

Press release – Monday 14 November 2011

Full steam ahead for the Hoof West Midlands network

Somewhere, at a riding school in the UK, the next Mary King, Carl Hester or Nick Skelton has just clambered aboard a horse for the first time.

Giving as many people as possible the chance to try their hand at riding – and then encouraging them to stay in the saddle – is the key not only to producing the next generation of champions, but also to maximising the growth of the horse industry.

This was the key message conveyed at the recent West Midlands Hoof network joint event, which took place on 31 October at the Riding for the Disabled (RDA) headquarters in Warwick.

Twenty-five delegates from riding centres, RDA groups and British Equestrian Federation (BEF) member bodies attended the event - to hear how collaboration between Hoof, the British Horse Society (BHS) and the BEF is working to boost business and raise the standard of riding schools in order to encourage existing clients to stay in the sport and encourage new riders into the equestrian fold.

Key speakers at the event included BHS representatives Lee Hackett, David Buckton, Ellie Layton and Margaret Linington-Payne, plus the BEF's David Hamer, who delivered a thought-provoking presentation on the journey to becoming an elite rider – a process that starts at the grassroots level, often in riding schools.

He said: "The initial experiences that talented riders have at riding schools are crucial to helping them on their journey to elite level competition. It is important to recognise the value of coaching and mentoring at this stage."

To this end, the West Midlands and North West Regional Development Co-ordinator Sonia Birch introduced a new programme called "Take Back the Reins", which will encourage riders who may have ridden once or twice in the past, back on to a horse.

Ms Birch said: "The programme will be rolled out nationally in the New Year, but at this stage we are simply encouraging centres to convey their interest in taking part. It will be a seven-week programme focusing on a high level of customer care to help new riders develop their skills and make new participants feel part of the riding community."

Sally Barker, proprietor of Hollyfast Meadows Riding Centre in Coventry, who attended the joint event, said: "I felt I learned a lot during the day and, with the help and support of such key organisations, I am excited about the opportunity to take our riding school to the next level."

The next West Midlands Hoof meeting will take place early in the New Year. For more information email Sonia Birch [Sonia.birch@bef.co.uk]

ENDS

For further information please contact Claire Shand: 02476698877 / claire.shand@bef.co.uk or Pippa Wade: 02476698871 / pippa.wade@bef.co.uk

Additional information can be found at http://www.bef.co.uk/In_the_Regions/HOOF_Networks.html

Hoof is an initiative set up by the BEF to ensure there is a lasting legacy from equestrian sport from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The London HOOF programme was first rolled out via the London Horse Network in 2007. Since its inception it has succeeded in attracting funding for the sector to increase riding opportunities while providing a valuable platform for businesses to share good practice, raise standards and identify opportunities to help equestrian businesses grow. Its success gained the backing of Sport England in 2009; with their support eight further HOOF regional networks were launched England wide between May-August 2011.

The aim of the networks

- To offer advice, guidance and support on the opportunities for equestrian businesses to grow and raise standards
- Consult with local equestrian businesses to understand challenges within the industry and find solutions
- Provide a local equestrian forum from which to raise awareness, share good practice and gain support

The objectives of the regional networks are to:

- Raise participation
- Empower local equestrian businesses / organisations to grow