

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's Olympic showjumper Nick Skelton

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... I lost the full movement in my neck after I broke it in a fall while riding in 2000. It won't ever come back totally.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd rob the Bank of England and use the money to build an indoor arena so I wouldn't have to ride in the rain any more.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Cadbury Dairy Milk – I have at least one bar a day.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand. It's a true story about US airman Louis Zamperini's survival in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in the Second World War. It makes you appreciate what you have.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I loved the movie Grease when I was younger, so I'd go back in time and watch John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John film the final dance scene. I wanted to be John Travolta.

Right: Muhammad Ali. Above right: building materials. Far right: the Royal Hawaiian Hotel

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... I can't stand mess. The yard at our Lodge Hill stables in Warwickshire has to be swept every day and everything has to be in its place.

The film you can watch time and time again... True Grit with John Wayne is the best Western ever made and Robert Duvall, who played Ned Pepper, is a friend of mine. He's really into show-jumping and we see each other every winter in Florida.

The person who has influenced you most... My dad David. He took me to horse shows all over the country when I was starting out. He's 85 now and is still at work on the gallops by 8am every day.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Muhammad Ali – I'd ask him how it felt when Henry Cooper put him on his back in 1963. I met Ali at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. He had such a presence and it was an honour to chat to him.

'I've had huge offers to sell my horse Big Star, including one for £12 million in 2013, but he's part of the family'

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...

Building. I love being part of building an extension or things around the stables.

The prized possession you value above all others... My horse, Big Star. He's 13 now and I've had him since he was five. We've had huge offers to sell him – including one for £12 million in 2013 – but he's part of the family.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... I once sold a horse called Top Gun who went on to win gold at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Listen to your parents more! Even my boys Dan, who's 31 and a racehorse trainer, and Harry, who's 27 and a jockey, listen to me for a bit, then say, 'Oh shut up, Dad!'

The unending quest that drives you on... To keep winning. My fear of failure keeps driving me on and my boys are exactly the same.

The poem that touches your soul... I'm not into poetry, but the national anthem means a lot to me. To stand on the podium listening to it is a great moment.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... A lot of people think I'm tight! I'm careful with money, but I'm also very generous and always get my round in at the bar.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... When I was 20 and I broke the British high jump record on Lastic at Olympia in 1978. People knew who I was after that – and the record, 2.32m, still stands.

The song that means most to you... Bruce Springsteen's Dancing In The Dark is great. I know him as his daughter Jessica is a showjumper who lived with us for a while a few years ago when she was learning to ride.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd take a day off from riding and start with a champagne breakfast with my partner Laura at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, Honolulu (right). Then we'd relax on nearby Waikiki Beach with my boys, Dan's wife Grace and their daughter Flo, who's three. At lunchtime I'd visit The

King's Head pub in Aston Cantlow, Warwickshire, for a few pints, then rejoin the family in Bora Bora in the South Pacific. I'd have shellfish and spend the rest of the day snorkelling. We'd take over a luxury villa in Tortola, British Virgin Islands, for the night where I'd have a steak and red wine for dinner. After all that food, I don't think the magic carpet would be able to lift off to take me home!

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... When Dan and Harry walked into the winners' enclosure at Cheltenham this year after their first win there with Superb Story. I felt very proud.

The saddest time that shook your world... When my mum Norma died aged 76 in her sleep in 2007. It was a shock because she'd been so well.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To travel the world making a TV series about riding a different breed of horse in each country.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Treat every day like it's your last because one day it will be.

The order of service at your funeral... Keep it simple and have a big party afterwards, then bury me at the top of the gallops at Lodge Hill.

The way you want to be remembered... That lad could ride a bit.

The Plug... The Range Rover SVR is just fantastic. It's like a rocket on the road and an absolute pleasure to drive. Visit landrover.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Jennifer Connelly stars in crime drama American Pastoral – in cinemas from Friday. Sting's new album 57th & 9th is out on the same day. And Lazarus, the David Bowie musical, opens at London's King's Cross Theatre on Tuesday

NEXT WEEK

- Part one of Monty Don's guide to creating a wonderful winter garden
- Antonio Carluccio's recipe for late-life love – plus five pages of his delicious Italian vegetable dishes
- Britain's best TV listings