

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's former champion jockey Willie Carson

The prized possession you value above all others... My Norfolk terrier Chester. He's full of character and he follows me everywhere at our stud farm in Gloucestershire.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not paying as much attention to my family as my career. I missed a lot of fun times with my boys – Anthony, 55, Neil, 54, and Ross, 50 – when they were younger, and their mother Carole and I got divorced. But I have a great relationship with the boys now and, if I'm honest, it was probably a price worth paying.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Black Beauty by Anna Sewell. I first read it in my early teens, when I was thinking of becoming a jockey, and I was swept away by the romance and emotion.

The priority activity if you were the invisible man for a day... I'd follow the Queen around in private to find out what she truly thinks. I've met her several times and she's incredible – but even though she's the most famous woman in the world, no one really knows her.

Right: Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey in Dirty Dancing. Above right: croissants and jam. Far right: Barbados



The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Tarmac layers who come to my farm and offer to lay some tarmac they have left over for a low price. They always botch it.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Buying moderately good horses. We have more than 50 already and my wife Elaine hates me going to the sales as I usually come back with one I shouldn't have bought.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Colonel David Stirling, who founded the SAS in 1941. I'd ask how he found the courage to lead a bunch of ruffians behind enemy lines.

The film you can watch time and time again... Dirty Dancing. It's a soppy story, but I used to be a bit of a mover so it caught my imagination.



'People think I'm hard – I've always been competitive, but out of the saddle I'm as soft as butter'



The person who's influenced you most... Bernard van Cutsem, the aristocratic horse breeder and trainer who took me under his wing in my 20s. I was a working-class kid and he taught me

how to eat alongside lords and ladies. He died from cancer aged 59 in 1975.

The song that means most to you... I'm a positive person, so it's Don't Worry Be Happy by Bobby McFerrin.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Rugby league – it's played with great sportsmanship.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The strength in my right arm – it's gone over the past two years so I'm too afraid to ride.

The unending quest that drives you on... To keep busy. I'm 74 now, but I'm still a workaholic.

The poem that touches your soul... Henry Scott Holland's Death Is Nothing At All is comforting at funerals.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Be truthful. If you tell lies you'll get found out.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm hard. I've always been competitive, but out of the saddle I'm as soft as butter.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Being given a job by Major Dick Hern when I was 34. That's how I started riding class horses and reached the big time.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd devise a brilliant way to steal our gold reserves from the Bank of England.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves. I'm a Scot and I've been quite shrewd.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To win the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe in Paris – it's the biggest race that eluded me.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd begin the day quietly on the balcony at the George V hotel in Paris. I'd have a croissant

with jam and read the Racing Post. Elaine would join me for a walk around the city, then we'd have lunch at La Colombe d'Or in Saint-Paul de Vence in the south of France. I'd have plaiçe and Chablis. We'd spend the afternoon in Barbados with my sons and their partners and my six grandchildren, who are all in their 20s, and my four great-grandchildren, all under six. I'd go waterskiing, which I used to be good at. As it's a fantasy day I'd then ride Troy, the horse I won the first of my four Derbies on in 1979, to victory in the Arc de Triomphe. Dinner would be steak in Buenos Aires with Elaine, then we'd go dancing.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... When an owner I was riding for gave me a silver Mercedes in the 1980s. I looked like a child driving it!

The saddest time that shook your world... I was devastated when our horse Chriselliam was put down in 2014, after a foot infection went up her leg. She'd won a Breeders' Cup trophy and we could have travelled the world winning with her, but it was cut short.

The order of service at your funeral... It'll be at a church near our home, where I've bought a plot for Elaine and me next to my parents. I've requested a bagpiper to play Amazing Grace.

The way you want to be remembered... As a champion jockey.

The Plug... The Investec Derby Festival runs from 2-3 June at Epsom Downs. Book tickets at derby.investec.com. ■
As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Cynthia Nixon is poet Emily Dickinson in *A Quiet Passion* – in cinemas from Friday. Deep Purple's new album *InFinite* is out the same day. And Damian Lewis opens in *The Goat, Or Who Is Sylvia?* at Theatre Royal Haymarket on Wednesday



NEXT WEEK

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- Britain's best TV guide