This summer I spent a week working for professional four-star event rider Charlotte Agnew in Gloucestershire, England, and competed in an English event. During this time, my cousin Sasha Hargreaves and I learned how to work, clean and help out in a professional yard. Most of the work consisted of mucking out stalls and cleaning and preparing the horses for hacks or turn out.

The first few days of being a working student were tough and long, with each day starting at 6:00 in the morning and finishing at 6:00 at night. At first it was a very nerve-wracking experience because everything had to be done a certain way, and I wanted to make it perfect.

On our second day of being working students, Charlotte gave Sasha and I the opportunity to groom for her at an event. Charlotte rode two horses at the preliminary level and one at the training level. The morning started off very early with us rolling out of bed at three and heading to the barn, where we helped Charlotte’s head groom prepare the horses for the day.

The day was filled with quick horse changes and cooling out, as Charlotte jumped off one horse and right back onto another to set out for the next phase of the event. I have to say, the most interesting part of this day was working out of Charlotte’s lorry, a massive five-horse with living quarters and loads of storage. After the event, we arrived back at the yard and took our first mounted lesson with Charlotte, introducing our horses to her and working with her to improve different aspects of our riding.

The third day of working at Charlotte’s yard, Sasha and I were offered the opportunity to ride along with another working student in the horse van to take Charlotte’s four-star horse swimming. It was very interesting to hear a racing trainer explain the different fitness levels of different types of horses, for example how many laps a four-star event horse can do (not very many) compared to a race horse (a lot!).

The last day of working alongside Charlotte’s small team of workers, Sasha and I were invited to go on a hack riding some of Charlotte’s horses. This was such a great experience because living in Maryland, I do not get the ability to ride out on the roads and go on miles of long bridle paths the way they do in England. It was definitely one of my favorite experiences as a working student because it was amazing to ride for miles and miles in the open country land. It was also interesting because going on hacks on the roads is something that they use to condition their horses in England, instead of going in the fields like we do here.

After being a working student for a week, Sasha and I were definintely tired, but we rallied through one more day and woke up the next morning at four to go compete in an event. I was grateful to be able ride my cousin’s five-year-old, green horse just imported from Ireland earlier this year. It was the horse’s first event at the novice level and we had a very successful day, ending 10th out of 40 horses, finishing with just one pole down in show jumping.

Overall, working for Charlotte was such an incredible experience that I was able to take part in, learning how to be a member of a professional yard and compete internationally in England.