

**PAST WINNERS OF THE SIDE SADDLE RIDER OF THE YEAR
SUE TURNER (NEE BLAND) WINNER IN 1980 AND 1982 AND RUNNER UP IN 1981**

**Side Saddle Exploits and More
by
Sue Tuner (nee Bland)**

'I don't remember a time growing up without ponies or horses, my grandfather was a farrier and my father, Ray, had an empathy with all animals but he especially loved horses. I learnt to ride on a Shetland pony called Ringo with a simple felt saddle. He had the devilish trait of tipping you off at any opportunity, so my balance and seat needed to be correct all the time.

'My elder sisters Christine and Vanessa and me, have always been a team. We started competing at the Suffolk Hunt Pony Club. I took part in showing, pairs, jumping, eventing, working hunter pony, best turned out and more, and that is where our competitiveness began. Our ponies at that time were Linden Lea, Forge Rosewood (Frosty), Charlton Petit Roi (Charlie), Starlight and my absolute favourite was Kelpi.

'In the early days we didn't go far from East Anglia but in 1976 my father's enthusiasm resulted in us getting a new Bedford lorry — which had a brightly varnished wooden body — so we, and more importantly our horses, could travel in comfort. Dad was the team manager, driver and groom and Mum was housekeeper. When Christine stopped riding, she became team secretary which was vital, as Nussy and I began to compete further afield. Early morning starts and late finishes were the norm, as we travelled around the country. If our boyfriends wanted to see us, they had to come along to the shows.

'My introduction to side saddle came about following a chat Dad had with the amazing Mrs Bill Barham. She was the spark that started it all and she supported me to the top. We were very lucky in that she lived nearby and without her my journey would never have been. Mrs 'B', as we affectionately called her, has a personality, presence and style that mirrors the attributes needed in side saddle competition and her gentle coaching and guidance helped produce my side saddle achievements. She organised the loan of side saddles, habits etc and we became hooked.

'Side saddle competitions began in 1977 with Nussy on Charlie and myself on Basil (Solway Windfall) whom we had on loan from Allister Hood's sister, Faye.



Sue on her first side saddle ride, Solway Windfall.

'The following year, 1978, I won the SSA junior championship riding Solway Windfall, which I recall was judged by Mrs Ransom and Mrs Francis. I received a giant bottle of perfume from the sponsors Hermes, which I still have un-opened!

'The following year we competed in show jumping and working hunter pony with Hugh, Star and Kelpie. I won the SSA junior regional at Stoneleigh and was runner-up in the final again at Stoneleigh on St Lawrence Question Master (Porky).



Sue and Starlight at Wembley Horse Show.

'Mrs Barham then organised a side saddle display at the Royal International Horse show. Nussy and I were invited to take part, which was an honour. We each had a Bernard Weatherall habit tailor-made, which we still treasure.



Mrs Barham and her team on a fitting day for their Bernard Weatherill habits. L-R: Mrs B, Karen Dudley on Mrs Barham's Hamalotta, Jane Rackham, Vanessa Bland, Tanya Bracegirdle, Sue Bland and Deborah Prentice

'In July 1980, when I had just turned 18, I competed in the seniors and won Side Saddle Rider of the Year. My mother's show records state that the prize money was £150, but it was the stunning trophy that meant the most to me.

'On the recommendation of Allister Hood, who coached and mentored me at that time, Mum and Dad bought a horse from the Hunnable family, called Samuel. He was the most beautiful show-off and a complete hypochondriac and I loved him from the very beginning. Together we took on the showing elite in lightweight hunter classes, winning at the Royal International, where riding down the centreline in the spotlight, is something I've never forgotten. Samuel also took me to HOYS for the first time.

'At the side saddle finals in 1981, riding my sisters' horse, Briar Hill, I was runner-up in the rider of the year, but went one better the following year. The final was at Malvern and despite Sam going lame for the final phase of equitation and having to switch onto Shooting Times (Timothy), I won the title back. The following year I was invited to ride in a display at Buckingham Palace's Royal Mews.

'About this time, I was contacted by the photographer Ian Bradshaw, who had taken the famous photo of a stalker at Twickenham whose modesty was shielded by a policeman's helmet. In 1984 his photos of me appeared in the Hong Kong Tatler and in the Sunday Mail's 'You' magazine.



Sue at home on Samuel in the photograph taken by Ian Bradshaw.

'By this time my father had learnt to ride and hunted with the Suffolk, on a horse called Treelee. He'd saved her from the bullet and she repaid his kindness by having a foal called Friar Tuck who went on to be placed third at the Horse of The Year show, I think this gave him the greatest of pleasure.



Sue eventing on the ever-reliable and honest Tuck

In 1987 Glen and I got married and in the space of five years, we had three children and a business that took our attention away from horses. Our eldest Tom, played many sports and was destined for a rugby career with Bath. However, following injury he decided to train as vet, and he is now a partner at Swaynes in Suffolk. Our son Sam was diagnosed as dyslexic at an early age and now he is a property surveyor with Carter Jonas based in Cambridge. He has worked so hard and never given-up. Our youngest, Holly, followed me with ponies and horses but chose eventing as her sport. She has ridden side saddle and who knows you may see her one day in the ring with me looking worried just as my mother did. By chance at Tom's graduation from Edinburgh University she was encouraged by his friend to train as a vet too and has just qualified at RVC in London. My children have all inherited my father's love of animals.



L-R: Molly with Sam, Nellie with Holly, and Evie with Tom.



Sue's husband, Glen, presented her with this beautiful painting of her on Samuel to celebrate her 30th birthday.

'Not long ago, my friend Kate Over, asked if I would ride side saddle again. It felt fantastic at the time, but painful a day or two later.



Sue on foot with Holly riding at the Suffolk Show.

From a small village in Suffolk this farmer's daughter was very lucky to have a family and friends that took her from playing with ponies in the paddock at home to the national stage. We've just lost my mother and father, so 'Team Bland' is a little smaller now, but we still have the amazing memories from 40-years-ago. I would like to thank everyone who competed with me and especially everyone from the association that made it possible.

To those of you who compete today, good luck and remember, you never know where it might lead... Buckingham Palace or Hong Kong maybe, so enjoy every minute.