

Leaving accountancy and setting up the riding holidays company In the Saddle has enabled Olwen Law to see six of the world's continents on horseback and turn other people's dreams into reality.



turning dreams into reality

Growing up on a farm near Hillsborough, outside Belfast, Olwen Law was, she says, a "typical, pony-mad little girl" dreaming of the horses she would one day own and the places she would ride.

"After lots of persuasion, my parents bought me my first pony when I was 11," she says. "He was a 12.2hh, Dun Connemara gelding called Seamus and we

had lots of fun doing Pony Club activities." After Seamus, Olwen had another 14.2hh pony but, as she grew older and went to university, she wasn't left with much spare time to pursue her equestrian hobby.

She studied economics at Queen's University, Belfast, then went to Dublin to work and qualify as a chartered accountant, before moving on to teach accountancy and tax at Dublin City University.

"I was then what I would call a recreational rider, escaping to ride at various stables in Dublin in my free time and embarking on the odd holiday," says Olwen. "In fact, it was during this time that I made my first trip to Castle Leslie – which is actually one of our destinations now.

"The accommodation is significantly nicer now, but Castle Leslie still offers some of the most wonderful riding that Ireland has to offer."

In 1987, Olwen made the brave decision to move to England to continue her accountancy career. "I worked for a very large company called Arthur Andersen and carried out management development roles in London and throughout the UK," she says.

"One of my responsibilities was career development, to help all of the young accountants find their direction. I used a number of tools, starting with visualisation, then setting objectives and plans for how to make it happen."

Then, Olwen practised what she preached! "I decided that I wanted to do something completely different with my life and I didn't want to be part of a large organisation any more," she explains.

"So I used my own teaching techniques to help me decide what I wanted to do.

Olwen Law's beloved Arabian, Cal, has given the accountant-turned-riding holidays company founder success in endurance competitions.

One of the perks of the job is testing out the holidays, such as this one in Portugal.



Spectacular beach rides are a feature of the Wild Coast holiday, in South Africa.



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Over the next year, Olwen started researching and collecting cuttings from magazines and newspapers about topics she was interested in and it soon became apparent that riding holidays were a recurring theme.

"Setting up my own travel business was not an idea formed overnight," she says, "but, one day, I simply decided I needed to give it a go and gave my notice in at Arthur Andersen.

"I was fortunate that they didn't want me to leave, so offered me consultancy work, which worked perfectly for me and gave me time to focus on my new venture."

In 1995, after Olwen's sister came up with the name In the Saddle, the travel company was born. "My first stop was Montana," recalls Olwen, "and, after trawling through tourist literature – this was pre-Internet days – off I went, armed with business cards and plenty of enthusiasm.

I made a list of all the things I liked doing, three of which were horse riding, travelling and photography, and that formed the basis of my plans.

Olwen spent part of her honeymoon in Macatoo, in Botswana's Okavango Delta – complete with giraffes – and it is now in her company's brochure.



"I spent two weeks signing up ranches, several of which are still with us now. Then, over the next few months, I signed up rides in Iceland and Spain, which gave me enough information to put together our first four-page brochure, which we printed in 1996!

"This, combined with exhibiting at the Adventure Travel Show and a couple of ads in *Horse & Hound* magazine, helped us to sell 120 holidays in that first year!"

During this time, Olwen met her future husband, James Sales, who was a geologist by profession but soon became heavily involved with In



the Saddle – making the business a true way of life for both of them.

"In 1996, we moved to Basingstoke, in Hampshire, and a year later we got married," says Olwen. "We spent a wonderful, three-week honeymoon travelling around South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

"We visited Ant's Lodge, which was merely a concept at that time, and spent time at Macatoo, in the Okavango Delta, in Botswana, as well as visiting Victoria

Falls. It was here that I really fell in love with horseback safaris – they provide the ultimate outdoor experience.

"In South Africa, they barbecue in temperatures when we would be tucked up inside but, because it is so dry, even if it is cold you can wrap up and spend hours under the stars, just enjoying the night's sky!"

In the Saddle's number of destinations grew and, by 1998, Olwen had converted her garage in Basingstoke into an office with four employees. "We had some amazing exposure on television," she admits.

"Programmes that don't exist any more featured some of our holidays, including a particularly memorable evening that showed Anthea Turner on a ranch in Texas for *Wish You Were Here...*

"Luckily, we knew it was running that evening, so I had asked everyone to come to work and, sure enough, the moment the final credits went up, the phone didn't stop ringing!"

As with any business, there are highs and lows. "Riding out on September 11th 2001 was tough," Olwen admits. "We actually had a group flying to Africa that evening and I remember exactly where I was when the news broke.

"I had been to the bank and was driving back to the office, and heard something about an explosion in America. By the time I got back to the office and flicked on the TV, it was evident that this was going to be a huge problem for us.

Fairy chimneys and underground towns are highlights of the Cappadocia trails ride, in Turkey (left).

It was in the Okavango Delta, in Botswana, and at Victoria Falls that I really fell in love with horseback safaris – they provide the ultimate outdoor experience.



Taking photographs enables Olwen to keep In the Saddle's brochures and website up to date.

"I drove to Heathrow to make sure that the group got to their destination, which they did, but we had clients stuck at various places across the world. The ones who were more than halfway across the Atlantic were worst hit. Some clients spent nearly a week on an air base in Canada. It was very traumatic for all involved and something I will never forget.

"Similarly, the volcanic ash cloud, in 2010, caused chaos and we had around 40 clients stuck at various locations around the world. It is these times when I am so pleased to have such a great team around me, as we had to put all hands on deck to keep people up to date and help them find a way home."

Shortly after September 11th, Olwen and James decided they had no need to be based in Basingstoke any longer and the time had come to put the next stage of their life plan in place.

"By this time, I had owned my beloved Arabian, Cal, for several years and had already grown to love long-distance riding, and the area we lived in was getting more built-up and busy.

"We looked everywhere, from Staffordshire down to Cornwall, with the aim of finding a property that had a barn we could convert into an office. Purely by chance, we came across the perfect location in Shropshire. We moved in 2003 and, by the end of the following year, we had finished converting the barn. We still run In the Saddle from there now."



Olwen samples her company's Moolmanshoek holiday, in South Africa, in a private reserve surrounded by some of the country's highest mountains.

Perhaps the most exciting journey in Olwen's life is not one that involved lots of travel, but the beginning of her family. "In 2008, James and I adopted two sisters when they were just three and four years old," she explains. "They are now seven and eight, and having them has been an amazing lifestyle change!"

"They love the business and, although they haven't been on a riding holiday yet, they are desperate to and have regular riding lessons at school. Our eight-year-old is a great ambassador – at Bramham Horse Trials, she learned her script and was drawing people into the stand with her 'sales-speak!'"

Having the girls has meant that Olwen has had to rein in her own riding. "Cal is still going strong at 19 years old, although my own riding has taken a back seat over the past few years," she admits.

"We had some amazing times, competing up to 80km and, at his peak in 2006, he was the top-ranking endurance horse in the Heart of England!"

On reflection, Olwen has already achieved so much and is an inspiration for people wanting to follow their dreams, but the In the Saddle journey is certainly nowhere near finished.

"When I look through all of our old brochures, it brings back wonderful memories of the times that have been and gone," she says. "It never stops, though. The brochure is now 280 pages long – a bit different from the four pages we started with!"

In Mongolia, Olwen enjoys the wide, open landscape and hospitality of the people.



A LIFE IN TRAVEL

Olwen Law has visited so many places around the globe, but here are just a few that stand out for her...

South America

"It was an exhilarating experience, taking just a rucksack, travellers' cheques and a credit card for emergencies. I travelled all over, but Argentina and Chile both left a lasting impression on me."

Montana

"I can really see why Hollywood film stars buy a whole valley or ranch in Big Sky country! I have been around four or five times to Montana and the scenery is spectacular. Bonanza Creek was the first ranch holiday I signed up when I started In the Saddle back in 1995 and it is still on our books now, so it holds a special place in my heart."

Iceland

"I have always thought that Iceland is one of the most amazing places to ride horses, and the most fun! Tolting [a unique Icelandic horse gait] across the wilderness offers a variety of terrains and breathtaking views."

Okavango Delta, Botswana

"Macatoo is where James and I spent some of our honeymoon in 1997. Seeing wild African game in their natural habitat is one of the ultimate ways to get an adrenalin fix and the luxury camping there is very memorable."

Mongolia

"This country has such a wide, open landscape and is said to be where nomads invented riding! This isn't a holiday for the fainthearted – you will experience a totally different way of life. The Mongolian people are famous for their hospitality and spending time with them is a privilege."

Turkey

"Going to Cappadocia, in the middle of Turkey, was a unique experience because of the area's geological interests, including the fairy chimneys, underground towns and the Christian churches carved out of rock."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON IN THE SADDLE RIDING HOLIDAYS, LOG ON TO WWW.INTHESADDLE.COM.



Great Prizes for the Right Answers

The *Equestrian's* readers have the chance to win some great prizes in this month's competitions. Just answer the simple questions.

Then send your entries on a postcard or back of a sealed envelope to *The Equestrian*, MAI Publications, Revenue Chambers, St Peter's Street, Huddersfield HD1 1DL, United Kingdom. Write each question number, followed by the answer – and include sizes and preferred colours where appropriate. Don't forget to add your name, address, telephone number and email address if appropriate, and tell us where you purchased your copy of *The Equestrian*. Write 'August 2012' in the bottom, right-hand corner. Entries close 23 August 2012.

hood for a horse

HERE'S a chance for two *Equestrian* readers to win a Lycra hood from Snuggly Hoods, ideal for combating manes that have minds of their own or horses who drive you mad when they rub those plaits out before you even get to the show.

The hood is made from the finest, yet durable, Lycra and is a firm favourite with top showing professionals. It is used to kick-start training the mane to lie flat and keep plaits tidy the night before a show and in place while travelling, as well as ensuring native locks are hay-free so that your horse or pony arrives at the showground clean, tidy and ready for the ring.

The hood comes in navy, royal blue, black and limited-edition sparkle, sizes XXXS to XXL.

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Q1: What is this Snuggly hood made from?