

Thrilling polocrosse is king

Our latest New Year, New Sport feature looks at a fast and furious equine team game

HAVE YOU ever felt the thrill of racing through a field on your horse, chasing a ball whilst one, two or three other riders attempt to beat you, block you or push you off your line, and sometimes off your horse?

Have you ever experienced reaching for the ball, stretching as far forward as you can to sweep it into your net — then spinning your horse around and galloping off, evading your opposition players and scanning the field of play to locate your team-mates?

And have you ever done all this while your team-mates lock on to your opponents and drive a gap in the field, to allow you to race through, bounce the ball, catch it and then shoot the ball straight through the goals?

If you haven't felt those thrills, then you haven't played polocrosse — possibly the fastest, most exciting team sport played on horseback.

Often thought to be like polo — because of the name — and described as lacrosse on



SHAUN GILLANDERS

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horseback, it is, in reality, neither.

Sometimes it is played more like rugby on horseback, and the pitch can be ridden as if it is football on horseback, with tactics and team plays being as key to winning as having a star player.

The mechanics and rules of the game are fairly straightforward.

Most horses and ponies can be taught the skills needed to play the game, and genuinely seem to love it.

Everybody who gives it a go enjoys it, whatever level they play.

Children can learn to play it on their ponies, and adults can play it on horses.

The game has a strategic element, with riders playing off the ball and not just chasing it around the pitch.

With overground passes and catches you need to think in three dimensions.

There is true parity between the sexes, with men and women playing alongside each other and against each other.



We believe it is a fantastic and addictive horse sport that allows you to enjoy riding with the company of others.

Whilst we are not claiming that no other horse sport allows you to do this, the high-octane, thrill-a-second nature of this one means that you should give it a go — and of course you only need one horse and not a string of them.

You may not have heard much about

"It is a fantastic and addictive horse sport."

Shaun Gillanders

this sport in Scotland because it is relatively new up here.

The Polocrosse World Cup was held in England in 2011, which generated quite a lot of interest in the sport within the equine press.

The next World Cup is in South Africa in 2015.

Internationally, the game is dominated by the southern hemisphere.

SHAUN

Dr Shaun Gillanders BHSI is a BHS qualified riding instructor who owns and runs a busy riding school in Kinross-shire with his wife Katie.

Shaun teaches all ages and stages from beginners up to BHS stage exams, both children and adults.

Shaun has been coaching polocrosse successfully now for three years, with his Pony Club teams being placed in the last two Pony Club national championships.

Last year his U12s won their national Pony Club polocrosse championships.

Shaun is happy to provide individual polocrosse lessons or group lessons privately outwith the training sessions listed.



Four teams from Over Dalkeith Stables Pony Club Centre near Kinross made a return trip of more than 500 miles to compete in the polocrosse tournament at the Pony Club Championships at Chalmordley Castle near Chester in August. The 12-and-under team comprising Ruaridh Gillanders, Olivia Mears and Annabel Mahoney won their group and received the Brookes Mini Championship Trophy. The juniors came third in their group, and the two senior teams were fifth and sixth after having to compete against each other in the play-off. Picture: Anthony Drew.