

TREC – the ultimate riding challenge

A full TREC competition is made up of three phases – often these will be split over two days, with the orienteering taking place on day one.

Some shorter-format events are held over one day – these may combine the orienteering and obstacle course phases or the obstacles and control of paces.

Orienteering

Also known as the POR, competitors are required to copy a route onto a map, then saddle up and find their way back to base within a set time.

Control of Paces

To achieve full marks, you need to canter slowly along a set distance, then walk quickly back.

Obstacle course

Riders tackle a course of obstacles, some led and some mounted, which could include bridges, S-bends and even water.



TREC is a brilliant way to explore the countryside on horseback

You may come across water on a TREC obstacle course



Words: Jo Browne; photography: David Miller

Mapping out success

Budding TREC enthusiasts have been treated to some A-list training by members of the Team GB squad. Jo Browne reports

What could be a better way of brushing up your skills in a discipline you're new to, than getting some practical experience with accomplished competitors who have represented their country?

Riders interested in getting started in TREC – or those already out competing at the sport's lower levels – were given the opportunity to learn from the best at a special training event in Surrey.

They kicked off with an unmounted evening Q&A session, before saddling up the next day to try their hand at map reading and orienteering and a course of obstacles.

The riding took place in beautiful countryside, just outside Guildford.

Route checker

One of the pro riders sharing their tips was Bristol-based Hilary Barnard, who reassured people that the map reading element of TREC wasn't something to worry about.

In the orienteering phase of the competition riders are required to copy a route onto a map. The challenge is then to follow this route at a pre-determined speed.

"People often say they can't read a map, but they probably use a Sat Nav in the car, and that involves looking at a map," says Hilary, whose TREC achievements include competing internationally for Great Britain and being crowned TREC Champion of Great Britain.

"You need to learn to read clues in a map. Take one with you when you go hacking and look at

the map to work out where you are and what is around you."

Fellow Team GB rider Sue Lee offered a handy hint, which is to look for map reading 'handles'.

"Look out for something significant that can place you on a map, like a building, a fence line or the corner of a field.

"A good idea is to do a pairs class and team up with someone who is experienced at map reading and can show you the ropes."

For riders starting at Level one, the orienteering test is 10-15km (eight to nine miles) long. This should take around two hours to complete.

As well as following the map, competitors may be asked to collect 'tickets' around the route, which could be numbered cards to spot, or even landmarks to note down.

The orienteering test becomes longer as you progress through the levels, and can be up to 40km (around 25 miles) at Level four.

Horses for courses

After honing their map reading skills and picking up some useful tips from the Team GB riders, the TREC 'trainees' practised some of the obstacles they could encounter in a competition.

They splashed through a water complex, popped a small log fence and ducked down to canter under the 'low branches' challenge.

Sue Lee gave Lesley Armley and Louise Deacon some tips on how to teach a horse to tackle the bending poles.

"To gain maximum points you need to canter through the poles, without breaking into ▶



That's the way to do it: Sue Lee demonstrates bending



Riders practise marking up a route on a blank map



Ellen Conrad's cob Albert proves to be a natural on the obstacle course

trot," says Sue. "For Level one, two and three competitions the poles are set six metres apart, and at Level four this is reduced to five metres.

"When introducing bending to your horse you can increase the space between the poles, or miss a pole or two out and build up in stages."

Sue also shows the riders how the low branches obstacle is done, where the aim is to canter under without knocking off the poles at the top.

Positive changes

Watching the action was Dave Rogerson, a TREC GB board member who is also a keen competitor – he is one half of the current Level 3 British Pairs Champions.

TREC GB took over management of the sport last year, from the British Horse Society.

Dave said the new organisation is making positive changes that will take the sport forward into the future.

"The committee has taken on board feedback from riders and incorporated their comments into the sport's rule book," he says.

"We are also doing more to encourage people to progress through the levels, and hopefully they will be inspired to aim for Level 4 and to compete internationally.

"A key aim for the future is to encourage more younger riders to get involved and hopefully represent their country." ■

NEW STARTERS

"TREC can take you to lots of new places"

One of the riders enjoying their first taste of TREC was Lesley Armley, riding 20-year-old former polo pony Pintita.

"Pintita is a Criollo that was bred in Argentina and I bought nine years ago," says Lesley, from Surrey. "She has just retired from polo and we were looking for something fun to do, and my friend Louise said we should have a go at TREC.

"It has been an enjoyable day and Pintita has found it all very exciting."

Louise Deacon recommended TREC to Lesley after competing in Level one competitions on her mare Cherry B.

"I love exploring the countryside on horse back, and TREC can take you to lots of new places," she says. "I even enjoy the map reading – it gives you an understanding of the geography of an area."

Finding the way

Victoria Gange Parry and Ellen Conrad were mentored by Team GB rider Jackie Bennett during the orienteering practice.

"Jackie talked us through the map and the route and showed us what to look for," says Ellen, who lives in Guildford, but is originally from Germany.

She let us make a few mistakes along the way, so that we would learn from them.

"I'm hoping Albert and I can get out and enjoy ourselves at some more TREC events this summer. He loves the obstacles, so I think he's made for TREC!"

Victoria, who rides nine-year-old Irish Draught



Louise (far left) recommended TREC to her friend Lesley (right)

Johnny says that the sport is a great way to have fun with your horse.

"Everyone involved in TREC is really nice and supportive, and it's a great education for my horse."

Team talk

Members of the Team GB TREC team reveal what they love most from the sport and share their top tips...



Rider: Lynn Davies, from Narberth, Pembrokeshire.

Horse: Bianca, a 14-year-old blanket spot Appaloosa.

How I got involved: "I started doing TREC in 2014, when a friend recommended it as being really good fun – I had a go and I was hooked."

Favourite things: "I love the mental challenge of map reading. Riding skills are important, but you have to use your brain as well. You also get to see some beautiful parts of the country and ride routes that you wouldn't normally be able to."

Top tip: Go along and watch a TREC competition to learn more about what's involved. Everyone is very friendly and will only be happy to tell you what you want to know and to share their tips."



Rider: Daniel Nolan from Rugby, Warks

Horse: Tommy, a Dutch Warmblood gelding.

How I got involved: "My first TREC event was in Wales



Daniel loves the challenge of orienteering

in 2005. A friend told me how great it was, so I thought I'd take the plunge. I've always loved hacking out and exploring new areas, so TREC is the perfect activity for me."

Favourite things: "The orienteering is my favourite element of the competition. I also like that any type of horse can excel at TREC, and you see all kinds of breeds taking part. Anyone can have a go, on any type of horse or pony."

Top tip: "To practise your map reading skills, print off a map of your local area and take it with you on a hack. Ride routes you already know and find them on the map. Then, up the challenge by going a bit further afield and exploring somewhere new."



Rider: Sue Lee

Horse: Daisy, a 12-year-old Thoroughbred X Welsh.

How I got involved: "I've been doing TREC since 2009 and started with an indoor competition. I had a hot-headed horse and indoor

TREC was brilliant as you can't get eliminated and you can get off and lead the horse if you want to."

Favourite things: "TREC has helped my horse and I form a strong partnership. It also helps my dressage – I compete in dressage at Advanced Medium level – and I believe that she is a much happier horse because of the variety of things we do together."

Top tip: "Don't forget to go out and have a really good time with your horse. It doesn't matter if you get lost on the orienteering route, it should just be a pleasure to be out there doing something fun with your horse."



Rider: Hilary Barnard, from Bristol.

Horse: Roughtor, a 14.1hh, 10-year-old, Dartmoor.

How I got involved: "Ten years ago, I heard about a local competition and thought I'd have a go."

Favourite things: "I enjoy

orienteering but I do like the challenge of a technical PTV (obstacle) course – that's where good schooling comes in. If you've put in the right training, the PTV will go smoothly."

Top tip: "Walk the obstacle course carefully and ask lots of questions of fellow competitors. It's OK to pick other people's brains. I also recommend reading the rule book, which is an important part of preparing for a competition."



Hilary and Roughtor in action

Contacts

To find out more about TREC and to locate your nearest local group, visit: www.trecgb.com; tel: (07469) 822 948.



Victoria (left) and Ellen (right) with mentor Jackie

Pedal power

One rider who had booked onto the training weekend was so determined not to miss out when her horse developed a problem with his feet that she rode her bike instead.

"I took part in a 'versatile TREC' event as an introduction to the sport and found it so inspiring," said Kate, from Guildford. "It left me really looking forward to this weekend and when I couldn't bring Charlie, I thought I'd bring my bike.

"There was a long climb up at the start and I was a bit worried I wouldn't make it all the way – then we got into the forest tracks and I really enjoyed it."

