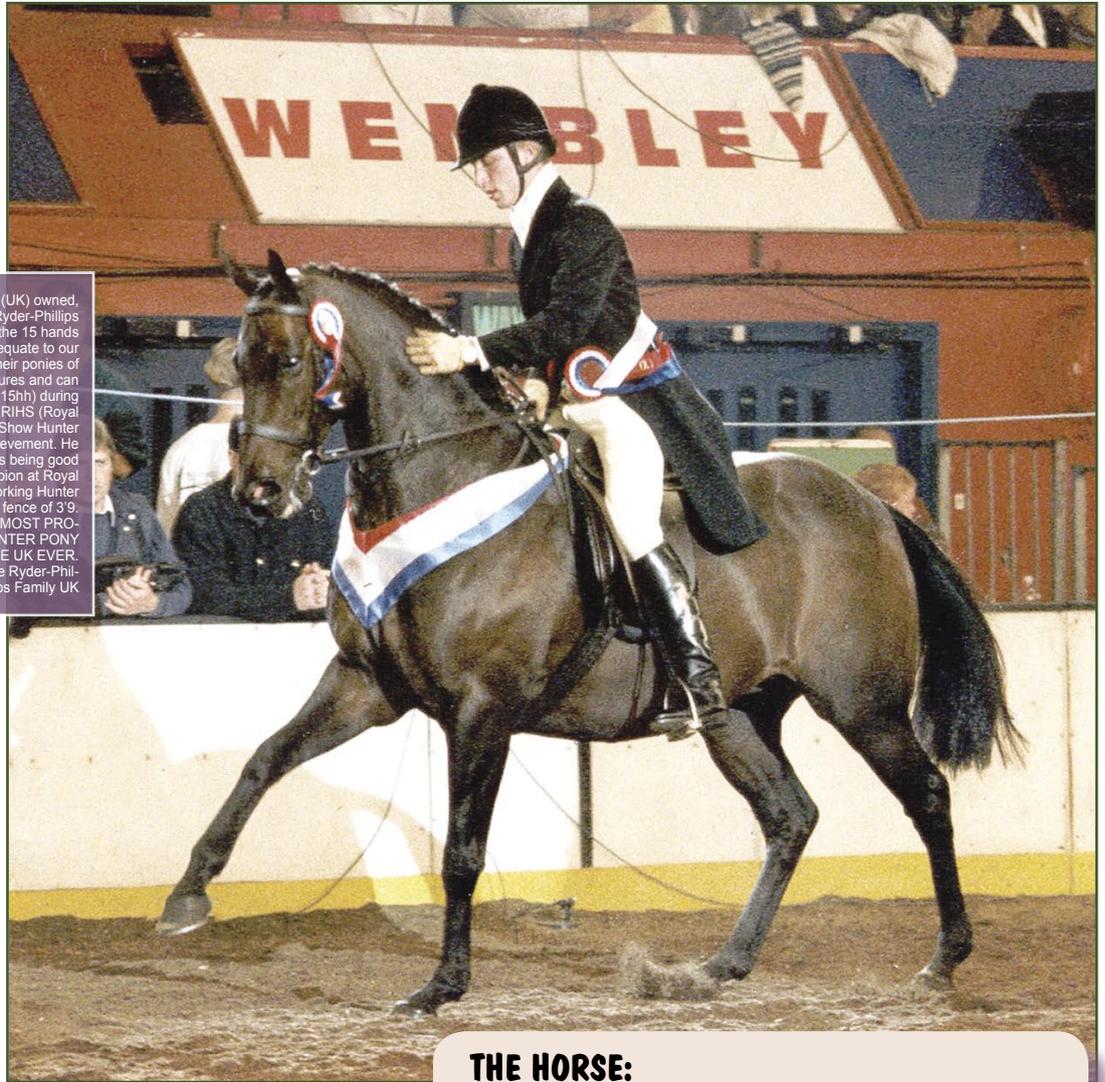


# THE SHOW HUNTER

*The hunter should be handsome as opposed to pretty*

By Samantha Watson

YOUNG DRAGONARA (UK) owned, produced and shown by the Ryder-Phillips Family. Dragon competed in the 15 hands section (which would loosely equate to our galloways, however in the UK their ponies of this size must show pony features and can go up to and sometimes over 15hh) during the 80's & 90's being a HOYS & RIHS (Royal International Horse Show) Show Hunter Pony Champion - quite an achievement. He was truly amazing - as well as being good on the flat he was also Champion at Royal International and HOYS as a Working Hunter Pony as well over fence of 3'9". THIS PONY WAS THE MOST PROFITIC WINNER OF SHOW HUNTER PONY CLASSES IN THE UK EVER. Photo with kind permission of the Ryder-Phillips Family UK



The first accurately recorded fox hunt was in 1534 involving a farmer in Norfolk, United Kingdom who used his dogs to chase a fox suspected of killing some of his livestock. There are references to hunting foxes in England as far back as AD43. Following the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, hunting grew as a "sport." The first organised

British hunt was established during the 1670s in Yorkshire where organised packs hunted hare and fox. Participants and proponents see fox hunting as a traditional equestrian sport as well as an important aspect of England's aristocratic history. Known as venery, the use of scent hounds to track prey dates back to Assyrian, Babylonian and ancient Egyptian times.

In 1753, a young country gentleman called Hugo Meynell began to hunt foxes on his own estate, Quorn in Leicester, UK. Meynell was the first person to breed dogs for speed, stamina and scent. The speed of his dogs gave a new excitement to hunting foxes. Meynell was a well known figure in London society who made fox hunting fashionable with the nobility. By 1800, foxhunting was supported by most of the great landed aristocratic families most of which kept their own packs of hounds. Hunt clubs were set up in country towns by local businessmen, lawyers and shopkeepers. These clubs became the centre of social life in the countryside, hunting being a unifying force, bringing the whole rural community together in a shared activity.

Before motorised transport, the wealthy owner would ride his hack at a canter to meet hounds. At the meet, he would change on to his hunter, which his groom had previously walked over to the meet ensuring the hunter stayed as fresh as possible for the day ahead.

## THE HORSE:

Hunters should not be hacks (pony, galloway or horse) which have failed to win in their own division.

The hunter should be handsome as opposed to pretty, he should be capable of carrying weight in the hunt field and should be of a substantial build, however, substantial should not equate to fat. The hunter can be of no specific breed and successful hunters have included and are not limited to blends of thoroughbred, Irish draught, native pony, Welsh cob, Warmblood and Arabian blood. Many international champion competition horses have made their initial competition career debuts in the hunter ring. The hunter should give the appearance of being fit and sufficiently conditioned to be able to follow hounds for a day's hunting. He should be sound, have an imposing presence and possess courage. Naturally in the hunter show ring, a high quality, attractive horse is desirable, however, a plain but true to type hunter should always win over a horse which is obviously of hack type. A would be champion should have that "look of eagles" which makes him appear an equine aristocrat, both in his manners and appearance. Judges should not reward failed hacks or alternatively chunky, round boned horses with poor lung capacity.

## BONE:

Bone is measured horizontally from just below the knee. A hunter horse over 15hh should have between 8 to 9 inches of bone. The sizing of the bone should be in proportion to the size of the horse, galloway or pony. Care should be taken to ensure that the limbs are not coarse, the ligaments and tendons should still be well defined. Weight and bone should be of an influence when you select your horse. Look for substantial limbs, strong, flat bone, large knees and hocks with elbows free of the body whilst keeping in mind that coarse bones and round joints are not acceptable in any horse. The hunter must be properly underpinned with appropriate bone and length of leg. In regard to ponies and galloways, there is no set bone sizing, however the bone should be commensurate to the size of the animal as previously mentioned and naturally, in keeping with the general description, the pony or galloway should lean more toward a traditional type or native breed pony or the Australian pony. The pony or galloway hunter should never be a fine type with fine bone and should carry the same characteristics and substance we desire in a horse over 15hh regarding movement, manners, paces and type.

In Australia, to ensure a standard programme of events can be designed to suit these horses, it may be easiest to separate classes into heights rather than weight which is applied in England where hunters are separated into three sections, lightweight, medium weight and heavy weight. One of the most controversial subjects in the showing of hunters in the UK is that of weight. People allegedly have and will always argue about a particular horse's weight, because it is not height that carries weight, but the bone below the knee. The stamp of a horse also makes a difference as a tall, narrow animal often appears up to more weight than it actually is. It is often the nice, short-legged horse which is the workman, deep of its body and with a good, sloping shoulder, short backed and with a fair set of limbs, having an attractive outlook and lots of natural presence.



Zion sashed Champion Saddle Hunter of the Year at the recent Kelt Capital Horse of the Year Show owned and ridden by Vanessa Everton. Photo Alicia Birch



SILVERSTREAM II - 1ST HEAVYWEIGHT HUNTER at ROYAL WINDSOR HORSE SHOW UK 2008. OWNED BY MRS C BARDO and shown by Jayne Webber.

## MOVEMENT, PACES AND MANNERS

Movement should form an important part of the decision when judging or purchasing a prospective horse for the hunter ring. He must display stronger, plainer paces than the light extravagant movement we would applaud in a hack and extreme or flashy movement should be penalised in a hunter. A hunter's movement should be ground covering whilst being straight, careful and slightly higher than a hack which allows them to carry their rider and travel safely over rough terrain without stumbling. However, short, choppy movement or high knee action is not acceptable. The hunter's gaits must be smooth, effortless whilst also being sweeping, elevated and clean. A hunter must also canter and gallop for longer periods. Hunters must work calmly and obediently. A gallop must form part of the workout, both the individual workout and also preferably and if safe to do so, with others on the circle. Show societies need to ensure that specific space is provided for these classes. A true gallop should be executed without any sign of laziness and will have the horse covering the ground in big, easy strides. The gallop should be immediate and the horse should finish calmly and without pulling. Competitors should not expect to fool anyone by cantering whilst leaning forward to simulate something faster, a definite gallop must be executed. Lengthened or

extended trots are not performed on the hunt field and should not be expected or asked for in the show hunter ring. It is incumbent on judges to ensure they use their own discretion and common sense when judging. Manners are important and the hunter does not need to appear robotic. Deliberate disobediences such as napping, bucking or rearing should be severely penalised. However small allowances could be made so that a horse coming back from a full gallop, may jig jog a couple of steps before regaining composure or may swap leads whilst taking a corner at a gallop or in the wet, without being penalised as the horse is technically balancing itself. However, a horse which naturally refuses to settle and walk and insists on jig jogging for more than a few paces should be penalised. A hunter should be expected to walk after a gallop with others, he should also be able to halt and stand still. No one wants to dismount in the hunt field to open a gate due to a horse which refuses to stand. A horse which will not settle and insists on jig jogging is irritating as walking can form a large part of the day whilst out hunting. Part of the individual workout whilst showing should include activities which may be carried out in the hunt field, ie the acceptance of the lash of the hunt whip hanging down the shoulder or dismounting and mounting.

### References:

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**NEXT ISSUE: SHOW HUNTER ATTIRE & SADDLERY**