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## Sophie Wells

**Date of birth:** 5 May 1990.

**Lives:** Newark, Notts.

**Major achievements:** Sophie, who is a grade IV rider, was selected for the World Class Start programme in 2004. She was named 2005 BBC East Midlands junior disabled sportswoman of the year and was promoted to the World Class Potential squad in 2006. Also in 2006, she achieved the highest score at the Millfield Para International and became the under-21 international para champion. Sophie has also been awarded the TASS (Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme) 2012 scholarship in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

In 2007, she finished sixth in the World Para-Equestrian Dressage Championships as well as taking third place at the Hickstead Under-21 international in the able-bodied junior advanced medium class.

Sophie was first reserve for the 2008 Paralympics with Touchdown II. Also in 2008, she became the national grade IV champion.

Competing in able-bodied competitions, Sophie qualified for the 2008 novice, elementary, medium and advanced medium regional summer championships with two horses. She also qualified for the Young Horse & Breeding Championships at prix st georges level. The same year, Sophie became a member of the British Young Rider Progression Squad for able-bodied riders.

She had more success at the Hickstead Under-21 international in 2008, this time winning the junior rider international class, thereby becoming the first para rider to win an able-bodied international competition.

**Current competition horses:**

- Pinocchio, a 16hh Dutch-bred gelding by Landeur, born 1997 and owned by Jacqueline Walker.
- Valerius, a 17.2hh liver chestnut gelding by Flemmingh out of Heidevrouwe, born 2002 and owned by Sophie.

**First competitive experience:** "Showing a fat pony at a local show when I was about seven or eight years old. I remember getting rosettes."

**Trainer:** "Angela Weiss."

**Superstitions:** "I have a lucky necklace, but try not to believe in those sorts of things."

**Most admired riders:** "Laura Bechtolsheimer; she's done so well getting to Beijing [2008 Olympics]."

**Qualities looked for in a dressage horse:** "Temperament is my number one priority followed by trainability. You can do quite a lot if you have a horse with those qualities."

**Favourite dressage venues:** "Moorsele in Belgium, Addington Manor Equestrian Centre, Bucks, and Sheepgate Equestrian Centre, Lincs."

**What other career would you have chosen:**

"I have just started [2008] a degree in sport and exercise science at Lincoln University where I am also a member of the netball team."

**Favourite meal:**

"Sunday roast."

**Favourite drink:**

"Orange squash."

Sophie was born with amniotic band syndrome, a condition caused by the lining of the amniotic sac coming away from the womb before birth. The lining trapped her fingers and ankles, which meant she lost some of her fingers and parts of others and has limited movement in her hands and feet.

Growing up on a farm, Sophie started riding Shetland ponies aged two, but they were sold as she developed a severe allergy to them. Aged six, Sophie decided she missed the horses so much that she started riding at her local riding club.

"I tried to ride with normal reins, so I would go over a jump and lose my reins, go over another jump and lose my reins again."

Sophie took part in pony club and riding club activities before turning to dressage.

"When I was 10, Vicki Thompson gave clinics near us which I took part in; she gave me a good start in the sport."

Sophie then came across David Hamer, international dressage trainer and squad co-ordinator for Britain's Paralympic World Class Development programme, while she was competing at a talent spotting competition for able-bodied riders.

"He asked me if I had been graded as a para rider and said that I should go forward for para squad selection. I had never seen a disabled competition and didn't know what it was about. I enjoy taking part in both now. The para competitions give me a lot of experience and exposure while I like pushing myself to compete against able-bodied riders too."

