

Bella Innes Ker, 29
GBR

It will be a first Defender Burghley for Britain's Bella Innes Ker (29) and her ride Highway II.

Bella, who turns 30 on cross-country day at Burghley, originally started her riding career as a keen member of the Duke of Buccleuch Hunt and Pony Club branch in the Scottish Borders. There was also success in the show ring, largely competing in working hunter pony classes. Bella has grown up with strong equestrian links: her late father, Guy Innes Ker, the 10th Duke of Roxburghe, running Floors Stud, a commercial thoroughbred breeding operation from which he bred many successful racehorses. Bella's mother Virginia, Duchess of Roxburghe, was the organiser of Floors Castle International Horse Trials at the family seat, an event that ran in the Borders for 26 years.

Bella was junior national champion in 2012, and represented her country on three occasions at Junior and Young Rider European Championships and was a member of two gold medal-winning teams.

After completing university and graduating with a first-class honours degree in sports management, Bella spent 2018 eventing full-time and the highlight of that season was leading the CCI4*-L from start to finish at Blenheim, becoming the youngest winner of that class in history. Bella then based herself at William Fox-Pitt's Dorset yard for two years before setting up on her own on the West Berkshire/Wiltshire border, just outside Hungerford.

Highway II (Baltic VDL-Voltara (Voltaire Pref)), owned by Roxburghe Eventing, Benjamin Chan and Milly Soames, is a Dutch-bred KWPN registered 12-year-old gelding, who was bred by W Beyers. Bella has produced Highway since he was a "rebellious" five-year-old. "He was quite the class clown as a young horse but as he started to progress up the levels his unbelievable talent and scope started to show," says Bella. Highway and Bella made their five-star debut at Pau in 2023, where they finished 33rd. They followed this up with 22nd place in the five-star at Luhmühlen in June 2024.