



ABRS+

Did you know the Association of British Riding Schools (ABRS+), has recently undergone a re-brand? Wondering why? In this month's issue we find out how the association has evolved, how the re-branding came about, what to expect for the future, but most importantly, what the ABRS+ stands for today.



An increase in the popularity of riding as a sport saw a boom in equestrianism in the 1930s. The increase in engagement and activity lead to concerns surrounding the level of competence and welfare in establishments. As a result, the Riding Establishments Bill was made law in 1939 to set standards whereby local authorities could appoint inspections of riding establishments by veterinary surgeons.

In 1954, a meeting held by a variety of industry peers led to the creation of the Association of British Riding Schools (ABRS) to support, represent and promote the proprietors of these licensed establishments.

One of the founding members of the ABRS+ was Suzanne Marczak of Suzanne's Riding School in Harrow, which is believed to have been one of the first licensed riding schools in the UK when it was established in 1939.

Suzanne's Riding School became the first ABRS+ testing centre and was under the same ownership for 65 years until closing its doors in 2004. In its latter years, Suzanne's son, Julian Marczak, was the co-proprietor and Chief Instructor. Julian was heavily involved with the ABRS+ whilst pursuing his equestrian career in instruction and running

Kings Barn Equestrian in West Sussex. He has since published several books on equestrian training and riding techniques. In 2005 Julian became, and remains, the President of the ABRS+.

Said ABRS+ president, Julian Marczak: "I have been associated with the ABRS+ over many years, and I am especially proud of the various ways in which it is developing and widening its remit. The work is vital if the association is to have a stronger voice throughout the industry and exert greater influence where needed. The approach of the association when I joined the Board many years ago very much remains today, which is to place its members at the heart of all that it does, providing them with support and advice which is delivered in a down to earth, non-judgmental way."

Over the years, legislation for riding establishments developed with the introduction of additional criteria. The Riding Schools Act, as it is now known, has remained largely the same since 1964. Yet, establishments are now subject to greater legislation, with additional welfare and control laws being introduced. Control of the licence issuing has been passed back to the local authorities in recent years, meaning there is less consistency, collusion or

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Whatever the equine establishment, there is support available to get the paperwork in order, with assistance to help understand the business's needs.



understanding for the industry.

For the last 65 years, the ABRS+ has remained the only equestrian association dedicated to supporting and representing the proprietors of professional equestrian establishments. The association provides support for licence applications, economic issues, educational and administrative aspects of the businesses. The ABRS+ holds its members central to proceedings, with the Board of Trustees being heavily involved in industry activities. Three members are proprietors of riding establishments, whereas others specialise in equine and non-equine business development, marketing and HR.

LICENSING FOR LIVERY YARDS

With the publication of 'Britain's Horse Problem', a report by a group of equestrian charities in 2020 looking into equine welfare issues, the introduction of licensing for livery yards now looks ever more likely.

At present, there is no livery yard regulation, no representation for yard owners, and no requirement for any level of competency for the proprietors. There is no way for those yards who are fully insured, competent, and following best practice guidelines to stand out from the crowd. Unfortunately, cost often prevails for horse owners, and a lack of knowledge means they do not always make the best choice when choosing a new yard. The level of service and competence offered by a yard can significantly affect the satisfaction of livery clients and the welfare of horses in their care.

Realising a need to support these businesses, **in 2020, the ABRS+ decided to extend its membership to include livery yards and equestrian centres alongside its existing membership of riding establishments.** Whilst the ABRS+ remains associated



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with riding schools, it remains a well-established equestrian association. Clients of riding establishments often progress onto buying a horse or pony, thus seeking livery themselves. With this in mind, the addition of regulation for livery yards seems the perfect fit and natural progression with existing members.

Said ABRS+ Chair, Jane Williams: "It is apparent that many livery yards feel heavily unsupported, especially during the last 15 months, which has been a testing time for all. A large number of our existing riding centres offer a livery service, so the expansion is a natural one, fits perfectly with the resources and our values of promoting the highest standards while supporting our members and their businesses."

There are no specific 'criteria' for a livery yard as per other approval schemes, meaning the membership is open to yards of all sizes and all livery types outside the 'standard' scope of those offering DIY, part and full livery. With the addition of service, proprietors of all equestrian establishments can now benefit from the support, expertise and representation of the ABRS+, and ultimately via British Equestrian and national government. The development of new membership types can only strengthen the association and give its community a stronger voice.

SUPPORT

The ABRS+ ensures its members' voices are heard whenever they need support. The ABRS+ have successfully represented their members on issues such as rate relief, licensing and more recently seeking clarification and financial support for members during the Covid pandemic.

As part of the membership expansion, the ABRS+ consulted its members and potential members. Since, the association has re-branded, reviewed and improved its existing member propositions for riding establishments and revamped the website.

ABRS+ membership now offers better benefits from before, including assistance



to the Equestrian Employers Association - offering employment, health and safety guidance, and LiveryList, a livery yard directory and resource for yard owners. As well as this, there are discounts available on many equestrian services and products. Free welfare, legal and health, and safety advice from equestrian specialists is also available.

PEACE OF MIND

The ABRs+ offers peace of mind to owners and riders in that all approved and certified establishments provide high standards of care and welfare. In a second aspect to the membership, the association will be increasing its educational offerings to encourage clients of all equestrian establishments to know what to look for in a

'good' riding establishment or livery yard. The ABRs+ also offers education for the younger generation of riders and pony owners in all aspects of equine care, safety and equitation with its Rosette, Certificate and Equestrian Care Award schemes.

The ABRs+ is an association solely for its members rather than being a small part of a larger association. Membership is a hallmark of quality and gives equestrian establishments not only support but promotion too. The ABRs+ seeks to raise the expectations and standards while promoting the professional yards on offer.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The ABRs+ also offers members and their staff opportunities for professional development

with CIEC coaching qualifications, safeguarding and first aid courses. The lifting of Covid19 restrictions also means the association can resume its much-loved conferences and revisit its regional networks.

Whilst it has been a difficult time over the last 15 months, things are slowly starting to return to normal. For those who haven't known where to turn for support or for those wanting to stand out from the crowd, there is no better option than seeing what the ABRs+ has to offer. •

With special thanks to Cheryl Johns, founder www.liverylist.co.uk

Membership is available from just £99; full details can be found on the ABRs+ website: www.abrs-info.org