



OFFICIAL RIDER BIOGRAPHY
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Ricky Balshaw

Date of birth: 10 November 1986.

Lives: Nr Telford, Shropshire

Major achievements: Ricky's talent was spotted early and he was asked to join the World Class Programme aged only 14. This provided him with the best training and development until he was 16 and old enough to compete internationally as a member of the British team.

Ricky made his International debut in Finland in 2002, finishing third in all three tests. That year, he also competed in Ireland, Holland and Belgium. The following year he was a member of the British team for the 2003 World Championships for Disabled Riders and finished fifth in the grade II freestyle. In 2004 he was first reserve for the Athens Paralympics and in 2007 he rode as an individual at the World Para Dressage Championships and won individual bronze in grade 1b. Ricky was selected to ride as an individual at his first Paralympics, the 2008 Beijing Games, taking home a silver medal in the grade 1b freestyle.

A bad fall in 2009 resulting in several broken ribs forced him to take a break from International competition but Ricky returns with a new horse for 2010, Academy Award. The pair are already showing early promise with impressive results at Moorsele CPEDI in April 2010 and are vying for selection for the World Equestrian Games in Kentucky later this year.

Ricky is on the World Class Performance squad which exists to provide Britain's elite riders with the best preparation to represent Equestrian Team GBR at World, European, Olympic and Paralympic level in the four Olympic / Paralympic disciplines of Eventing, Dressage, Show Jumping and Para-Equestrian Dressage.

Current competition horses: Academy Award is a 17.2hh chestnut gelding foaled 1996 and owned by Mrs Elaine Hoeg, British bred by Puriso III out of Bofina.

First competitive experience: "A regional Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) show when I was about five or six. At that stage, I still had people holding me on either side of the horse, so that I didn't fall off."

Trainer: Lisa Garland and Michel Assouline

Superstitions: "I don't wear green when I'm riding. I was once told that green is an unlucky colour and it stuck in my mind. One day I borrowed a green whip and ended up being bucked off; I haven't worn green since."

Most admired riders: "Lee Pearson for what he has achieved in Paralympics and able-bodied competitions."

Qualities looked for in a dressage horse: "The main thing is that it has brakes, so that I can stop. I like well-built horses and go for warmbloods."

Favourite dressage venue: Moorsele, Belgium

What other career would you have chosen: "I am working in the hotel industry part-time, but riding is my priority."

Favourite meal: Chicken tika balti

Favourite drink: A cup of tea

Ricky has cerebral palsy and used to have a lot of spasticity in his muscles until, age 10, he underwent a 9½hr operation followed by a 10-week stay in hospital. This operation has helped to reduce the involuntary muscle movements associated with his condition and stopped the disability getting worse.

"It is hard to move my limbs individually," he says. "I don't use any special tack except jumping reins as my grip is not great. I also use elastic bands on my stirrups to hold my feet in place as I can't get the stirrups back if I loose them."

Ricky's physiotherapist recommended he took up riding when he was aged four as it helps to learn balance and stretch muscles.