started jumping than I do now, apart from Valmy De La Lande!" he muses. "I had one hand-me-down from my dad that had jumped five-star grands prix."

Isabelle also benefitted from equine "hand-me-downs".

"I was lucky to have horses that Mum had ridden and would pass down, either older ones or younger ones that weren't going to make top horses but were good enough for me," she says.

International dressage rider Gareth Hughes, whose 17-year-old daughter Ruby is following in his footsteps, cautions that there's a flip side to these practical benefits. Success is sometimes attributed to the family's set-up rather than to the rider's talent and hard work.

"People assume that we spend millions of pounds on horses and that's why Ruby does well," he says.

"So far, we've bought one horse for her, a youngster, and she had to put some money in. Everything else we've loaned. People don't see that, they assume that because we ride at the level we do, these horses are led out of the stable for her and she gets to tootle down the centre line."

AS well as having facilities, equestrian families are a treasure trove of knowledge, which Leonie says can be a huge advantage.

"If you think about the different areas you'd need advice in – from vet issues to navigating the structure

Isabelle Cook was also inspired by one of her parents, eventing legend Tina.

"I remember going to all the big events at a young age, the Badminton and Burghleys, unaware really of what was happening," Isabelle says. "But when I went to the London Olympics in 2012, I suddenly realised Mum was quite famous! I felt the success and I just wanted to do that and nothing else. Growing up with it, I'd never known any different."

IT'S a story with which Leonie Lightfoot, performance coach with British Equestrian, is very familiar.

"If you've been brought up in an equestrian family, it's part of your identity," she says. "If a family is involved in equestrian sport, it's highly likely a child gets the message that being involved in equestrian sport is fun, important and valued by this family."

Leonie points out that there are many practical benefits of coming from an equestrian family.



"My dad doesn't say a lot but what he does say is unbelievable... an endless supply of advice"

JACK WHITAKER

"Whether it's being able to borrow a lorry or having horses at home to ride, there are fewer barriers if you're

Laura's choice

I find it fascinating all those family dynasties that there are in equestrian sport. I never had that, so I thought it would be interesting to delve into that different side of growing up and to see what they think the pros and cons are. From the outside, we might assume they have a massive advantage on the rest of us but is that the reality?

Three generations: Althea Gifford with Tina (on Jim Chromiak's Cymoon "F" Z) and Isabelle Cook

