



OFFICIAL RIDER BIOGRAPHY
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Sophie Christiansen MBE

- Date of birth:** 14 November 1987.
- Lives:** Sunningdale, Berkshire.
- Major achievements:** Sophie was the 2003 Riding for the Disabled (RDA) Grade I National Champion, the level of the most disabled competitors. She won individual bronze in at her first major international, the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games, riding Hotstuff. The same year, she was voted BBC London Disabled Athlete of the Year.
- Sophie made it a gold treble at the 2005 European Para Dressage Championships as a member of the victorious British team and she headed the individual and freestyle tests with Martini Maybe. In 2007, she won freestyle gold and individual bronze at the World Para Championships in grade 1a.
- In 2008, Sophie won team and freestyle gold as well as individual silver at the Beijing Paralympics.
- Before riding took over, Sophie used to compete in half-marathons and won the Windsor half-marathon in a self-propelled wheelchair race in 2002. Sophie was chosen to carry the torch for the 2002 Commonwealth Games.
- In 2008, she was awarded the Vivien Batchelor Trophy for the most outstanding rider under 25 by the British Equestrian Writers' Association (BEWA) as well as the Raymond Brooks-Ward Memorial Trophy, which is awarded to the most promising rider under 25 in eventing, dressage and show jumping.
- Sophie was awarded an MBE in the 2009 New Year Honours List for services to disabled sport.
- Riding the Dutch gelding Rivaldo of Berkeley Sophie earned her place on the gold medal para dressage team at the 2010 FEI World Equestrian Games with a test score of 69.529%. Sophie comfortably secured a gold medal in her individual grade 1a test with 76.100% and silver in the freestyle just behind fellow Brit Emma Sheardown with 78.550%.
- In May 2011, she graduated from Royal Holloway University of London with a first class Mathematics Degree.
- Current competition horses:** Rivaldo of Berkeley, a 16.1hh Dutch-bred gelding, born 1998 and owned by the Berkeley Group.
- First competitive experience:** "A really small show at South Bucks RDA when I was about 13."
- Trainer:** "Clive Milkins from South Bucks RDA has trained me since 2001 and I have squad training with Michel Assouline."
- Superstitions:** "I have lucky socks. I wear the Union Jack socks I wore when I won my bronze medal in Athens for every major competition."

- Most admired riders:** "All my fellow para dressage riders. They are great ambassadors for sport in general. Athens changed my life. I grew up. I came back confident and knew about the importance of team work."
- Qualities looked for in a dressage horse:** "Outstanding walk and temperament."
- Favourite dressage venues:** Moorsele, Belgium
- What other career would you have chosen:** "I recently completed a maths degree at Royal Holloway University of London. I can't look after my own horse, so I will need to employ someone to do it and will need a decent job that pays well, but I'm not sure what I want to do yet."
- Favourite meal:** "It has to be my dad's spag bol."
- Favourite drink:** "Baileys."

Sophie has cerebral palsy, which affects her muscles, including her speech. She started riding aged six when she went on a school trip to her local RDA centre, South Bucks. Sophie is one of the few grade I riders who is not wheelchair-bound. She uses an electric scooter as she cannot walk long distances.

"I wanted a challenge and I had the choice to go to the RDA or do PE. I love being on a horse because the horse moves for me and I feel free," she says.

It was Sophie's trainer Clive Milkins who spotted her talent and inspired her to compete. Sophie only manages to ride a few times a week and has to go to the gym on the other days to strengthen her muscles to help her riding.

"Trying to sit up straight on a horse is a challenge for me and I have to do special exercises for my core stability," she says.

