

TETRATHLON



Photography: Horsepowerpics Brian Johnson



One of the newer pony club disciplines, tetrathlon roots are steeped in history. Baron pierre de coubertin, founder of the modern olympics, selected events which he considered to be the most representative of the skills necessary for the military; riding a strange mount, fencing with an epee, pistol shooting, swimming and cross country running.

Natasha L Johnson started Tetrathlon (te-trath'-lon) at the age of ten, was hooked after her first training session and competed for the following 11 years until she was out of The Pony Club. Tetrathlon was initially introduced for boys in the hope that it would retain their interest in the Pony Club by providing an athletic challenge that still required horsemanship. Girls now also compete but in separate competitions with a separate scoring system.



To be successful you have to have get all four events right in one event and have a bit of luck on your side. Even the most experienced tetrathlete can get something wrong; a wayward shot, a simple mistake on the cross country or just not feeling good for the run or swim.




Tetrathlon consists of pistol shooting, swimming, running and cross country riding, on a familiar horse, fencing being excluded because of its complexity. In the winter months competitions are run in the form of triathlons. Run in exactly the same format as tetrathlons but minus the riding phase. The scoring of events allows each phase to have an equal influence on the final result. Every year each Pony Club Area holds an area qualifier which allows individuals and club teams to qualify for the Pony Club National Tetrathlon Championships. Every four years the UK send two teams to compete in America and Canada, and the Americans and Canadians along with Irish Republic compete in the UK two years later. I started Tetrathlon at the age of ten after a primary school supply teacher, whose daughter competed, suggested I give it a go. I loved the first training session and after being placed individual and as a team in my first competition I was hooked and I competed for the following 11 years until I was out of Pony Club. Children start Tetrathlon for many reasons and I would say to

anyone who is interested to go along and give it a go; it is a fantastic sport that opens many doors. Most pony clubs have a tetrathlon team and all clubs are friendly and will hold a weekly training session. A competition usually takes place over two days with the first day usually consists of shooting and swimming. The first phase is shooting, a phase I mastered in training but never in competition. It requires self control, concentration and the ability to control nerves! A poor shoot can leave a lot to be made up in the other phases and knowing this makes the nerves worse. Competitor can have up to five practice shots and then have 10 competition shots on two targets under supervised conditions at all times. Most clubs will have guns that can be borrowed and people with the expertise to help you. Swimming takes place in heats where competitors swim against people of the same ability as them. This is the first phase spectators can watch as only one person can accompany competitors in the shooting. Walk into a pool during a tetrathlon competition and you will not be able to hear yourself think through the noise. Not only will the parents be cheering but friends and friend's parents and other club members, but as a competitor you can hear the noise and appreciate it but can not pick out individual statements.



The second day of competition consists of riding followed by running. During the riding phase mum's normally run around anxiously, dad's hide and the children gallop round on their ponies having a fantastic time without a care in the world!



Courses are getting more technical but they are designed to test the rider and you do not need to spend thousands on a mount. Many children have horses on loan or borrow them. My two good horses that took me to Junior Area and Senior UK and National level were both ordinary hunters. In the winter they carried the Fitzwilliam huntsman or provided their owner, Alison Howard with a safe mount to lead her young children from, and in the summer they were my tetrathlon horses. The running is the part that most competitors seem to dislike but training does make it easier. Many competitions

have been won or lost on the running. Competitors set off at 1 minute intervals and courses are generally one lap courses over varying terrain. Occasionally obstacles such as a jump or stream are included which can provide entertainment for spectators. It is not all about competing; there are the football and rounder's games, not to forget the practical jokes, BBQ's, parties and water fights at the end of a long day of competition. What other sport can you see children competing against each other one minute then best of friends the next? You will make friends for life from your club, other clubs and from teams abroad if you get the opportunity to be involved with International competitions.

For more information about Tetrathlon contact the Pony Club www.pcuk.org

