



Age doesn't have to slow horse riders down

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The Washington International Horse Show sets an example for older riders!

Achieved at age 54, **Nick Skelton's** impressive wins at this year's 53rd Washington International Horse Show at D.C.'s Verizon Center were heartening examples to riders who are no longer in the flush of youth (yours truly being one of them!). We don't have to hang up our spurs just yet.

Skelton won the \$25,000 Puissance on Unique, a ten year old Dutch warmblood bay gelding on Friday, 28th October, 2011 when they cleared the 7' wall.

He followed this up with another huge win on Sunday, 30th October and took home the largest purse of the show, the \$100,000 President's Cup Grand Prix CSI 3*-W class. He was on another ten year old, this time a Holsteiner gray gelding, and bested a field of 24 entries.

Not only is Skelton beating much younger riders, but consider this fact. In 2000 he [suffered severe neck injuries](#) after a fall at a show and was told by doctors that he should never ride again, as another fall could prove fatal. Eighteen months later he was back in the saddle, and look at him now!

Here are some other well-known veterans for whom advancing age has been no obstacle to riding at the highest level.

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Show Jumpers

Ian Millar of Canada, who has had such a long and successful career, earning over \$1.5 million on his 17.3 hands horse **Big Ben**, was born in 1947 and is still winning at the Olympic level. He competed in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing at age 61 where Canada won the Silver medal and he hopes to be riding at the 2012 Olympics in London. He will be 65 years old! Read here about how, in his opinion, he was [reaching his peak at age 60](#).

Nelson Pessoa won the grueling **Hickstead Derby** located in Sussex, England. He was victorious there in 1996 at the age of 60 on Loro Piana Vivaldi, an Irish horse standing nearly 18 hands. (If I recall correctly, Vivaldi was 18 years old at the time.) In total Pessoa won the Hickstead Derby three times: twice on Gran Geste in 1963 and 1965 before winning it again *thirty-one years later!*

John Whitaker, whose most famous equine partner was the great **Milton** (both of whom I had the privilege of watching at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics) is 56 years old and still going strong.

Dressage Riders

Reiner Klimke was born in 1936 and won his last Olympic gold medal in 1988, at the age of 52. Possibly the most beloved German dressage master, Klimke holds the record for Olympic medals in equestrian events. His most famous horse was Ahlerich, the Westphalian gelding on whom he won the 1984 and 1988 Olympic team gold, and the 1988 individual gold medals. Sadly Klimke passed away at age 63 in 1999.

Klaus Balkenhol first burst on the Olympic scene in 1992 at age 53. The other team members that year were Nicole Uphoff aged 25, Monica Theodorescu aged 29 and Isabell Werth aged 23! His background is in the mounted police. He writes on his [German website](#) that he learned most of the higher level dressage purely from observing other riders and reading. He taught his police horse, Rabauke, how to perform the difficult movements. Rabauke was his mount when Balkenhol's talent as a dressage rider was first discovered.

These are just some of the older riders who inspire us to keep enjoying our horses.

Some Resources for Older Riders

The Old Peoples Riding Club

The age qualification for membership in the Old Peoples Riding Club is an ancient 21 or older! But the club has members well into their 70s and 80s too. It caters to all types of riding, and if you click on the chapter links below you will get a good idea of the fun members have.

Billed as 'quite basic and very difficult to fail' is the standard D1 test all members need to pass in order to participate in horse activities with the club.

Chapters in the DC Area

Maryland (3 chapters): <http://oldpeoplesridingclub.org/chapters/maryland.htm>

Virginia (5 chapters): <http://oldpeoplesridingclub.org/chapters/virginia.htm>

Pennsylvania (4 chapters): <http://oldpeoplesridingclub.org/chapters/pennsylvania.htm>

Can't Find a Local Chapter?

If you have five or more people wishing to form a new chapter, you can find information on how to do this on the OPRC website.

Articles for the Mature Rider

Here are some useful hints for the older rider.

Rider Fitness Tip of the Month: Fitness for Mature Riders by Heather Sansom

Considerations for Older Riders by Jayne D. Wilson

Jayne writes "Consider the oldest ever female Olympic competitor, Mrs. Lorna Johnstone, who at age 70 placed 12th in the dressage event in the Munich Olympics in 1972. An exception perhaps, but certainly something to inspire us as we grow older."

The Elderly Horse Rider Tips to Be Safe by Annette Willson

(Warning: Ms. Willson considers anyone over 40 to be in the 'elderly' bracket! But don't be put off by this as she has some good advice.)

Hopefully you intend to keep riding for many years yet. I certainly do!

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