



## BIOGRAPHIES

# Debbie Criddle

- Date of birth:** 10 May 1966.
- Lives:** Taunton, Somerset.
- Major achievements:** Grade III rider Debbie won individual, freestyle and team gold at the 2002 European Championships, the 2003 World Championships and the 2004 Athens Paralympics, all riding Figaro IX. They are the only combination to have won a gold treble at all these championships consecutively. At the 2007 World Para Championships, they won individual bronze and freestyle silver.
- Debbie competes in able-bodied British Dressage (BD) competitions up to medium level.
- Current competition horses:** Debbie had the ride on Nina Venables's Figaro IX for major championships. Born in 1991, he is a 16.1hh British-bred bay gelding by Baron B out of Mandolin. He was retired at the 2007 World Para Championships. Debbie bought her own horse in March 2005. Pompidou II is a 16.3hh Dutch-bred gelding by Jet Set out of Boelina, born 1997.
- Debbie also has the ride on Pavaroti. Owned by Debbie and known as Dudley in the stable, Pavaroti is a 17.1hh German-bred bay gelding by Quavaroti out of Leona, born in 1998.
- First competitive experience:** "A Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) regional dressage competition when I was aged 21."
- Trainer:** "Nina Venables has trained me since 1999."
- Superstitions:** "My mother gave me three lucky pennies - I only have one left now - and I wear a small golden horseshoe pendant and necklace my trainer Nina gave me."
- Most admired riders:** "My trainer Nina because she is such an elegant rider."
- Qualities looked for in a dressage horse:** "Temperament and quality of paces, but temperament is more important. Willingness to work makes up for a lot."
- Favourite dressage venues:** "Athens was fantastic. In this country, it would be the Unicorn Centre, Stow-on-the-Wold, where we train."
- What other career would you have chosen:** "Your typical office clerk. Before my accident, I worked in telesales at a builders merchants."
- Favourite meal:** Prawn salad.
- Favourite drink:** White wine.

Debbie was a typical pony mad girl with parents who couldn't afford riding lessons. She did, however, go on trekking holidays. Her careers officer talked her out of training towards becoming a British Horse Society (BHS) assistant instructor (AI). Instead, Debbie did business studies.

"I thought I would get a good job and do my AI afterwards," she says.

A motorcycle accident in 1985 changed her life. The right side of her body was badly injured. Debbie lost the use of her right arm, which was in plaster for one year and, eventually, she made the difficult decision to have it amputated in 2003. The doctors saved her right leg, but she only has "half power" compared to her left leg and wears a kneepad to protect the scar tissue. Apart from the kneepad, Debbie rides with short reins. She also has a twisted spine, which has been caused by the way she walks and rides with her missing arm and injured leg.

"The accident changed everything, in some ways for the better, but back then I did not see it that way," says Debbie, who is still in pain 24hrs a day.

When Debbie was able to ride again after her accident, she went to a riding school.

"They were brilliant and worked with me to overcome my problems. They contacted the RDA to see if they had any ideas to help me and that is how I ended up at my first RDA regional dressage competition. It just grew from there," she says.

