

GALLOPING AHEAD

Here's what it takes to be India's only woman horse breeder

TINA BARUAH

IF you want to meet me, come at 8 am. We are farmers, our days start early. If you come in the afternoon, you'll probably find me sleeping." That's Usha Farms' owner Ameeta Mehra, two years after her entire family, sparing younger sister and business partner Devika, was wiped off in a chopper crash. *Talk* finds out what it takes to be the only woman horse breeder in the country (Devika isn't involved in running the stud farm).

"Trot." Hundred and twenty three horses queued up in front of Mehra and vet Captain R.N. Phaugat in an 'inspection' parade. Mehra would take one good look at a horse and shout: "trot." It's a daily ritual at the three Usha Farms, two in Gurgaon and one in Pataudi in Haryana (yes, she actually takes the two-hour drive every alternate day).

Inspection round over, she drives down to a kindergarten that she set up in the campus two years back. "Education based on conscience is my first love. One day I'll start a university that works like a gurukul," she says. Mehra used to be a teacher at Mirambika, and has also taught villagers at Tilonia in Rajasthan.

Mehra claims to be "a bit like my horses, least emotional and most detached." And that's what helped her cope with her crisis.

"Two years back, I had everything, wonderful parents who led an amazing social life. In fact, I was taking a lot for granted. But my father (Major Pradeep Mehra) must have known, he was always in a hurry to teach me how to run this stud farm."

Initially, Mehra worked as a groom, carrying bags of horse feed on her back, eating langar with workers till her back hurt. Soon she was packed off to study management at IIM, Ahmedabad. She also studied equine management at the Irish National Stud in Kildare and later studied nutrition at Kentucky. The toughest part of being a woman horse breeder is selling and buying horses. "It's all about dealing with shrewd businessmen, or to be precise, their egos. Whenever I need my father's advice, I meditate and he guides me. But it depresses me a lot so I take comfort in spirituality and yoga."

And social life? "In Delhi, I have three sets of friends: philosophical, academic and horsy ones. I choose my company according to my mood. I don't enjoy big parties and dinners, so no one invites me to these anymore. I party a lot when I am abroad and that's at least 90 days a year." Mehra loves driving, "My whole life is a long drive. And I quite enjoy it." Quite naturally, she has a fleet of cars ranging from a Mercedes 270 CD i, a Skoda...



RAVI BATRA

Ameeta Mehra, owner of Usha Farms, with one of her prized horses at the Delhi Race Course