



OFFICIAL RIDER BIOGRAPHY
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Simon Laurens

Date of birth: 28 November 1967.

Lives: Jersey/Cheltenham, Cotswolds.

Major achievements: Having become a Grade III para rider in November 2005, Simon was a member of the winning British team at the 2006 Hartpury International with his partner John Gamlin's former show horse, Ocean Dream. They won the individual and team tests.

Simon was the National Grade III Disabled Dressage Rider Champion in 2006 and 2007. He also won team and freestyle gold at the 2007 World Para Championships.

In 2008, Simon won the Novice Winter Championships competing against able-bodied riders riding Ocean Don Jon. He was once again selected to ride for Britain, competing at his first Paralympic Games. Riding Ocean Diamond, he helped Britain win team gold with a second place in the team test as well as winning an individual silver medal in the freestyle.

In addition to his Paralympic success, Simon became a list 5 judge and was awarded the BBC South West Disabled Sports Personality 2008.

Current competition horses:

- Ocean Diamond, a 16.1hh black Oldenburg gelding, known as Derek, by Rubinstein, born 1996 and owned by Simon's partner John Gamlin.
- Ocean Don Jon, a 16.2hh chestnut gelding by Donnerhall, known as Eric, born 2001 and owned by John Gamlin.

First competitive experience:

"The only reason I remember it so well is because I was the laughing stock of The Pony Club. I was eight, competing my first pony Champagne in a sack race. I was in the lead by a long way. When I finished, I turned round to see I only had an empty bridle in my hand and my pony was grazing half way down the field. I burst into tears and had a tantrum. I told my mum what a terrible pony he was and that she should sell him. She didn't and he spent the last 10 years of his life as a RDA [Riding for the Disabled Association] pony."

Trainer:

Henriette Andersen

Superstitions:

"I have a whole ream of them. I have my lucky black patent belt and my lucky pants, which are white Calvin Klein's. I don't allow anybody else to saddle my horse and I am paranoid about the number three, but as all numbers start with three when you compete in grade three, there is not a lot I can do about it."

Most admired riders:

"I admire my trainer Henriette Andersen who always inspires me to do better, Carl Hester (us Channel Islanders have to stick together), Isobell Werth because she makes it look easy and, last but not least, anyone who just has a go and enjoys the sport."

Qualities looked for in a dressage horse:

"Good temperament is key now that I am not as strong as I used to be. I can't be doing with anything that is a bit of a fairy and spooks at a plastic bag. I also don't like big horses, nothing over 16.1hh, perhaps because it is too far to fall these days."

Favourite dressage venues: Addington Equestrian Centre in Buckinghamshire

What other career would you have chosen: "Property developing, which I have started doing with my partner John Gamlin. I am addicted to all the property programmes, such as Property Ladder, Grand Designs, and so on."

Favourite meal: "Grilled tuna steaks."

Favourite drink: "Bloody Mary."

The only reason Simon was introduced to horses was because, when he was 7½, his best friend was given some riding lessons for her birthday and she refused to go on her own. Simon's friend was bucked off during her first lesson and gave up while Simon was hooked. Three months later, his mum bought him his first pony and the obsession continued with, at one stage, Simon riding three horses before school and four after. Show jumping became Simon's passion and he ended up on the Jersey junior show jumping team and was the captain for three years before moving on to horses. He was on the senior team for nine consecutive years and captain for five of those.

"Then I moved to England and realised I was just an average show jumper. I went back to Jersey and was going to do a sensible job, work in a bank, and keep a horse as a pet. But then the sun shone and I couldn't go through with it."

Then Paul Green, the father of the successful dressage rider Gemma, approached Simon to help his daughter with her ponies and he ended up working for Gemma for nine years, watching her progress from show jumping to eventing and eventually dressage.

Simon was diagnosed with MS in November 2004. Both his mother and grandmother have suffered with the same disease. He has lost strength in his right side and suffers from general fatigue. After the diagnosis, Simon sold all his horses.

"I am a perfectionist and if I can't do something properly, I don't want to do it at all. I made my partner John Gamlin sell everything, all the horses, lorries, 4x4s, but he made me keep one horse, his old showing horse."

Then John suggested Simon enter a prelim dressage class. It was one of the judges, Chris Porterfield, who suggested he had a bash at para dressage.

"I had never thought of myself as qualifying as a disabled rider. Chris got me all the info and I went to the Para Convention and everybody just egged me on."



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