



COUNTRY LIVING

The new partner of family-run luxury goods brand Engana, Jodie Kidd tells Tempus why she's championing British made – while giving her competitive side a workout...

Words: Michelle Johnson

Jodie Kidd makes no secret of her competitive nature. Her relentless drive and ambition have fuelled her career from early show jumping success to her domination of British fashion in the 1990s, as well as seen her take on rally races with Maserati, hike Peru's Inca Trail for charity and transform a village local into a sustainability-driven, AA star-rated gastropub at the heart of her West Sussex community.

"Mine is a very competitive family," says the businesswoman and mum of one. "We've all been brought up as sportsmen and sportswomen and in sport, to be successful, you have to win. It's been ingrained from an early age to be winners in life."

It's this inner drive that compelled Kidd to reach out to the founders of Engana, a family-run luxury goods company, to champion its 'Made in England' ethos as a brand ambassador. Established by entrepreneurial couple Helen and Philip Gutteridge, Engana's accessories, such as leather boot and blanket bags, are designed with the countryside in mind, fitting perfectly in the family Range Rover or horsebox. They aim to marry this rural practicality with traditional English craftsmanship by using only British-sourced materials, textiles and artisans.

"I think it's so important to support British businesses and local manufacturers, especially in these quite unstable times," says Kidd, 40, adding that this commitment is inspired by her country upbringing – her father Johnny was a British show jumping champion, while brother Jack is a star of the polo scene.

Discovered aged 16 by legendary fashion photographer Terry O'Neill, Kidd's 6ft height and distinctive look propelled her to supermodel status, with her sister Jemma (now Countess of Mornington) following in her footsteps. And whether she's supporting sustainable fashion labels – her favourite is Vin + Omi – or designing her own collection for Engana, it's clear that Kidd's latest mission is all about 'brand Britain'... »

Tempus: *Jodie, you've had a varied career as a model, driver, entrepreneur and more. How do you define success?*

Jodie Kidd: I think it's just being competitive. It's been ingrained from an early age to be winners in life, whether that's on the school sports field or on the back of a horse. My family has always wanted to succeed – there's nothing like jumping off against the clock in show jumping or playing the last dying seconds in a polo match. It brings you the most incredible kind of feeling, and I suppose that love for challenging myself is something that carries over into the rest of my life. I think it's in the genes; it's hereditary.

What inspired you to approach Englana and become its ambassador?

I loved what Helen [Gutteridge] was doing with Englana – the quality of the products and how she's supporting local English producers and suppliers. When I discovered the boot bag I thought, 'Oh my God, this is genius'. Helen saw what was missing from the market and established such a core, countryside collection – now it's evolving and becoming very chic to match those city trips, too.

I felt that we're very like-minded. Englana has an unapologetically pro-British approach, supporting these small leather craftsmen and tanners, and legacy businesses that were once a quintessential part of their communities. It's also a gorgeous family-run company; they're a lovely family who are very supportive of UK talent.

You're working on your own Englana collection. How are you finding the process?

It's really exciting. We're looking at all the different colourways and I'll be designing some travel pieces and extra items for the summer. It's a relationship that's going to grow and grow. What's nice is that, although I've designed various items in the past – such as clothes for sports brands or my own trainers – with Englana I'm very much coming with my knowledge as a consumer and saying, 'This is what I love and use' or, 'This is what I can see my friends requesting'. As a 40-year-old woman, who is both a mum and an entrepreneur, I need what works for my lifestyle. It's so much fun to be creative like this, particularly having been in the fashion world for so many years, albeit on the other side of the spectrum. It's lovely that I can use my own creative juices and not just model someone else's designs.

It sounds like a great creative challenge, but you're very much a sportswoman as well. Are you taking on any physical challenges right now?

I'm always trying to take myself out of my comfort zone and push the envelope a little bit – that's just my kind of mentality. I've always liked to push myself forward and live life to the max; and I love adrenaline. I don't know why, but if someone says, 'Right, come on, let's climb a mountain', I'll be like, 'Yeah, why not?' I love doing challenges like that for charity – if I can help raise money for great causes then it's even better – so I'm sure I'll be doing a few of those in the near future.

But although I like to scare myself, the older I get the more I feel that I have to be a little calmer. As soon as I had [my son] Indio [in 2011], I stopped doing really dangerous things. I stopped racing cars and playing polo, because it's all about my little boy now. I want him to grow up with a

mum, so I have to try not to scare myself quite as much as I used to.

You were a rally driver for Maserati for many years – how did you get into cars?

Oh, I'm a petrolhead through and through, but it came later. I didn't actually get my driving licence until I was 21, and then years later a friend of mine said to come and drive the Gumball Rally. After that I was presenting at the GQ Man of the Year Awards and sat next to [then-Top Gear presenter] Jeremy Clarkson, and we got chatting about the cars. He said it would be nice to get a woman, a model, to come and do the show, and I ended up breaking the speed record for their 'Star in a Reasonably Priced Car' segment. From that moment I knew I was hooked. I loved cars. I ended up having a long career racing for Maserati. It was a lot of fun.

Do you have any favourite cars?

I like cars that suit the mood of the day and where I am, but it's so conflicting and difficult to choose. I love a good old classic. If I want to waft around the countryside, I will go for a lovely classic Mercedes Pagoda – it's got lovely lines and good engine. For a modern car, it's all about performance. I want something practical, a hybrid, that sort of thing. I mean, if I had an open chequebook, I would get a Ferrari 250 California, short-wheel base.

The countryside is huge part of your life, particularly where you live in the Sussex Downs. Tell us about becoming a local landlady with the Half Moon?

When you live rurally, it's so important for the community to have a place where everyone can come together. Half Moon is like the heart of the village – you can have your husband's birthday or WI meeting or just come and have a natter after work. Developers keep buying off our little village pubs, and I've seen people become a lot more insular as a result. It's so important to people's mental health, to lifestyle, so when my local went up for sale I said, 'Right, I'm not going to let this happen. A couple of friends and I bought the Half Moon – and then we said, 'Okay, does anyone know how to run a pub?' [laughs]

The last two years have been a massive learning curve, but I think we're really getting there. We've got lovely rewards for our customers and we've had great reviews. We are very focused on local produce – we only use organic produce from a 25-mile radius. Sometimes we've gone in the wrong direction, and then had to reverse. I'm really proud of everyone involved in the pub.

What was it like to step back on to the catwalk at this year's London Fashion Week as a model for sustainable brand Vin + Omi?

It was kind of like, 'Here we go again...' – there were lots of memories. But what Vin + Omi are doing is so incredible, so the bigger picture of walking for them was very special. Everything they do is made out of recyclable plastics – my whole dress was made out of plastic bottles – but the fabric is amazing, you'd never know. It really showed that you can wear beautiful fabrics that can be created through recycling. We have to look after our planet now, it's all about conservation, so to be involved was really rewarding. 

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