

British Para Show Jumping Association a newly formed organisation for physically disabled riders

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This sport is practiced in several nations led by France, who hold regular competitions with up to 20 riders taking part. Their International Championship for riders with disabilities is held during the FEI World Cup Series in Bordeaux and in 2005 it was won by British Rider Yvonne Holloway.

The association's chairman Andy Lawes explains more:

I have been involved with Para show jumping for four years, since my wife, Emily, was asked to jump in Bordeaux, by Tony Bott a British FEI Steward. Para Show Jumping is in its tenth year in France.

"Two years ago after coming back from Bordeaux it was decided that the UK should hold a show to bring physically disabled riders together. As I am good at organising events I was given the task of arranging the UK's first Para Show Jumping Event, at Crockstead East Sussex in August of last year. I combined it with Para Dressage and combined training. Everyone had a great time even though we had to perform in the torrential downpours of last summer. In fact that made the show better because everyone had to pull together and move all the jumps from a muddy quagmire to a dry indoor arena. It brought everyone together, the camaraderie between the French, Irish and the Brits was excellent!

At our dinner after the first day, we had an inspirational talk by Lisa Murphy who competes internationally with able bodied riders. By the end of the show

everyone was fired up wanting to do more. We were not recognised by anybody, and nobody in the UK was organising shows or wanted to take it on. I decided to do something about it and so The British Para Show Jumping Association was born"

The association's goals are:

- To promote the skill of show jumping for disabled people.
- To provide a means of distributing information to all participants.
- To help with the provision of appropriate training for those with disabilities.
- To give show jumpers with disabilities the opportunity to reach their potential.
- To be a united voice for show jumpers with disabilities.
- To enlist the help of other bodies involved in show jumping and to accept, encourage and make provision for show jumpers with disabilities.
- To provide a structure for the selection and training of members wishing to compete as individuals or teams both nationally and internationally.
- To raise the funding necessary to achieve the aforementioned objectives.
- To seek qualifications to the highest level in all that they do.
- But most importantly for every one to have fun and enjoy their sport safely.

Before riders can compete they are classified according to disability. The grades range from I to IV, I being the most severely disabled to IV being the most able of the disabled. This is a functional classification carried out by PE accredited classifiers. Having been classified, the riders are given a functional profile number and a grade. Skill is not part of the classification system; it is calculated solely on functional ability/disability. In France they also have blind and visually impaired riders who have a lead horse to follow.

Once classified, riders compete at their relevant grade and heights of fences are set accordingly. The fences start at 70cm and get higher for the more able grades the maximum is 1.1 m.

We asked Andy about safety:

"Is it safe? Nothing is safe, and it is important to remember that riding itself is a dangerous sport look how many able bodied riders are injured or killed in pursuit of their sport/hobby.

"Every precaution is taken with our riders. Courses are built to be flowing with not too tight turns. However when it comes to a timed jump off they are as competitive as any other show jumper and want to win as much as anyone else and will cut corners and ride tight turns if they think it will save them time.

"In the four years I have been involved with Para Show Jumping no accidents have happened or riders injured. Safety is a key aspect of our sport."

As a growing sport the association is looking for more shows and centres to host competitions. In



August a three day international show is being held at the David Broome Event Centre.

Entries are already being accepted for what Andy describes as "the best ever and most exciting Para show jumping event of 2008". So far riders from France, Canada, Ireland and the UK have accepted making it a truly international event. Some of the riders will be bringing their own horses with them but for those travelling from further afield the organisers will find suitable horses. If any one can help with this do contact the show organisers, details are at the bottom of the page.

Local member and junior rider 16 year old Ben Carr recently made the journey from Hasketon, Woodbridge Suffolk to compete at Chateau Bleu. On his debut ride for GBR as an individual, Ben had an excellent show. On both days he gained first places and was crowned overall champion of the event. On this occasion Ben rode a hired French horse called Goldo.

If you are interested in finding out more about the association please contact Andy Lawes on 01424 819450 Email andy@bpsja.co.uk Website www.bpsja.co.uk