



Kings Sedgemoor Equestrian Centre, Chard Equestrian and Mendip Plains Equestrian Centre all host affiliated and unaffiliated showjumping and dressage. Pontispool runs Cotswold Cup qualifiers and other unaffiliated one-day events throughout the season. Bicton, Prestige and Hartpury are within a reasonable distance, too.

"Those considering the commercial potential of a property will factor in proximity to competitions and events," says Chris Johnson, senior associate director at Strutt & Parker. "This is one reason why Somerset is home to some of the region's most sought-after equestrian properties."

BUT whether you're a professional or an amateur, there's one thing that Chris says is non-negotiable – the quality of the land.

"Light loam and chalk-based soils are preferred, as they offer good drainage and year-round usability," he says. "Heavy clay can become waterlogged in winter and harden in summer, while sandy soil can pose health risks such as colic if horses

ingest too much of it. Well-established, free-draining grass is essential."

The quality of the land was a key factor in Katie and Robin Dumas's decision to base themselves near Shepton Mallet some 30 years ago.

"My husband wanted to build a quality cross-country course, so it had to be very free-draining," says Katie.

They bought a 30-acre former dairy farm in 1991 for just £120,000 and it's now home to Team Dumas, an eventing and sales yard that they run with their daughter, international event rider Millie Dumas.

Katie says the location is perfect.

"We're at the foot of the Mendip Hills, so we don't have to box our horses anywhere to get them fit. It's under an hour from Badminton and if you have a novice eventer, you don't have to travel more than an hour to get to lots of events."

And when it comes to sales, nearby Bristol airport has helped attract clients from overseas.

"They can fly in for the day, try a few horses and fly home," says Katie.

Their cross-country course is aimed at professionals – Tom McEwen and Laura Collett trained there before the Olympics – and now has more than 350 fences.

"We've got tricky lines, two water fences, one of which was specifically built for the British team to practise for London, and we're building a third," says Katie. "The ground is superb, there's a lovely cushion of Somerset grass – we don't graze it, so it's always pristine for the precious event horses."

While it might not be the first thing that equestrians consider, Katie highlights Somerset schools like Millfield and King's Bruton as another plus.

"Every autumn, we get calls from estate agents with families who want to buy our property!" she says.

"Everyone who comes here says it's so friendly"

KATIE DUMAS

The Dumas have no plans to leave Somerset, though.

"It's a horsey county and everyone who comes here says it's so friendly," Katie adds. "Somerset is the best-kept secret, but there are more and more event riders here now."

Fellow event rider Alex Bragg and his wife Simmone both grew up in Somerset and, for them, there was no question of setting up anywhere else.

"We had started a family before we became professional event riders and Somerset was home," Alex explains. "It was where the children went to school, where their friends lived and it was where we were happy."

"We live very near the M5 so it's very convenient for travel. We can easily access big roads in our lorry to get to events and training."

SOMERSET has a particular appeal for those seeking a better quality of life.

"Generally, buyers have made a lifestyle decision to move to the south-west, to work from home or commute two or three days per week," says Justin Lowe, partner at Greenslade Taylor Hunt.

The county's laid-back attitude was something that Samantha Osborn

