



Any type of horse can compete in TREC, as long as it's well educated and sensible

How do I get involved with TREC?

I recently lost my nerve with my 15.2hh part-bred thoroughbred after a nasty fall and someone suggested that TREC could be a fun way to build my confidence back up. What is it and how does it work?

P Phillip, Cornwall

WITH an emphasis on horsemanship rather than horse power, TREC offers riders an interesting but relatively safe competitive challenge.

The three-phase sport tests rider navigation and the horse's ability to tackle different terrain and natural obstacles, without undue demands on either bravery or bank balance.

'A mind game'

"YOU can be as competitive as you like," says Amanda Marfleet of TREC GB. "It's a sport in which you have to use your head — it's really a mind game."

There are four competitive levels in TREC, from the easy and encouraging mini TRECs to the more demanding events at international level.

The first phase is orienteering on horseback (POR), where riders follow a route on a map at speeds predetermined by the organisers.

"It's nothing like as fast

as an endurance ride," says Amanda, explaining that at level two you'll cover up to 20kms in around 2-3hrs, with some trot and the occasional canter.

"You'll need a stopwatch and basic map reading skills."

The timed control of paces (CoP) phase calls for solid flat work foundations, as competitors must canter as slowly as possible along a narrow track before returning at the fastest possible walk.

Finally, an obstacle section (PTV) recreates natural hazards you might encounter out hacking — such as a gate, steps up, a river crossing or a jump. All obstacles are optional, but you'll lose points for missing one.

"You get the chance to ride around some lovely places," says Amanda. "And you'll learn by your mistakes. It's easy to make progress."

TREC does not require a particularly athletic or well-bred horse. Retired

show hunters, retrained racehorses and native ponies compete side by side.

"You can ride any kind of horse, provided he's well educated and fairly brave," says Amanda. "Something sensible is good."

"You may have to stand to do a gate or canter into a checkpoint, or, if you're lost, maybe 'bush bashing' or riding chest high in bracken."

'Confidence builder'

AS you can compete individually or in pairs, TREC can be a confidence-builder for both horse and rider.

Trainer Kelly Marks of Intelligent Horsemanship believes a TREC competition can be a good early outing.

"I have a nice young horse who I think will make an eventer," she says.

"I welcome every chance to get him out and about, so a low-key event like this is ideal."

"If you buy a horse that's done TREC, the chances

'IT ASKS A MENTAL QUESTION OF THE HORSE'

SUE LEE'S medium-level dressage mare Daisy also competes internationally in TREC.

"She's a goey, powerpack of a horse and was very sharp as a youngster," says Sue of the Welsh-thoroughbred mare. "We started four years ago with indoor TREC and she enjoyed the laid-back competition atmosphere. She was a bit excitable at her first outdoor event, but soon settled."

"On the first day [the orienteering], the horse is really just a vehicle to carry you from A to B. But on day two, in the CoP and obstacles, a highly trained horse is a tremendous asset. At championship level we might jump a 1.10m log with an immobility three strides later [where the horse stands still], or canter along a corridor 50cm wide. Good transitions, obedience and straightness are essential."

"Dressage at our level is pure physicality, but TREC gets the horse thinking and working independently. It asks more of a mental question. I find that Daisy comes back to dressage renewed — she's not stale and she wants to work."

"TREC builds a really good bond between horse and rider — I've ridden Daisy through rivers and up mountains. It all comes down to teamwork and horsemanship."

"Daisy has taken me to British Dressage winter and regional championships and has won the TREC British level three pairs. My main aim this year is a place on the GBR team at the TREC European Championships in Italy in September."



are he'll be pretty well rounded."

Summer TREC competitions are usually run over two days.

"They're extremely good value at around £45-60 for the whole weekend," says Amanda, adding that there's a small extra charge to "corral" your horse overnight.

"In winter, when we run the CoP and obstacle sections indoors, entry fees are £10-15 per class."

"You can compete abroad from level two, choosing your own event, or you could try for the national team at level four." **H&H**

Getting started

THERE'S a good UK spread of TREC groups, so finding somewhere local to start shouldn't be too difficult.

The BHS website (www.bhs.org.uk) lists plenty of information for beginners, along with details of the new £20 riders' licence required for affiliated competition.

In October, the BHS will hand over the administration of the sport to TREC GB. Find out more at www.trecgb.com

What to wear

THERE'S no dress code for TREC, but most competitors prefer short boots and chaps. An appropriate safety helmet is a must, as is ID for both horse and rider.

Hi-viz and reflective gear is required for

the POR phase. Riders must also carry equipment, including a compass, a whistle, a torch and waterproofs.

A body protector is compulsory for the PTV phase.

How did it all begin?

TREC originated in France, where it developed as a means of testing and improving the skills of trail ride leaders in the equestrian tourism industry. It was introduced to the UK in the 1990s and remains a sport based on the skills required for hacking.