

Rhondda Bach

Rhondda was foaled in 1971. He was bred by Mr W.C. John of Treverbert, Rhondda Glamorgan. He is a registered Welsh Section D pony and his name can be found in volume LIV of the stud book. He had several owners before he arrived at the Meadow School of Riding in 1978. Amongst these was Bill Ginns, the funeral directors in Leicester, who used to drive him in a pair. Later he was sold to Mrs D. Hackett from Lower Broombriggs, Woodhouse Eaves who also used him for driving. Whilst Mrs Hackett was out driving with him one day they came across some people shooting in an adjacent field. A piece of shot accidentally hit him. Rhondda took off and they landed in a ditch. Fortunately, neither Mrs Hackett nor Rhondda were badly hurt. Shortly after this incident, Mrs Hackett decided to sell him and this is when the late Olwen Allonby bought him. Mrs Hackett may have lost confidence in him but at the Meadow School of Riding he has never put a foot wrong.

At the Meadow School of Riding, Rhondda continued to be used for driving – by Olwen and later Dawn who learnt how to drive from Rhondda. His skill at cross country eventing soon became apparent however. When Mark Allonby was nine years old, Olwen decided that he should try Rhondda instead of his usual pony Robin in a competition at Barrow and Walton. Mark returned from the course thrilled because for the first time he had managed to “jump everything”. Robin would not jump or go near water jumps! Rhondda continued to successfully compete at many Pony Club tetrathlon events until Mark was 18. His friends often asked if they too could ride Rhondda at these events because Rhondda almost guaranteed them a clear round. On one occasion, Rhondda completed the same course three times because two of Mark’s friends discovered that the ponies they had brought were lame and unable to compete.

Meanwhile, Rhondda became a popular pony to borrow for another reason. Friends of the Allonby’s often asked if Rhondda could drive them to or from their wedding. Jane Corral came out of her wedding service to find a fine pony with a carriage waiting outside. She was quite jealous at the thought that some lucky bride would be leaving her wedding in a horse-drawn carriage. She did not see Dawn who was hiding behind the carriage and perhaps did not recognise Rhondda straight away. It was a little while before she realised that she was that lucky bride! It had been arranged that Rhondda should take her to the reception as a surprise present.

It is perhaps his success as a reliable RDA pony that Rhondda is best known for now. Three times he has reached the semi-finals of the Lloyds Bank championships to find the most suitable horse/pony for disabled riders. He won the regional and then the national working pony competition at Peterborough in 1988. He has also reached the RDA National Dressage Championships with Jane Stidever several times. After winning at the Leicestershire County Show, Rhondda went on to compete at Wembley in 1987. The ponies were really put to the test when they had to walk calmly past a series of bizarre situations including people waving flags, dogs barking, a cowboy firing his pistols, a person with a silly walk pushing a giant panda bear toy across a zebra crossing in a push chair and a lollipop lady jumping up and down on a space hopper! Rhondda behaved perfectly (but to be sure, Dawn and David fired a starting pistol near him when he was in his horse box just in case the pistol shots fired by the

cowboy frightened him.) He didn't win the competition but he did win the admiration of Harvey Smith. Behind the main arena Dawn and Rhondda found themselves warming up in the same practice ring. Harvey Smith would have preferred to have had the area to himself and thought he was making his intentions clear by instructing that the practice jump be raised to 4'6". Dawn and Rhondda promptly cleared the jump! Harvey remarked on how good Rhondda was.

Rhondda has proved to be a versatile pony at the riding stables. Besides his RDA work, his carriage driving and his cross-country eventing, he has taken clients out hunting on Boxing Day (the riding school no longer hunts) and has even been ridden side-saddle. He is also the perfect pony for taking young riders out on their first hack. A few years ago he helped realise one client's ambition of taking part in a show jumping competition at a proper show. After much practising, Rhondda was entered for the Sutton Bonington show. Rhondda completed the first round successfully and was required to jump a second round. Unfortunately the rider fell off part the way round the course – she didn't mind and sat on the ground laughing. Rhondda however went on to finish the course, clearing the remaining four jumps, in the correct order, completely unaided! He is such an intelligent pony that anyone who has a lesson on him soon discovers that Rhondda almost doesn't need a rider at all – he can carry out Dawn's instructions perfectly by himself!

They say that you will meet only one special pony in your lifetime. Rhondda is our "special" pony!