

of the one-horse sports



IN THE late 1930s Edward Hirst and his wife, who lived in Sydney, Australia, read an article in an English Horse Magazine about an exercise referred to as polo crosse.

Keen to pursue their interests of horse breeding and sports, they decided to find out more during travels to the UK.

They visited the National School of Equitation at Kingston Vale near London, where two instructors had developed an exercise to supplement the work of equestrians at the riding school and help young riders take better charge of their horses.

The exercise was played indoors with two riders a side, using wall markers from which a ball could bounce back into play.

The goals were elongated basketball nets hung at each end of the arena.

Riders used polo sticks with the mallet replaced with a squash racquet head and shallow string net.

The idea was to scoop up a ball a little larger than a tennis ball, ride to the end of the arena and drop it into a net.

Realising the possibilities of the exercise as an outdoor horse sport, the Hirsts returned to

DEVELOPMENT OF POLOCROSSE



PHILIPPA
STEPHEN

Australia armed with a rule book, sticks and balls and sought the assistance of polo player Alf Pitty.

Hours of discussion, trial and error and numerous rule changes later, they came up with an exciting game using one horse per player which could be enjoyed by those of any age. They called it polocrosse.

Mr Pitty helped the

Hirsts give the first recorded polocrosse demonstration, at Ingleburn Sports Ground near Sydney, in 1939.

Polocrosse reached South Africa in the early 1950s before making it back to the UK in 1978, when it was introduced to two branches of the Pony Club in Surrey.

The modern game is played outside. Each rider uses a stick featuring a racquet head with a loose thread net in which the ball is carried.

The ball is made of sponge rubber and is about four inches across.

The objective is to score goals by throwing the ball between your opponent's goal posts.

Unlike polo, players are allowed only one horse, except in the case of injury.

There is no restriction on the horse's height, although the 'ideal' polocrosse equine is considered one that does not exceed

around 16 hands. Horses of all breeds play, but stallions are not permitted.

A team consists of six players in two sections of three who play three or four alternate chukkas of six minutes, and eight minutes in internationals.

A match comprises six or eight chukkas.

Each section has a number one for attack; a number two in midfield (a combination of defence and attack), and a number three for defence.

In Britain the 'king of one-horse sports' is governed by the UK Polocrosse Association.

Players are graded, or handicapped, with a score between zero and 20.

The highest graded player in the UK currently sits on 16.

The sport is played throughout the world, and is still supported in the UK by the Pony Club.



SHELAGH
STEVEN

THERE ARE a lot of great expectations placed on young horses.

We see top riders doing very well in the young horse classes, having produced the horse to a very high standard. These horses are the crème de la crème.

To reach this level requires a very special horse and expert training.

What we don't see is all the other horses that are kept at home until they mature and are ready mentally and physically to deal with the hubbub of competitions and the likes.

How long it takes to have an established horse depends on its personality, the facilities available, the amount of training put in by the rider and the ability of the rider.

Although the end goal is very much to have a horse that is educated, socialised and fun, we can get there by many different paths.

The more horses you bring on, the more tools you have available to deal with the requirements of each young horse that comes your way. Just as in humans, no two are the same.

With spring competitions just around the corner, we must be careful not to 'run before we can walk' with our young horses.

It is easy to get carried away with entering for this and that, and before we know it we have blown the horse's brains, overfaced it and lost all trust and confidence.

The poor horse gets blamed for not being good enough, is punted down the road, and a new version comes in as a replacement.

Take it one step at a time. Riding Club and Pony Club offer great tuition to help you gauge where you are at.

If you have a regular coach, they will be able to advise you on the best route for you and your horse.

Have fun with your horse, work on what he is good at, and work away quietly on the weaker areas. Before you know it you will have your own little superstar ready and willing for you to go and have a ball.

However, there is a growing number of international teams in Europe, with Ireland and Britain being the strongest nations.

We want Scotland to take its place on the international stage. We have a large pool of horse riders here, and in many equestrian events field Olympic and international riders — so why not work on creating an international polocrosse team?

We also just think it's great fun and a very sociable sport, and the more players and teams we can get then the more fun we can all have.

If I haven't convinced you to give it a go yet, have a look on YouTube and search polocrosse, or call Over Dalkeith Stables and speak to me to arrange a lesson.

We need more Scottish riders coming in to the sport.

At Over Dalkeith Stables we provide polocrosse tuition for all ages and abilities, from nervous beginners to wildly competitive experienced players.

We can provide the horse or teach you on your own.

We field teams for Scotland in Pony Club polocrosse and would love to get the Saltire out there competing at adult levels.

Our ultimate aim is to enable a Scottish international side to compete on the world stage alongside the English and Irish teams.

To do this we need financial support for team horses and transport — and more players. The more of you budding players out there currently hiding your talents that we can uncover, the better our pool becomes.

So go on to the Scottish Polocrosse website, pick up the phone to chat, come to watch, come to play, just come — you never know until you've tried it.

For more information pay a visit to:

● overdalkeithstables.co.uk
● scottishpolocrosse.co.uk

Above and below right: all-out action from a thrilling sport.

Pictures: Anthony Drew.

DIARY DATES

● **Wednesdays, 6.30pm to 8pm: training at Over Dalkeith Stables.** Call 01577 840740 to book.

● **Sundays, 4.30pm to 6pm and 6.30pm to 8pm: training at Over Dalkeith Stables.**

● **Second Scottish Polocrosse Ball: date and location to be confirmed.**

● **Scottish summer training camp: July 22-26, Over Dalkeith Stables.**

● **Dates for tournaments in England can be found by paying a visit to the UKPA website at ukpolocrosse.co.uk.**

