

TEN YEARS TO THE TOP..

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE SPSS (2000 - 2010)

by Celia Clarke (Chair, Sports Pony Studbook Society 2000 - 2014)

Little did we know when, in early 2000, Sarah Steggall and I began to draw up plans to launch a sports pony studbook for the UK, just how much it was going to take over our lives for the following decade. Sarah was the driving force behind it, with her impeccable knowledge of sports pony pedigrees, performance and requirements, and I have to say that my contribution at this point was just to attempt to draw up some workable rules for registration and grading. There were many onerous regulations that we had to comply with in order to gain approval to become an official studbook and passport issuing organisation (PIO).

The Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Sports Pony Studbook Society were confirmed on 10 November 2000. Directors and an Executive committee were also appointed as the SPSS is a limited company. This, however, was just the start of it as, unlike any other studbook before or since, we also had to convince MAFF (the forerunner of DEFRA) that we were fit people to run a stud book through a lengthy personal interview and inspection process. We also had to use considerable political skills to convince a number of existing native and rare breed pony studbooks that we were not infringing on their sectors and that their pure-bred studbooks would not be diluted by a flush of sports pony 'types'. Edith Rutherford was of great help here with her knowledge of pony breed societies and Eriskay ponies in particular.

We obviously succeeded in this task as we were granted approval in early 2001. There were codicils that any native or rare breed stallion had to be licensed with its studbook of

origin before it could be presented to us for grading. Further, any native or rare breed pony must get its passport/pedigree papers from its native breed society rather than the SPSS (although the SPSS could overstamp them in the normal way). In fact, these requirements have actually been of considerable help to us in ways that we could not have foreseen at that time.

“Key to successful breeding is the quality of the mare”

The other pony studbooks realised that we were straightforward and easy to work with, DEFRA trusted us and we were recruited onto the BHS Horse and Pony Breeds Committee and the Council of the Central Prefix Register. As well as being one of the organisations selected to test the Beta version of the National Equine Database, we were also asked to help prepare the 2005 Code of Practice for Studbook PIOs which is still in force today. We were also involved in the British Dressage Young Horse and Pony Dressage Championships from the very beginning and we have close and continuing links with the Futurity and the British Lead Body for the Performance Sport

Horse and Pony (PSHP). Not bad for one of the youngest studbooks in the country!

So that's the boring bureaucratic bit out of the way. What about the ponies I hear you ask impatiently... Well, from the very first grading in 2001 the SPSS has been blessed with a devoted, and I am pleased to say continuously growing, band of stallion and mare owners who have seen fit to invest in the very top performance lines worldwide across the breeds and make them available to the sports pony breeding public. The background and statistics of this operation are as impressive as the ponies themselves.

As far as stallions are concerned, to date, 86 have been entered into one or other of the graded studbooks, with 63 successful candidates appearing before the grading panels. The remainder have been over-stamps of stallions already graded in recognized sports pony studbooks or World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFSH) member studbooks. Fifteen stallions have been awarded the accolade of Elite (reserved for those that have either competed internationally themselves or have sired international competitors).



Jane Buchan from Baileys Horse Feeds presents the Futurity Certificates of Merit to Frances Smither for Littledale Bright Star (far left), Sarah Steggall for Bernwode Brokat (near left) and to Lucy Sheldrake for Bernwode Evelina S (far right).



Broomford Dancer & Marlies van Baalen (NED) Team Bronze medallists at the 1993 Pony European Championships

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Of particular note are the 'old boys', the two German-bred international dressage ponies **Broomford Dancer** (who established his own very successful sire line in Germany before coming here) and **Manitu N** (who has consistently competed for GB at the European Championships with three different riders), the Danish-bred **Laban** (sire of the European Pony Eventing Team Silver Medallist, Red Alert), and not forgetting the Welsh Section D **Carregcoch Bleddyn** (whose own son **Machno Carwyn's** own achievement as twice European Pony Show Jumping Individual Gold Medallist earned him his own place in the Elite section as well). However, it is the younger stallions with whom the future of the SPSS now mainly lies so we will be watching the competitive careers of their progeny with great interest in the future.

Of course, the key to successful breeding lies in the quality of the mare and any studbook is only as successful as its broodmares. The SPSS has some outstanding examples with 12 mares being ranked Elite. Three of the SPSS Elite mares, including the German

Bundeschampion and European team silver medallist, **Daphne**, were already graded by another European Pony Studbook as were a number of other mares. However, the majority of the 166 mares in our three mare studbooks have successfully attended an SPSS grading.

I would just like to highlight a few British-bred mares for a special mention. The TB x Connemara **Sapphire Blue** (European Eventing Team Bronze 1996 and team member 2000) and the International dressage pony **Maelor Midora**. Another high achieving mare is the European Eventing Team Silver Medallist 2008/09, **Catherston Nutsafe**, whose embryo-transfer daughter, Catherston Roundabout, was one of the highest scoring foals in the 2008 Futurity series. Catherston Nutsafe is by the British-bred Riding Pony Catherston Nightsafe, who spent 2 seasons in Germany siring successful sports ponies such as the stallion grading Champion, Chantre B.

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I will actually close with a further mention of the Futurity Evaluations as, during the past 4 years, they have provided an excellent platform for the whole range of SPSS bred youngsters across the disciplines. It is therefore only fitting that, in the first couple of weeks of our 10th year, at the annual Supporters of British Breeding dinner, SPSS graded ponies achieved a clean sweep of the Pony awards and ranked highly amongst the top horse stallions and mares breeding in Great Britain!

For the first time, the BEF Futurity recognised the consistent contribution of sires and dams in each discipline over the years for which they have collected data. Based on combined results for 2008 and 2009, the owners of the highest scoring horses and ponies were presented with a parchment scroll of honour and personalized rosette.

The Sire and Dam awards of Sports Ponies, sponsored by Baileys Horse Feeds, were open to ponies and horses resident in the UK.

The Futurity Certificate of Merit for 'All Years' Leading Sire of Sports Ponies was shared between Catherston Stud's **Littledale Bright Star** (sire Catherston Nightsafe) and Bernwode Stud's **Bernwode Brokat** (sire Brilliant). Both of these stallions are established SPSS graded sires who are producing quality stock each year and they both achieved the excellent average score from their top 3 scoring progeny of 8.84 out of 10. To complete a perfect result for SPSS Ponies, DeLaRoche Stud's **Bernwode Evelina S** was awarded the equivalent mare title as the 'All Years' Leading Dam of Sports Ponies' based on her excellent average progeny score of 8.96.

The final pony award, the SPSS sponsored trophy for the 'Top Sire of Competition Ponies' was awarded to the SPSS Elite stallion, **Ashfield MacTalla** (sire of the 2009 European Eventing Team Pony, Trewithian Bracken). Sadly, his owner of many years, Miss Sue Rowe of Trewithian Stud was unable to attend as she was 'snowed in' at home in Cornwall but, as the picture shows, she and 'Mac' proudly received their award by post! A fitting close to a very successful decade I think we would all agree.



Ashfield MacTalla and owner Sue Rowe with the 2010 SPSS 'Top Sire of Competition Ponies' Trophy.

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