



OFFICIAL RIDER BIOGRAPHY
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Deborah Criddle

Date of birth: 10 May 1966

Lives: Taunton, Somerset

Major achievements: Grade III rider Deb won individual, freestyle and team gold at the 2001 European Championships, the 2003 World Championships and the 2004 Athens Paralympics, all riding Nina Venables' Figaro IX. They were the first combination to have won a gold treble at all these championships consecutively.

In 2005, riding her own Pompidou II, she achieved a team gold and an individual bronze in the freestyle. Deb competed as an individual at the 2007 World Para-Equestrian Dressage Championships, once again riding Figaro IX, winning bronze in the individual test and silver in the freestyle. She was selected to ride as an individual at the 2008 Paralympics. She finished fourth in the freestyle, missing out on bronze by a fraction, and fifth in the individual test.

Deb was out of top level competition for a brief spell due to lack of horsepower, but the purchase of a Swedish-bred gelding by the name of Akilles by the Lady Joseph Trust turned that corner. In February 2011, she was introduced to her new partner and in just a matter of months they've formed a strong partnership.

Deb competes in able-bodied British Dressage (BD) competitions up to medium level.

Current competition horse:

- LJT Akilles – Chestnut, gelding, 16.1hh, 2000, s. Amiral. Three top six placings at Deauville in April 2011, after a month together, put them in the selectors' eyes. This was followed in June by a hat-trick of wins at the Para Championships at Hickstead.

First competitive experience: "A Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) regional dressage competition in 1987."

Trainer: "Nina Venables has trained me since 1999."

Superstitions: "None really."

Most admired riders: "My trainer Nina because she is such an insightful and elegant rider."

Qualities looked for in a dressage horse: "Temperament and quality of paces, but temperament is more important. Willingness to work makes up for a lot."

Favourite dressage venues: "The new Hartpury Arena, The Half Moon Stud and Equi-Sense in Somerset."

What other career would you have chosen: "Originally I had wanted to be a riding instructor, but after college I ended up in an office job."

Favourite meal: "Lasagne."

Favourite drink: "Earl Grey tea and a white wine spritzer."

Deb was a typical pony mad girl with parents who couldn't afford riding lessons until she was in her last year of school. She did, however, go on trekking holidays. Her careers officer talked her out of training towards becoming a British Horse Society (BHS) assistant instructor (AI). Instead, Deb did business studies.

"I thought I would get a good job and do my AI afterwards," she says.

A motorcycle accident in 1985 changed her life. The right side of her body was badly injured. Deb lost the use of her right arm. Eventually, she made the difficult decision to have it amputated in 2003. The doctors saved her right leg, although they didn't think she would walk on it again. The leg stayed in plaster for a year and, while it is still unstable and only works at "half power" compared to her left leg, it is weight bearing. Apart from a protective kneepad, Deb rides with short reins.

"The accident changed everything, in some ways for the better, but back then I did not see it that way," says Deb, who is still in pain 24hrs a day.

When Deb was able to ride again after her accident, she returned to the riding school she had attended as a teenager.

"They were brilliant and worked with me to overcome my problems. They contacted the RDA to see if they had any ideas to help me and that is how I ended up at my first RDA regional dressage competition. It just grew from there," she says.



Deb and LJT Akilles at Hickstead June 2011