

South West Pony Association

'Promoting showing for all ages and types of equines'

Where and why it all started.

By Richard Broad

Both my wife Medwin, and I had previously been involved in helping to run shows in our area of Somerset. At that time many of the 'qualifying type' shows like NPS & BPS held classes for their own types of ponies in the main. Like ourselves many people had other types of equines like cobs, coloured, hunters & horses.

There also seemed to be a lack of an affordable yearly championship for all types in the South West & Wales areas.

All the championships shows were not only far away but seemingly for the top end of equines & riders.

Are thinking was, wouldn't it be great to have a 'championship type' show in the South West area, for all types and all levels of showing. After much chatting and throwing around ideas, my wife Medwin, our friend Jayne Vowles, and I founded the South West Pony Association.

Our very first show was a summer one day show held in Devon, July 1997. The show was a great success and convinced us that we could try and hold a 'championship type' show later in the year.

After a lot of organising and finding a venue, we held our very first championship show at The Hand Equestrian Centre in Clevedon, nr Bristol.

Not knowing how successful it would be, we planned the show for one day, big mistake, as we were still showing well past midnight, but I have to say everyone was in good spirits and were very patient.

We realised that for the following year we would have to do some rethinking, and so the following year we planned the show for two days. However, due to a lack of permanent stables, we had to get temporary stables in, which for us at that time was a big undertaking in terms of costs, and logistics.

After just a few years we had just outgrown the facilities and started to look at other venues.

By this time along with running the Championship Show, we were running six 'one day' shows per year at various venues in the South West and South Wales, which were all very successful.

Our second 'Welsh Show' was again due to be held at Pencoed College, but they had double booked, so very quickly we had to find another venue, and it was suggested I contact The David Broome Event Centre. I should say that along with many other people, we grew up watching show jumping on the TV and David Broome was one of our heroes.

I was set to meet David, and driving over I was feeling rather nervous, here was I going to meet a celebrity!! Well in rolled David in a little van looking very much like any normal farmer, and a nicer gentleman you couldn't wish to meet.

Well, he said do you think you could run your show just to one side of our own large show jumping show, I looked at the space and said yes, although I was worried, we might be an interference and nuisance to them.

Anyhow the day came, and we turned up to run our little show, and to be fair it seemed to go okay, and I didn't think we were affecting their own show., well I needn't have worried as David's wife, Liz Broome, came over and said 'your so quiet over here, I hope your show was a success'

After this show we talked to David about moving our Championship Show to the Centre as we had outgrown The Hand E/C and also the new owners weren't too helpful. A date in early September was agreed, and since then we have formed a great connection with the Centre and become very good friends with all the Broome family.

Over the years we have increased the championship show to three days with 'evening performances' under floodlights on all three days.

I have to say our early attempts at floodlighting were a bit of a disaster with free standing lights being blown over, and I remember at one show ending up with a very small corner of the ring being lit. Fair to say we have improved this somewhat.

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Since COVID we have stopped running 'one day' shows partly because of dwindling numbers at most shows, but also after some twenty plus years running six/seven shows a year it had taken a toll on our family life.

Not too long after we started in 1997, Jayne Vowles resigned and we carried on for several years with a committee, but for various reasons this was no longer working, and so we changed from a committee led association to just our family, and supported with some very loyal friends.

Very sadly my wife, Medwin lost her battle with cancer on 30 April 2020, but as was her wish we regrouped as a family and continued with her wish to keep the Championships' going.



What does it take to run a three day championship?

Well, believe it or not, we start planning the next championship show pretty much straight after the current show. During the show myself and my two daughters, Charise & Stephanie, write any notes on a master schedule, any mistakes, or ideas of how we can improve all manner of things, including safety, the start times of classes, did we have enough stewards? did they all get fed and watered? how we can make the next show even better?

In 2015/2016 one of our family members, Kevin & Natalie Hadfield who run an IT company, said they thought they could come up with a new electronic system to run shows, from membership and entering classes to recording who is in each class and recording where they came in the class. Their thinking was if they could get a system working for a large three day show it would be robust enough to cope with most shows.

It's fair to say there were many teething problems, and we had many phone calls and meetings to work through various issues. But now the whole mechanics of running our show are run by Showing Scene. I can't tell you how much work it saves us and results are instant which means exhibitors can see how various rings are running etc. Showing Scene themselves have grown rapidly and many Agricultural shows and other shows use their system.

Once we have decided what changes we need to make, we work on the provisional schedule. This has to be done as soon as possible as members need to be able to upload their results to unlock the championship class they have qualified for.

Once the provisional schedule is online, I will spend many hours each week up to Christmas securing judges and stewards for the show, trying to increase our number of affiliated shows, making sure the timetable is correct and any amendments made, arranging accommodation for our judges, securing our Medics and Security, arranging insurance, and many other tasks that need to be completed.

Over the years we have had schedules printed for us, printed our own including collating, folding, and stapling. Paper everywhere!! Nowadays we now only have hard copy schedules for our judges, stewards, and the office, which we print ourselves, as the schedules now for members and exhibitors are only available online.

All other printing, including Affiliation Packs, Qualification Cards, Laminated Signs etc. are all printed by ourselves, mainly because it's cheaper, and also, we don't have to rely on printers getting our orders done on time, which was often a problem in past years.

Then we try to enlist sponsors, without whom like many other shows these days we couldn't run the show. We are very lucky in having some very committed sponsors who very kindly sponsor year after year.

Traditionally, we have always tried to be able to take a 'back seat' from SWPA business from Christmas to the start of spring. Obviously, there are memberships and qualifications to process, but other than that we try to have a break.

When spring arrives it's my cue to double check the accommodation for our judges is correct, and pay for same. Because we require anything up to 13/14 rooms we are listed as a corporate company as far as the Hotel we are currently using is concerned, which means we have to be able to pay up front the total cost to secure the booking, usually around £2,500.00, we will also have to secure the insurance, which is around £1,000.00 add to this the 50% deposit to secure our Medics and Security, which is in the region of £2,500.00 you can see we need to have a healthy bank balance after paying for the previous show.

It's also time for us to start ordering floodlighting, stewards buggies (a must over three days on your feet) rosettes and sashes, all of which need to be ordered by June at the latest. As we move closer to the date of the show our workload increases with many more members joining and qualifying. We also need to make sure all our judges have their own hardcopy schedule and vouchers for lunch. We are very lucky at David Broome's, to have a fully licensed restaurant within the Pavilion complex, run by Joshua Currall and his team at Pickled Pumpkin. We also have the use of a 'Judges & Sponsors' lounge above the secretaries office. Kirsty & Stephanie have kept all visitors looked after with tea, coffee, and many incredible nibbles and cakes.

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The weeks leading up to the show are incredibly busy for all of us at home, making sure all the rosettes are boxed up correctly and double checking everything, so that when we get to the show, all should run as well as we have planned. Unless of course like this year when I had left the internet hub and bunting at home, so a trip back home for my Son In-Law to collect same.

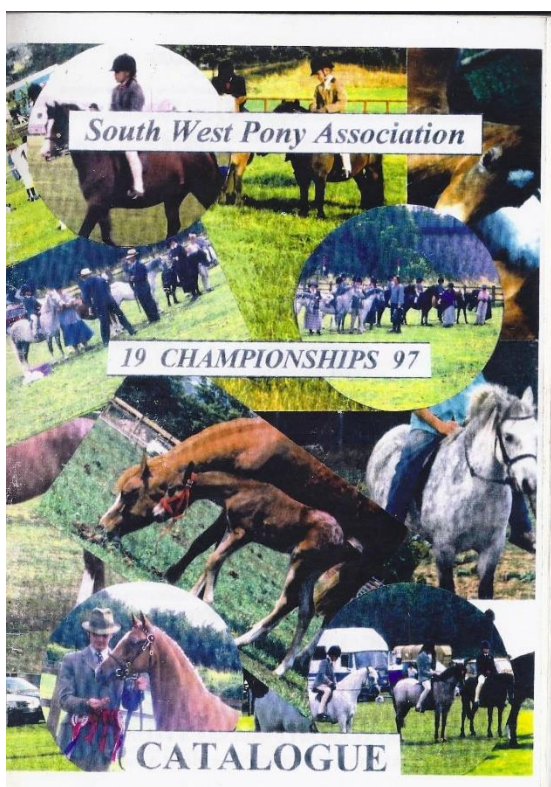
Although the show doesn't start until Thursday, we arrive on Tuesday midday, and then it's pretty much non-stop, getting stables checked and labelled, and getting 'set up' in the office and checking everything works as it should.

On Wednesday we help our course builder set up show jumping and working hunter courses. We are very fortunate at Broome's as the team there are so very helpful delivering the jumps to the rings, setting up the dressage arena and dividing rings to suit our needs. Then with the help of Hayley, Roy, and the team at Broome's we get the mobile floodlighting set up.

Then it's back to the lodge we hire from Broome's to go through everything again, making sure all the 'Evening Performance' stewarding team know where they should be, and what their duties are. It's all about crossing the 'T's and dotting the 'I's One thing I hate is getting up on the first show day with jobs still to do.

My job on Thursday morning is to welcome all the stewards and judges and assign stewards to judges. And then GO! it's time to get the show running, and if we've all done our homework the show should run okay, and our members and exhibitors will have fun regardless of the results gained. Although we've been doing this for some twenty six years, getting the first classes running is always a nervous time, I liken it to putting a boat out to sail, you're hoping it won't sink and all you have to do is steer it around a few obstacles.

SWPA has always run as a non-profit making association, and we try to keep the whole three day showing experience as inexpensive as possible, although a sobering thought every year is that we have a budget of around £45-50,000.00 to run the show, which is down to me to secure, any loss comes out of my pocket. Yes, I know some of you will think we're mad!! and probably we are, but when we see the joy it brings to so many it's more than worth the risk.



This is the front cover of our first Championship Show Catalogue



These pictures make all our hard work worthwhile

