



WORDS | Hannah Goodby

What is TREC?

I asked myself the same question.

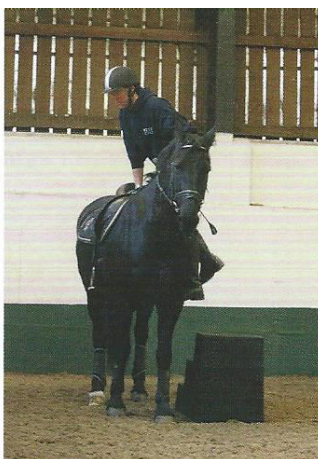
It appeared as though there was an equestrian sport I knew nothing about. Not one to enjoy being left out, it was only logical that I attempt to find out more. Luckily I was asked to come along to a recent event and see what all the fuss was about.

A BIT OF BACKGROUND

TREC is designed to test the skills of a horse and rider needed when trail riding; navigation across different terrain, fitness of horse and rider, and ability to deal with natural obstacles. It originated in France as a way of testing and improving the skills of trail-ride leaders, and was introduced into the UK in the early 1990's.



TREC made its first appearance on the Island in 2012 and has been going from strength to strength. Now in 2014 it has a dedicated committee that runs events on a monthly basis, in keeping with TREC GB (the governing body).



THE SPORT CONSISTS OF 3 PHASES:

ORIENTEERING PHASE

Riders follow a set route, on their own or in pairs, which they have copied onto a map themselves at a range of pre-determined speeds. The routes vary in length from 10-40km and riders lose points (from a maximum of 240) for using an incorrect route or being too fast or too slow. At the higher levels riders may be asked to navigate using grid references or compass bearings only.

CONTROL OF PACES PHASE

Riders must demonstrate their control over their horse's paces by cantering as slowly as possible along a track and then returning in walk as fast as possible. Points (out of a maximum of 60) are determined by the time taken for each pace.

OBSTACLE PHASE

Riders complete a course of 16 obstacles which are designed to represent things that could be found on a ride, each of which is judged out of 10 (maximum points available 160). The course has a time limit and points are deducted for exceeding the limit. Obstacles may be required to be completed ridden or led, and include things like riding through water, opening and closing a gate, jumping a small fence and riding or leading up or down a slope, over a bank or through a dip.



The points gained by a rider or pair are totalled and the highest total wins.

START TREC

MY EXPERIENCE

It was a Saturday lunchtime when I jumped in my car and headed down to Kennaa Equestrian Centre. Riding hat in hand I was ready to have go, not just observe.

When I arrived the atmosphere was very relaxed and friendly. There certainly didn't seem to be any pressure on the competitors. Everybody was having fun and there were several obstacles set up in the indoor arena.

To give you an idea there were narrow poles, a low branch to go under, a bridge made of pallets and poles that bent in and out; all were there to simulate what you might come across whilst hacking out (riding out on roads or in plantations etc). This tests the trust and control between horse and rider.

I watched 3 combinations in action, all of various ages, and mounted on very different horses. The beauty of TREC is that you don't need a flash horse or any special equipment, just standard riding attire is fine along with hi-vis clothing for the orienteering stage.

Full of enthusiasm and intrigued - as always when trying something new - I mounted Gillian Newey's 'Misty' (14hh). Gillian assured me that Misty would look after me! She was clearly a pro as we navigated our way around the obstacles. It was great fun and took more skill than I first thought.

IN SUMMARY

As an instructor I like the fact that, in a very relaxed way, TREC helps to teach the basics of riding a horse properly and promotes better horsemanship - something I am very passionate about. So TREC gets the thumbs' up from me.

If you would like to have a go yourself and get involved in this exciting equestrian sport, you can contact Jo Ralston, visit the website at www.treciom.com, or find it on facebook www.facebook.com/treciom

With Christmas fast approaching and given the title of the article I should have a witty pun involving 'live long and prosper', but instead I'll stick to tradition and wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.