



Orla McEvoy, junior representative for area 3, recently conducted a survey looking into junior participation and retention with BRC. Here she reveals her findings and tells us why she thinks her fellow junior members value us so much

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Top— What keeps our junior members coming back

Above—The Championships don't feel too competitive although a win is always nice

Main pic—Orla competing at the NAF Five Star Horse Trials championship this year



YOUNG GUNS

—All together now—

Juniors continue to make excellent contributions to BRC, not just as riders but as volunteers too

As part of my Young Equestrian Leaders Association (YELA) Gold Award, I carried out a survey of junior BRC members and the feedback was phenomenal, writes Orla. The findings were a huge compliment to BRC but, as a junior member myself, I must admit that I was hardly surprised...

Junior riders have hundreds of opportunities to participate in equestrian events across the country, but what is it that makes BRC so special? From the survey, I found that over 90% of junior BRC members would definitely be continuing as senior BRC members after the age of 18 – so why is it that, despite a season of extreme weather, and the introduction of new junior programmes elsewhere, BRC’s junior platform is still flourishing so comprehensively?

As any horse owner in the UK knows only too well, there has been a LOT of rain this year. Far too many days I’ve stood under the cover of my pony’s stable, staring out at the deluge over his paddock, contemplating whether it’s cold enough to justify a medium-weight rug in June, and refreshing my phone only to receive a dreaded ‘event abandonment’ email.

However, BRC did not allow the misery of the ‘Great’ British summer to taint its competition season this year. Each of its seven national championships ran seamlessly. Admittedly, there was slightly more than a ‘firm breeze’ at Aston-Le-Walls for the Arena Eventing Championships, and I’m not too sure my white jodhpurs will ever recover from the Amazonian downfall that hit during Sunday afternoon’s presentations at Lincoln for the National Championships!

Nevertheless, officials and volunteers alike powered through, ensuring the very best competition for all participants. Whilst the rest of the country panicked over ground conditions and flood warnings, BRC managed to carry on, providing a whole season of fun. This dedication to not letting its competitors down is perhaps one reason for its enduring success.

TEAMWORK

Another key element of BRC success is the sense of community and team spirit. This applies across the board from individual club competitions and area qualifiers to championships. And as a junior competitor particularly, I believe that the importance of this cannot be overstressed.

I suffered a big knock to my confidence last season, and I firmly believe that without BRC I would have struggled to come back to competitive riding. Here was an amazing community of people to help me through my sticky patch, something I will be forever grateful to teammates, manager and BRC officials for.

Over 12% of members competing at BRC championships this year were under 13-years, for many it would have been their first championship and for some, area qualifiers would have been their first real competition.

Having members so young makes it even more important that all competitors feel that they are part of a welcoming team and supportive community; and I believe BRC has really embraced this nurturing atmosphere. Also the introduction

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of walk-trot dressage and the 70cm show jumping and arena eventing is the perfect example of giving more opportunities to grassroots riders.

From my own experience, sometimes junior competitions can be a little too intense – and sadly even financially driven. But, BRC has managed to overcome this. It offers a welcoming, friendly and relaxed atmosphere to a degree which seems fairly rare within the equestrian community. An impressive 96% of juniors agreed that BRC championships are fun, friendly and inclusive – a huge credit to all at BRC.

As a member of BRC, BE and The Pony Club, I can compare and contrast and the differences can be striking. For instance, warm-up arenas at BRC competitions are not stressful or competitive places, they tend to be more encouraging and supportive hubs.

Even at the highest level of BRC competition, the ethos is a mutually supportive atmosphere with people rooting for their fellow competitors as well as their own team. This allows for riders from opposite ends of the country to interact and make friendships rather than foster harsher rivalries – something which further enhances BRC’s unique sense of community and camaraderie.

Over the past four years I’ve met hundreds of other junior members from all over the country, most recently spending ages talking to a girl from Kent (a fair distance from my home in Cheshire) in the dressage warm-up at the National Championships. And we’ve kept in touch.

BRC competitions embody the ethos of its motto which clarions togetherness, promoting the most important values of junior competition – ride *together*, train *together*, compete *together*, have fun *together*. The emphasis is always on – *together*.

Ultimately, BRC provides a welcoming, fun, competitive community for junior members of any age and ability to be a part of. Aply supported by the constant, enduring hard work and dedication of BRC volunteers. BRC offers a supportive, empowering sense of team spirit in action.

And all of this friendly togetherness and support underpins junior members’ access to a wealth of exciting opportunities both competitive and leisure-based. This is what makes BRC so special, and this is why it seems to be getting the youth vote! 🐾



There is a huge amount of support available throughout BRC, from your own club right through to the staff at HQ



More info

If you are a junior interested in representing your area, contact BRC Team Leader Megan Gibbs on megan.gibbs@bhs.org.uk