



OFFICIAL RIDER BIOGRAPHY
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Nicola McGivern

- Date of birth:** 7 December 1966.
- Lives:** Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire.
- Major achievements:** Nicola was short-listed for the 2002 World Equestrian Games in her first year of partnering Active Walero. They went on to win team bronze at the 2003 European Championships at Hickstead and were members of the British team at the 2004 Athens Olympics. In 2004 and 2008, they were reserve national champions.
- Current competition horses:**
- Active Walero, a 17.1hh Hanoverian bay gelding by Wanderer out of Marata, born 1991 and owned by Active Equestrian.
 - Active Enigma, a 17.2hh gelding by Archipel, born 1996 and owned by Active Equestrian.
 - Active Valentino, a 17.1hh black gelding by Don Primaire, born 1998 and owned by Active Equestrian. Active Private Dancer, a 17hh chestnut gelding by Jazz, born 1997 and owned by Active Equestrian. Nicola breeds her own horses and is bringing on a number of youngsters.
- First competitive experience:** “My first success was when I won the working hunter pony championships at the New Forest County Show when I was 15. I was riding my first pony, a New Forest dun mare. I got Bubbles when I was 13 and she spent most of her time bolting with me in our first year.”
- Trainer:** Norbert van Laak
- Superstitions:** “I’m superstitious about not having any superstitions because I would become obsessive. On the 2006 Spanish Sunshine Tour, I found myself leaning towards favouring a particular pair of socks, so I had to have a long, hard talk with myself.”
- Most admired riders:** “Germany’s Ulla Salzgeber has her horses working really ‘uphill’. I admire how Holland’s Anky van Grunsven in the middle of a freestyle test can adapt her whole test to accommodate a spook. Germany’s Hubertus Schmidt is a beautiful rider and my trainer Norbert van Laak has such empathy with horses. He is a horseman first and a dressage rider second.”
- Qualities looked for in a dressage horse:** “Before I bought Walero, I would have talked about the importance of conformation, but it isn’t everything as Walero has proven. I still look for a horse with an ‘uphill’ conformation and am fanatical about biomechanics. I like to see a horse move with his whole body, rather than just having flashy leg action.”
- Favourite dressage venues:** Norten-Hardenberg and Wiesbaden in Germany and Dressage at Hickstead.
- What other career would you have chosen:** “Not a chef – I can’t cook to save my life. Perhaps a Formula 1 racing driver or some other job involving speed.”
- Favourite meal:** “Anything my husband puts in front of me.”
- Favourite drink:** “My sponsor’s Ruinart Champagne and Bombay G & T.”

Nicola, who comes from a non-horsey family, has been fanatical about horses since she was a little girl.

"My mother says I talked about horses all the time and read every horse book I could lay my hands on," she says.

Nicola started riding when she was 11. This was at a showing yard, where she helped produce New Forest ponies and then she moved on to a stud, where she learned to produce Welsh Section A show and working hunter ponies. When the family moved to a house with a paddock, 13-year-old Nicola finally got her first pony, a dun New Forest mare called Bubbles.

At 16, encouraged by her parents to have a "proper" career, Nicola started working at Barclays Bank and tried to give up riding.

"I sold my ponies, including Bubbles. After six months I realised it was never going to happen, so I bought my first mare from the money I had saved while I was working and didn't have any horses to keep. As I bought her all by myself, without anybody else's advice, I called her 'Solo Venture'."

A car accident in which Nicola injured her back and neck was the catalyst for her completing a computer course. She went on to become the youngest computer consultant at the Foreign Office at the time. While out of action, she also decided to put Solo Venture in foal. Choosing a sire ended up being a straightforward decision. She went to a stallion parade at her local stud, Catherston Stud, where she watched Britain's dressage doyenne Jennie Loriston-Clarke ride the international grand prix stallion Catherston Dazzler, who was only three at the time. The result was Razzle Dazzle, whom Nicola competed up to prix st georges level, with the help of her trainer Jook Hall.

In the meantime, Nicola met her husband-to-be through the Foreign Office and John encouraged her to leave her job and set up First Equestrian, a livery and dealing yard. They bought The Fieldhouse in Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire. Also their home, it has 15 stables and an outdoor arena.

John was also instrumental in his wife achieving international competition success.

"He insisted I needed a grand prix schoolmaster, so we ended up buying Alan Doxey's ride, Royal Star. This horse taught me everything, especially humility as we came last in every single grand prix we entered."

In 2002, Nicola once again turned misfortune into something positive.

"I was going through a particularly bad time, having lost three horses within a 10-week period. One of my youngsters was injured while being broken, I lost my top horse, a stallion by Cocktail, due to colic and my livery Fiona James's grand prix horse severed an artery in a freak accident while travelling in a lorry."

The result was a new business, Active Equestrian, which Nicola set up with livery owner and friend Fiona James. This new venture resulted in the purchase of another yard seven miles away. Sedges Farm has another 30 stables, an indoor school, spa facilities for the horses and brings the acreage to a total of 165.

It was also in 2002 that Nicola started to ride the horse that made her Olympic dream come true. Active Walero, who was in training with German trainer Norbert van Laak, was bought as a flagship for Active Equestrian.

