



Hook Norton
Veterinary Group

White Hills Surgery, Sibford Road, Hook
Norton, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX15 5DG

Pets: 01608 730501
Equine & Farm: 01608 730085

enquiries@hooknortonvets.co.uk
www.hooknortonvets.co.uk

Living the dream

Samantha Cutts of Hook Norton Vets shares her passion for breeding and international eventing

The Insights Team were fortunate enough to catch up with Vet and International Event Rider Sam Cutts before the start of both the breeding and eventing seasons and Sam shared with us her remarkable career and how she practices what she preaches from a veterinary perspective. Sam is the senior Equine Partner at Hook Norton Vets and is also the Senior Veterinary Surgeon at Stratford Racecourse.

Sam had the dream of becoming a vet at the age of eight years old after meeting a charismatic vet who treated one of her ponies and eventually trained at

Cambridge University to become a fully qualified vet herself.

Sam started riding at the age of four and quickly became a member of the Spooners & West Dartmoor Pony Club where she was part of the Pony Club Area Eventing team with her horse Piccola Star and

then she went on to be part of the Team GBR junior event team in 2003 and also took part in Young Rider Trials.

Sam's ride Piccola Star – a mare - took her all the way from Pony Club through to Advanced and CCI5* whilst Sam was also training to be a vet. Piccola Star was by the



Sam Cutts with Piccola Diavola as a foal



Hook Norton
Veterinary Group

White Hills Surgery, Sibford Road, Hook
Norton, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX15 5DG

Pets: 01608 730501
Equine & Farm: 01608 730085

enquiries@hooknortonvets.co.uk
www.hooknortonvets.co.uk

Irish full Thoroughbred Stallion I'm A Star who was also the sire of Mary King's Badminton and Burghley winning ride Star Appeal who won Badminton in 2000 and Burghley in 1996 and was 7th individually at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Piccola Star was 75% TB blood and Sam described her as incredibly brave and fast cross country. During Sam's time at Vet School she was also competing in U25 classes at the same time. In her second year at vet school Sam and Piccola Star did the

U25 Championship class at Bramham with very much the support of her Senior Tutor at Cambridge who was very in favour of women competing in the top levels of sport.

It's not surprising given Sam's success with Piccola Star that she eventually decided to breed from her after sustaining an injury at Luhmühlen CCI5* - which happened in Sam's 3rd year at Cambridge. The resulting foal was a filly by the event stallion Devils Jump whom she named Piccola Diavola.

Piccola Diavola was successful like her dam and jumped clear round her first B.E. Advanced at Little Downham and qualified for the 8 and 9 year old CCI4*-S at Blenheim in the same year. The pair went on to take 11th place in the CCI4*-S at Barrocca in 2019.

Having bred a successful daughter from Piccola Star in Piccola Diavola Sam decided to breed from Piccola Diavola; but this time by embryo transfer using the stallion Wish Upon A Star. Sam was able to use her reproductive skills



Sam and Piccola Diavola at Blenheim CCI4-S 8-9 year old. Copyright Matt Nuttall



Hook Norton
Veterinary Group

White Hills Surgery, Sibford Road, Hook
Norton, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX15 5DG

Pets: 01608 730501
Equine & Farm: 01608 730085

enquiries@hooknortonvets.co.uk
www.hooknortonvets.co.uk



Sam and Piccola Star at Saumur CCI4-L

on her own behalf for once, synchronising Piccola Diavola with her two recipients before a highly successful walk in flush at Tomlinson Equine (a partnership that has worked well for Sam and her clients) resulting in three fertilised embryos and two fabulous fillies for Sam, so preserving the fabulous dam line for the future.

Now four years old, the fillies are very different to each other with one (Piccola Stella) being bigger, confident and faster to mature and looks quite warmblood in type and the

other (Piccola Ivy) is smaller less quick to mature and has a more sensitive disposition and looks more Thoroughbred in type. Sam is smart in recognising the differences in the two youngsters and intends to produce them both differently; it is her plan to produce Stella for four-year old classes and Ivy is not likely to make her first outing until she turns five years old.

Sam took Piccola Stella to the Futurity as a two-year old where she won a gold award but didn't put Piccola Ivy forwards as she was less

mature and needed a little more time to grow and strengthen. The plan is to produce Piccola Ivy for the Nexgen series for young event horses, but Sam doesn't feel under pressure to do too much with her too soon as Piccola Diavola was slow to mature and didn't do the 5 and 6 year old classes but still made it to Blenheim for the 8 & 9 year old CCI4*-S.

Sam described the two sisters as both having the same lovely straightforward trainable temperaments which was also one of their dams most



Hook Norton
Veterinary Group

White Hills Surgery, Sibford Road, Hook
Norton, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX15 5DG

Pets: 01608 730501
Equine & Farm: 01608 730085

enquiries@hooknortonvets.co.uk
www.hooknortonvets.co.uk



Sam and Piccola Diavola competing at Barroca d'Alva CCI4-S' Copyright EquusPix

endearing traits which made her not only a successful event horse but also as a pure dressage horse. However, with the commitment of work and the arrival of a baby daughter called Sophia nine months ago, Sam decided to sell Piccola Stella to Louise Bradley.

Having secured the bloodline again via Piccola Ivy, Sam intends to breed again but this time from her dam Piccola Diavola when she retires and to do this directly rather than via embryo transfer. Outside of work Sam still successfully juggles being a mother, an event horse breeder and competing at

the highest levels. She is currently competing at PSG level with Piccola Diavola and was training at Inter 1 over the winter. Sam feels that competing in pure dressage at this level has also helped educate her eyes on the ground as a performance vet.

On competing at this level Sam said: *"It also helps to understand her client's goals and qualification needs especially when injuries happen and plans need re-adjusting to allow for medication and recovery"*.

Sam said that if a horse sustains an injury and a desired goal isn't possible

then she understands the emotions involved when she has to deliver news that neither the rider or the owner particularly wants to hear but has a compassion and understanding being a serious owner/rider herself. She also joked that she had done more than her fair share of riding horses after box rest and so had an understanding of how difficult it can sometimes be to stick to rehabilitation plans! Sam's determination as a rider is clearly evident in other parts of her life. She was back at work nine weeks after having her daughter Sophia and back eventing a week after that.



Hook Norton
Veterinary Group

Pets: 01608 730501
Equine & Farm: 01608 730085

enquiries@hooknortonvets.co.uk
www.hooknortonvets.co.uk

Why Hook Norton Vets?

Sam joined Hook Norton vets in 2012 after doing maternity cover for Fiona Elliot who owned Jonty Evans rider Cooley Rourkes Drift; but then never actually left! She is the only equine partner and has overall responsibility for a department of 10 equine vets and 5 nurses. Sam also heads up the breeding team and has a strong interest in

performance horse work and so those two areas take up the vast majority of her clinical time.

Whilst Sam has been a beneficiary and leader of Hook Norton's equine reproduction services it is not a new field to them and was in fact set up by Simon Richards MRCVS 25 years ago.

With there being an increasing number of vet practices in

the UK we asked Sam what was so special about Hook Norton? Her first answer was its independence at a time when there is considerable consolidation in the UK of vet practices creating an increasingly corporate environment for customers. Sam believes that Hook Norton's independence allows them to offer a service which is individual to each client.



Sam Cutts eventing with her baby daughter Sophia and nanny Simone



Hook Norton
Veterinary Group

White Hills Surgery, Sibford Road, Hook
Norton, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX15 5DG

Pets: 01608 730501
Equine & Farm: 01608 730085

enquiries@hooknortonvets.co.uk
www.hooknortonvets.co.uk



Sam Cutts with Piccola Stella, taken as a 3 year old

Hook Norton is rare in that it is 100% owned and run by the six directors within Hook Norton Vets. The team there do not have any shareholders to answer to and all of the business decisions are made by their own vets working within the practice. However, Hook Norton does work with other fully independent practices in a wider group called 'XL Vets' which enables them to unleash corporate advantages such as increased buying power, group training, and a graduate training programme.

As the practice approaches its 40-year anniversary Sam believes that this gives them further advantage in the marketplace. This allows them to become embedded in the local area and are proud to offer a brilliant service to their clients – some of whom they have worked with over several generations!

Sam believes the level of specialist care that they are able to offer to a range of animals whether that be horses, cats, dogs, farm animals and domestic pets

sets them apart from other practices and also allows them to meet the full spectrum of their client's needs – after all, which horse owners don't own a dog or a cat!

With a client base including WG Stud who stand Silvester and Carthargo Chicago, Team Way Eventing, and Hill View Stud it is no surprise that Hook Norton are one of the most respected vet practices for equine reproduction in the Midlands.