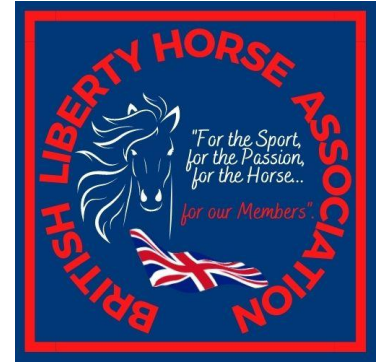


British Liberty Horse Association presents

# Professional Spotlight on...

Arran Parker



## Introduction

Arran is one of our professionals and is part of the BLHA Sports Development Team, supporting the BLHA through challenges, tests, videos and lectures. He is based in Shropshire and offers superb training at Student of the Horse

Here's what we found out about Arran...

### **How old were you when you decided on a horsey career?**

It wasn't really a conscious decision. I fell out of school with hardly any GCSE's. I am extremely dyslexic and have dyscalculia, so between those two things I needed an escape from school and a friend invited me to start riding their racehorses. From there I got various jobs within the sport for some reputable trainers and I cut my teeth grooming and under-riding for different people.

Then I went travelling and I really made it my mission to find people that were doing unusual things with horses and alternative styles of training. When I came back to the UK, I started practicing the techniques on young or feral horses and started to see some amazing results.

### **What are you working on with your horses right now?**

I have a few horses at different stages on their journey in the Genuine Horse Development Course. My foals, one-, two-, and three-year olds are spending most of their time working on the Art of Basic Horsemanship Skills module. For my slightly older horses, I'm spending an increasing amount of time focusing on the Art of Lunging and the Art of In-Hand Work modules. The more advanced horses are increasing their time in the arena working on the Art of Riding Module and starting to engage with dressage at liberty.

### **Who is the most amazing person you have met as a result of working with horses?**

So many people I have met through horses have been unique and inspiring in their own ways. When you're in an arena with someone, it is like they have invited you into their secret world of horses and when you have watched as many different horses and people as I have (we're probably talking about thousands and thousands) you get insight into their relationship - the unspoken parts between them - and that is awe inspiring, magical and a great privilege.

### **What is the most unusual place you have worked?**

I have had some amazing opportunities to travel - from colt starting in the Arizona desert to riding young horses through mountainous British Columbia, Canada. I also went with my mentor to train horses in Istanbul, Turkey, which was miraculous. I've been so lucky; I could go on and on! More locally, I have had my liberty horses on the beaches of Dorset, Wales and Scotland, doing photoshoots in forests and swimming in lakes. Take me to a wild place with some horses and that's my happy place.

## **What have you learned from making a mistake?**

I think that the experiments that go wrong are our greatest learning opportunities.

One of those that comes to the forefront of my mind is too much education – education is the death of creativity! What I mean by that is when horses have too much structure, their light goes out. It is the same way that students can become if they feel overly structured and controlled. We are all individuals and we all have our own magic finish that we will want to imprint on our horses. Similarly, our horses have their own magic too, which will put a finish on the work which is completely unique between every trainer and their horse.

Having said that, without any structure and without any technique the horse can feel quite lost and start to become reactive. The same can be said for the trainer in that if they don't feel held by the technique, then they can feel quite lost, anxious or unmotivated.

The benefits I've found since writing the Genuine Horse Development Course have been quite profound and that is because it's based around what I feel are the six key training components – the Art of Basic Horsemanship Skills, the Art of Ground Work, the Art of In-Hand Work, the Art of Lunging, the Art of Riding, and the Art of Liberty. Once you've been through the course you'll know exactly which training component you need to use for your horse at its specific level of education and this will give you the confidence to know what to do next. At the same time, no one ever completes the course looking exactly the same as another student or horse because they are all on their own unique journey. What I want to see is horses and people having fun and getting creative together – and you can't do this without making mistakes.

## **Who is your horsey hero and why?**

That's a tough question! I suppose my main heroes are the horses themselves because they are so good at letting us know what works for them and what doesn't. My students are also my heroes. I have a huge amount of respect for anybody that really takes the time to allow their horse to be itself and develop that relationship.

In terms of famous people, I travelled with my family and horses to the Delgado stud and I learned a lot there. I think the Delgado Pignon family has got such a lovely way with horses – they just seem to get it right. I've also visited Bent Branderup and was very lucky to live just down the road from Ingela Larsson Smith when I was younger, so I got to see a lot of magic between people and horses in my early years.

**If you could own a horse from history, who would it be and why?**

That's a great question. I am a bit of a fan of a lot of old breeding, so I really like some of the traditional Portuguese bullfighting horses. The reason I breed Lusitanos is because they have an incredible body build and mind. I am a big fan of working with my own horses and I admire the partnership between the horses and the people that educate them, so I wouldn't ever want to take on a horse educated by somebody else because that's a special thing between them and their horse.

**What do you do in your spare time?**

Living up here at the farm, it's pretty all consuming. I have two young boys, so most of my spare time is spent hanging out with them and we like to cook together and go on adventures in the forest. We eat a lot. We are a very foodie family, some might say greedy!

**If you weren't doing what you are now, what other career might you have done?**

When I was a kid I wanted to be an artist and a musician. I am also a massive foodie. I dream of doing something with food one day, so that when students come to Student of the Horse we can chill out and eat amazing food together.

**What is the one thing that irritates you most about horse people?**

This is a tough one. I guess the show or celebrity element can be challenging for me. I find the popularity contest that exists in the horse world slightly distasteful.

I think horses are very authentic creatures and are very genuine. They wear their heart on their sleeve, so I really like to be around horse people that honour that and I also want to connect with horses on that level. So when people are discussing who is better or who has won this week, I sometimes find that to be a bit jarring.

Hats off to those that can enjoy that atmosphere, I don't like it and neither do my horses.

**What career aspirations do you still have, or are you living your dream?**

I am still learning about breeding, even though I have bred a lot of horses. I am breeding the most incredible horses now and I feel really privileged, but I know I can always improve.

I would like to get my young horses to Grand Prix bridleless. My previous Grand Prix horse Oakley, who sadly passed away, was amazing and I

learned so much from that partnership – through experimenting – that it made me want to progress further.

I can see the mistakes that I've made in the past that I wouldn't make again and things that I would do differently. So every time I produce a horse I am always questioning what techniques I should use that are best for this horse.

Teaching students is the same, I have learned to look back and see where I can improve myself and what I can do differently next time.

My aim is to help develop this heightened level of communication between horses and people, which I believe is what brings the confidence we need to be able to let go with our horses and get creative.