



BIOGRAPHIES

Lee Pearson MBE OBE

Date of birth: 4 February 1974.

Lives: Cheddleton, Staffordshire.

Major achievements: Lee has won 18 gold medals since starting para dressage competitions in 1998. He won three of those at the 2000 Sydney Paralympics, another three at the 2004 Athens Paralympics and repeated this triple gold tally again at the 2007 World Para Championships.

In 2006 and 2007, Lee won the Grade I Disabled Dressage Rider Championship at the National Dressage Championships. In 2003, he became the only disabled person to have won a title at the British Dressage National Championships competing against able-bodied riders when he took the 2003 elementary restricted finals.

Lee was voted BBC Midlands Disabled Sports Person of the Year 2003 and 2004 as well as BBC Midlands Sports Personality of the Year 2004. He was awarded an MBE in 2001 and an OBE in 2005 in recognition of his monumental equestrian success and services to sport for the disabled. Also in 2005, Lee was bestowed an honorary doctorate from Staffordshire University.

Lee became the first chairman of the FEI (International Equestrian Federation) Athletes Committee in 2007.

Current competition horses:

First competitive experience: "A fun ride when I was 15 on a four-year-old racehorse I had just bought who had come out of training a few days before."

Trainer: "I train myself apart from when I have help from World Class Performance Plan squad trainers."

Most admired riders: "I was inspired when I watched a video of Germany's Ulla Salzgeber and Rusty perform their 1999 World Cup freestyle."

Qualities looked for in a dressage horse: "A fabulous walk and I like them to be sharp, but not spooky. My horses need to be forward going as I don't have much use of my legs."

Favourite dressage venues: "Beaver Hall, it's 10mins from my home."

What other career would you have chosen: "Something to do with animals, definitely not anything to do with paperwork, which I'm allergic to."

Favourite meal: "Chicken Korma ready meals or beans and cheese on toast, but the cheese must be melted into the beans."

Favourite drink: "I love Bailey's Glides, otherwise a cup of tea or a chocolate milkshake. To stay hydrated - I don't like water - so I buy lots of Aldi's squash."

Lee has a condition called arthrogyrosis. This is when a foetus's muscles don't grow correctly while in the womb and cause joints to be limited in movement at birth. Lee had to have 15 operations and still can't move his ankles or knees, so he controls horses using his hips. He walks with his legs completely splinted from hips to heels and uses crutches or an electric wheelchair to get about.

The reason Lee started riding was because he couldn't pedal a bike. All his friends had BMX bikes.

"Mine was a hairy version, Sally the donkey, who wouldn't turn right and bucked everybody else off but me," says Lee.

He went to a riding school for lessons when he was eight years old. When he was nine, he had his "dream Christmas" as he was given a pony. However, the pony bucked him off every day and Lee stopped riding for a while. He wasn't put off for long and started riding for a local lady with hunters. Eventually, when he was 15, he bought his own horse, a former racehorse "as they were cheap and I didn't have much money".

Lee jumped, showed and did endurance, only discovering para dressage while watching the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics on television. He contacted the Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), which was the governing body of the sport at the time, and eventually somebody came to assess him.

"This chap came expecting me to have a finger missing or something as I had told him what I had been doing. He couldn't believe I was so disabled, but I couldn't believe they graded me in the most disabled category. Until then I hadn't realised how disabled I was," he says.

Although Lee is certified as a grade 1 rider, the level for the most disabled competitors, he rode Blue Circle Boy in the more technically difficult grade 3 classes in 2005.

Lee now has a yard with six stables and spends his time producing horses. He has a groom to help him, whose salary is paid by his sponsors Lafarge Cement UK.

