

Virtus' virtual competition case studies

Oliver Peace

Oliver Peace is 31 years old and comes from Pontefract in West Yorkshire. Oliver has a co-ordination disorder affecting all four limbs as well as an intellectual impairment. Oliver competes in II1.

Oliver's path to Virtus equestrian is not a typical one as he did not come to Sport Excel UK and Virtus through an RDA or British Dressage route. Oliver does not have his own horse, he trains at Back Lane Stables in Leeds with his Coach Gemma Hughes. Since Oliver's first session at Back Lane Stables, he has forged a wonderful relationship with veteran riding school horse Bailey. Bailey helped Oliver to develop his riding skills and gain confidence before the horse's well-deserved retirement at the age of 28 years.

Many years ago, Oliver began as a Sport Excel UK athlete registered with National eligibility status in the sport of swimming. At a national swimming gala for athletes with intellectual impairment, Virtus Executive Director Nick Parr, shared the news that Virtus would be adding equestrian as a new sport to develop. Oliver approached Sport Excel UK directly to be considered to compete in equestrian.

With the support of Chief Executive Tracey McCillen, in 2017 Oliver represented Great Britain at the inaugural Virtus World Para Equestrian Video Competition in Dressage finishing in 3rd place. To date, Oliver has competed in every one of the 9 Virtus Equestrian video competitions (the only athlete in the world to have attained this) and has achieved 12 top ten placings. He hopes to continue to compete with Virtus and one day to represent GB in a face-to-face competition.

Steve Peace
Olivers Dad



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Christopher Bradley

Christopher Bradley is a 37-year-old rider from Bedfordshire. Chris has a rare chromosome disorder with associated learning disability and is also Autistic. Chris competes in II1 and is also a regular British Dressage competitor.

Following the RDA Championships in 2021, Chris was invited to apply for classification via Sport Excel. As he trains and competes regularly it was felt that he fulfilled the requirements to compete with Virtus. There were several forms to fill in and we also had to include evidence of Chris's Intellectual Impairment. This meant he had to visit an Educational Psychologist for an IQ test at a cost of £200. Chris could have also applied for II3 eligibility as he has Autism and on reflection this may have been an easier process as his Autism tests proved that this was an addition and not because of his chromosome disorder. To be eligible Chris needed to have an IQ of 75 or lower. He was then issued with a Virtus Classification number and appeared on the master classification list.

Chris's first Virtual Competition was in October 2021. This was on a borrowed horse as he had sadly just lost his competition horse. He came 8th overall which he was really pleased with as he was competing against people from all over the world. This was the highest GB score.

In the first rounds of 2022 Chris came second in his class on his new horse Harley Rebel. The second round proved to be even more successful with Chris and Harley winning their class.

Chris was then selected to represent Great Britain in Vichy at the Virtus Global Games. The event took place in June 2023 and was the first time Equestrian sport featured in a face-to-face event. It was a huge honour for Chris and his family and the week in France was one they'll never forget.



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Due to the cost of taking Chris's own horse (approx. £5000) and the paperwork needed to travel which was difficult to manage in the timeframe that we had, we decided to let Chris borrow a horse from the home nation. He was able to ride the horse before the competition and get to know him a little better. If you borrow a horse, there will be a groom supplied to manage the horse care.

For riders on their own horses, the rider mark in the collectives isn't multiplied by two so that the playing field was a little fairer. That said, Chris managed to beat some riders on their own horses coming a very credible 5th overall. As we only had two GB riders, we couldn't field a team (you need three for a team) which was a shame as this would've made the competition even more exciting. If you consider taking your own horse to an international competition, then make sure you have advice from a Vet and you have a clear understanding of the rules surrounding equine travel.

Chris was given a team GB saddle pad which was lovely, but we did note that the Australian team had extensive government funding and the USA had a great deal of sponsorship to help with the cost of international competing. We were entirely self-funding and even with borrowing a horse we spent somewhere in the region of £2500.

We have learned so much in the past two years and we would be very happy to share our knowledge and experience to help other athletes. This is a tremendous opportunity for Intellectually Disabled riders, our dream one day is that these classes are featured in the Paralympics.

Veronica Bradley
(Chris's Mum)

