

## Ariana Rockefeller

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Bust 81cm / 32"

Waist 65cm / 25.5"

Hips 92cm / 36"

Shoes EU/US/UK 39 / 8 / 6

Eyes Green

Hair Brown



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# GOOD

Born into unimaginable wealth and privilege, the socialite, philanthropist and all-round arbiter of elegance  
Ariana Rockefeller believes there's nothing quite like a horse for keeping your feet on the ground

*By Eleanor KELLY Photographs by Brett WHITE Styling by Tina STELL*

# BREEDING

TELEGRAPH LUXURY

45

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**I**n a grassy meadow on a farm in Hampshire, Ariana Rockefeller prepares to mount a dark bay thoroughbred by the name of Echo. Normally this would be a simple matter for Rockefeller. But he's borrowed Echo, and she's wearing a billowing Carolina Herrera skirt for our shoot, so the logistics are a bit more complicated. And then there's the fact that she had a serious fall two months ago and shattered her pelvis, sacrum and ribs. No wonder her mother, Diana Howard Rockefeller, who has flown over to London from the US for the week-end, seems anxious as her daughter negotiates straps and stirrups. But Ariana herself looks entirely unperturbed. This is the first time she's ridden since Heidi. It feels so good to be back on board, she says in her soft-Atlantic drawl, the product of a life spent in Massachusetts, New York, Maine and, more recently, Europe.

She had her accident while jumping her horse in the Netherlands. 'It was definitely the worst fall I've ever had, but that's horses, and I've given no time to get really healthy and reflect,' she says cheerfully. Most recently, she's been recovering at the private King Edward VII's Hospital in Maylebone. And now, she and Echo can pose unappetizingly for the cameras despite the cold gust of wind sending clouds of fabric swirling out behind them.

Rockefeller says she inherited her passion for all things equestrian from her mother - a fearless rider on the hunting field in America, Britain and Ireland - and from her grandfather, David Rockefeller, who was still driving his horse and carriage at the age of 100. Ariana, meanwhile, has competed in amateur show-jumping competitions in America and Europe, but what she really loves is training horses and watching elite riders perform. She has recently joined a direct-to-videotape class of women who own a horse that they hope will compete at the highest level internationally. 'I love every minute of the horse world,' she explains. 'I feel like it's my refuge, the horses. They are animals and they don't care who you are. It's less about being competitive, it's more just the love of being a horse girl.'

Equestrian sports has a long history of attracting blue-blooded riders, and modern-day showjumping is now a particularly high-octane mix of old and new money and high fashion. It has drawn in royalty such as Charlotte Casiraghi, Ulla in line in the throne of Monaco and a fleet of Chanel, and Sheikh Akhmed Khalid Al-Thani, from the ruling family of Qatar. Then there is Greek shipping heiress Athina Onassis, plus Roman Abramovich's daughter Sofia, together with Silicon Valley billionaires and the offspring of numerous Forbes 500 families. It would not be unusual to see Jeanie Spingarn, Eve Jobs and Jennifer Gates, the daughters of Bruce, Steve and Bill respectively, going head-to-head in a Barcelona arena over jumps measuring 16m in, or at the Royal Windsor Horse Show, competing for the prize pot at the Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington, Palm Beach. Jenaka Spingarn was part of the US team that won Olympic silver in Tokyo last year, while Eve Jobs is a member of the US team at FEI Nations Cup competitions around the world as well as recently becoming a sportsmodel for Louis Vuitton. Not to be outdone, Jenaka Spingarn has modelled for Ralph Lauren and is now the face of Tommy Hilf's new equestrian range. Horses, it seems, are now a mode.



Frontal jersey top, €230, and organza skirt, €2,085, both Carolina Herrera @italianstore.com; Pearl-embellished necklaces, €215, Jimmy Choo @jimmychoo.com; Jewellery, Ariana's own

*'I feel like it's my refuge, the horses. They are animals and they don't care who you are'*

It helps to be rich in that world, because the costs of competing on the global circuit are eye-popping, with equine superstars changing hands for millions. Then there is the cost of upkeep at about 450,000 per year per horse. And you could easily spend the same again on vets, physio, equine dentists, nutritionists, vitamin massages and physiotherapy sessions, not to mention cranial osteopathy, acupuncture and stem-cell therapy - all for the horse, not the rider. A top showjumper is treated with as much loving care as a premium footballer. If you plan to fly your steed across continents to compete, expect to pay about €18,000 for a return ticket from the US to the UK. Unless you come from rich royalty or actual royalty, you need the support of a wealthy patron who owns the horse and pays the overheads. As for the rewards, with sponsors such as Rolex, Longines, Hermès, Louis Vuitton and others, the winners can be healthy: a €1 million prize is not unheard of. Scott Frash, the son of a small-time builder from Peabody in

Scotland, became a millionaire and won team gold at his first Olympics in London - in his mid-20s.

From another point of view, showjumping is a more egalitarian sport than most. Men compete against women, and age is no bar - as Nick Skelton proved when he scooped individual gold at Rio in 2016, aged 55. He achieved this feat on his seventh Olympic attempt, aboard the gelding named Big Star, a horse no money could buy. It was rumored the animal's owners, recycling tycoon Gary Widdowson and his wife, Beverly, turned down an offer from one Donald Trump to buy Big Star - perhaps he liked the name?

Of course, Rockefeller brought in the global world of showjumping today. Her family have been American aristocracy for five generations. Her great-grandfather was John D Rockefeller Sr, who founded Standard Oil in 1870, having started his working life as an assistant bookkeeper. He was America's first billionaire, with a fortune worth nearly two per cent of the national economy. Briefly speaking, he is generally agreed to be the richest American ever.

Her great-grandfather was financier John D Rockefeller Jr, who funded the building of the Rockefeller Center, while her grandfather, the oil-rich-serving David, served as chair of the family-associated Chase Manhattan bank (now JP Morgan Chase) from 1969 to 1981.

*'Showjumping is not glamorous. You're living out of a suitcase and covered in dirt most of the time'*

The family still possesses one of the world's largest fortunes, but they have always liked to give away substantial chunks. John D Rockefeller Jr donated \$537 million to charity over his lifetime (worth well over 10 times that in today's money). David, who died in 2017, gave away about \$2 billion over his lifetime. In 2018 David and his wife Peggy Rockefeller's art collection sold for charity at a days-long auction at Christie's, New York. Valued at \$500 million, it made more than \$815 million. Ariana herself is involved with the nonprofit David Rockefeller Fund, which focuses on the arts, climate and the justice system. She's also committed to God's Love We Deliver, a New York charity that delivers healthy food to seriously ill people in the city who cannot afford proper nutrition. This year they expect to deliver three million meals, she says. 'I am so proud because even during the pandemic, they never closed their doors when people were so scared for their own health.' Her background - a degree in political science at Columbia University in NY, followed by a stint interning with Kofi Annan at the United Nations - was also partly dictated by her heritage: '1661 was part of my family history,' she explains. 'My great-grandfather gave the

land for the United Nations to be built on, and then my grandfather was involved in the building of the UN and was very passionate about international relations.'

After diplomacy came design, and in 2011 she launched an eponymous lifestyle and fashion brand, starting with collections moving onto handbags, working with a former executive at American leather brand Coach, and opening a pop-up shop in SoHo, New York, in 2014. Inspiration for her label came from her grandmother Peggy Rockefeller, and her first collection relied on the Franco-Italian designer Étienne Suez as an after, which hung in her childhood home. She closed the business in 2020 but says that the still-love fashion and on the books of Select Model Management. When we meet in the extremely unat and very discreet members-only Show Club in Chelsea, she arrives in leather leggings and an oversized camel-pullover. She's so hot (looks younger, and, despite minimal make-up and having come straight from a heavy personal training session, she's strikingly elegant. At New York's Met Gala this year Ariana caused a stir by wearing an old dress of Peggy's. Designed by Ferrnando Armani in 1954 in gold brocade with a train, it quietly outlasted the more ostentatious conditions on parade.



Crystal-embellished front full-skirt, £1,995, Erdem @erdem.com; Jewellery, Ariana's own; Hair and make-up, Emma Snel at SoHo Creative Artists, using Fendi and Beuthe and Nivea

**Y**et while she seems comfortable on a red carpet it's on a horse that Ariana feels most at home. 'You don't communicate with words, obviously - it's just all feelings,' she says. 'I could say training my horses at home is my happy place.' Her parents first met her on a pony at the age of three at home in the countryside outside New York. Diana and David Rockefeller had two more boys to keep her and her sister, Camilla, 27, sheltered. These days Ariana's horsey circle includes her fellow riders, trainers and, especially, the groom who helps look after her three horses. 'We spend a lot of time together so you become close, and sometimes they are basically your therapist, too.' And as for showjumping's global image? 'It is not as glamorous as people think,' she says with a shrug. 'You're living out of a suitcase and it's early starts and late finishes. You are covered in dirt most of the time, and some times you are buried in it.'

For most of her adult life and before her nine-year marriage to the entrepreneur Matthew Bucklin ended in 2020, home was New York, but Ariana spent lockdown with her three horses in the West Midlands. Boring in Stamford-upon-Avon at her own showjumping yard, she trained with his partner, Luis Krast. Lockdown was an amazing time for me to bond with my horses as I was with them six days a week. We did a lot of backing out around 11 in the soft English countryside. Usually we are on the road all the time, or it was backwards and forwards in New York for family business (she serves on the Mattel Corporation Advisory Council of the Rockefeller Capital Management), so it was nice to just focus on my horses.' She has now moved them to a yard two hours from Amsterdam to make travelling on the continent easier. She lives in a flat at the stables, because, she says, 'There is where the horses are. There is very little furniture but I just love looking out to see my horses at pasture. When you come from a well-known family, there's something about the peace and solace of being in a stable with your horse.' ■

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