

**The MFHA Team Chasing Committee  
Annual Conference  
Cheltenham Racecourse - Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

**Minutes**

**1. Apologies.**

Apologies were received from James Buckle, Fred French, Debbie Topping, Ben Pauling, Tim Easby and a number of event organisers and competitors.

**2. Minutes of Annual Conference on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014.**

The minutes of the 2014 Annual Conference were approved.

**3. Chairman's report:**

**a. Review of the 2014-2015 Season.**

The 2014-15 season had been highly successful with more teams than ever competing at novice and intermediate level. The events had been extremely well run and although the weather had caused some problems. The main aim is that all involved have fun at all levels and the 5 key area to focus on:

1. High standards throughout
2. Good basic infrastructure
3. Strong, well built and safe courses
4. Communicating and interacting with the public
5. Entertainment on the day – a good commentary is key to this

The National committee consider and review all events at their meetings and all involved are encouraged to continue to feedback their views to the committee so that we can improve the sport. It is appreciated that the events are manned by volunteers and everybody has other things in their lives but it was felt that we are generally going in the right direction and there is a focus on the days team chasing that must not be lost if a successful team chase is to be run. Events were discouraged from running Hunter Trials in addition to the day's primary Team Chasing activity, but where it did happen an event organiser must ensure that the Team Chasing takes complete priority.

**b. National Committee matters.**

There have been two meetings of the National Committee since last year's Annual Conference, in December 2014 and earlier during the day. A number of matters were discussed during that morning's meeting:

We reviewed the website and social media which is an important factor in promotion of the sport.

Course inspection is critical to the sport to ensure we are moving forwards with course safety and progressing a recognised regime of course construction. We are grateful to our course inspectors Bryan Allen, Andy Clarke, Debbie Topping and Tony Berry for their work in this regard.

The £5 levy on all teams competing was discussed. This is collected by event organisers and passed on to BTC. Originally this was put in place to enable us to find a new National Sponsor but

we now look on it as a “promotional” rather than a “sponsorship” levy as that is what it is used for in order to attract new audiences and competitors and to promote the sport generally at a national level. It was decided that in the absence of National sponsorship this season that a one off payment should be made out of the levy of £200 to all events who ran an Open Qualifiers in which 8 or less teams entered in recognition of the effort and expense involved in staging an Open class. There are 8 events which qualify for this payment.

**c. Committee Appointments.**

Paul Scott joined the Committee in December and we have one vacancy following Netty Nevills retirement. We would be delighted to hear from anyone who might be interested and are looking to represent all interests in the sport and in order to create a more balanced committee we need in particular need to focus on the administrative and promotional sides rather than the competitive side.

**d. The British Team Chasing website, inc social media.**

Jane Carley reported to the meeting that the Facebook participation was becoming established as a strong method of communication, the Facebook page having taken over from the old style forum and giving a great feeling of “community” within the sport. This had been very successful. The website itself is important as the main source of information about the sport and this is now ready for a “refresh” which is being discussed with our web site designers. It does require participation from both event organisers and competitors to maintain interest and information on the site.

**e. British Team Chasing – the brand and our identity.**

The BTC logo was launched 3 years ago and it is crucial that we engage with a clear image which portrays the sport and use the brand to benefit all events and show that they subscribe to a standard. It is important that all events use the logo which can be downloaded via dropbox.

The Fernie this year took online entries through the website using a system administered by Equine Affairs who host the website. Setting this up was somewhat challenging but in the end it worked very well. Other events are encouraged to use this system for on line entries going forward and should contact Hayley Sharman at Equine Affairs for more info.

**4. The British Team Chasing National Championship.**

Charles Frampton reported that the feedback from this year’s National Championship at Heythrop had been good. There had been a number of changes to the course following the feedback from last year and it has now become established as ticking the right boxes for a Championship course and venue.

It was confirmed that the committee had concluded that the National Championship should be offered to the Heythrop for a further 2 years so that all could reap the benefit of the course but that it was important to move the venue around from time to time. Therefore the committee will consider the venue for 2018 onwards in 12 months time.

It was stressed that hosting the National Championship was a far more onerous task than a normal day’s Team Chasing (in terms of course and administration and promotion) and it is essential for the brand and national profile of the sport that the event is marketed as the National Championship first and foremost.

The Heythrop Hunt had also hosted a party in the marquee on the night of the Championship and in order to this had run the event on a Saturday. There was however a general consensus among those present that a Saturday fixture was not ideal from a team chase perspective, and that going forward the event should revert to being a Sunday fixture.

## **5. The Open and Intermediate Leagues.**

These have been sponsored by Coombe Farm Wines and the Vestey family for the past 6 years and whilst they continue to be successful and popular with competitor Coombe Farm Wines have decided to step down from the sponsorship following the Autumn Final at Cotswold this year to concentrate on other areas of their business. Accordingly a new sponsor is being sought as part of the National Sponsorship package.

The Chairman thanked Rosie Vestey for all the support which Combe Farm Wines had put in over many years, and asked those present to record their thanks and appreciation in a round of applause. He urged everyone to buy Combe Farm Wines in the future – not least as from personal experience, they were delicious wines!

The League rules have been changed slightly so that the top 8 Open teams are not now eligible to compete in the Intermediate League and the award of 11 points for completing up to 3 Opens has been removed so that points can only be awarded in Intermediate classes as it was felt that these provisions skewed the league tables at the top end.

## **6. Team Chasing sponsorship arrangements.**

Peter McNeille has been brought on board since September 2014 to assist in trying to attract a National Sponsor in the sum of around £15k per annum. He has undertaken a lot of work and reported to the December committee meeting that he had approached a large number of companies and had 2 active leads. He was hopeful at that stage that a leading motor manufacturer might sign up to the deal but unfortunately due to a change in personnel that now seems unlikely.

Peter reported to the meeting that he had found the search for a sponsor an interesting exercise and it had become apparent that a lot of the potential sponsors may already be involved in the sport on a local level. We are in direct competition with Point to Pointing and currently the “experiential” exercise of turning up with a stand at open events is not a major draw. The media value of National sponsorship is hard to tie down and without undervaluing the coverage that we get from Horse and Hound, they have nothing to gain from mentioning sponsor names. . WE have very little data on potential customers for a sponsor from within the team chase /hunting community but there is clearly an intangible value in getting access to market products and services to competitors, hunt subscribers and landowners. A problem is that whilst we have or can collect data on competitors who pay in advance to compete – especially if entries can be done online, we do not know who the spectators are and we need to identify who these are in order to create a profile of the customer base that can be targeted. With some point to points they have now introduced on line ticketing for spectators so that car passes can be purchased on line in advance and this provides valuable data about these customers.

Peter confirmed that he had had some promising conversations going on and would be interested to hear from anyone with potential leads to follow up.

## **7. National Team Chasing Rules.**

PC reported that the safety review panel had made 51 recommendations for alterations to the National Team Chasing Rules, Administrative Guidelines and Course Layout and Construction Guidelines and that the Committee had decided to accept 49 of these. A new set of Rules and Guidelines would be published shortly to take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015.

The key thing about the changes is that they do not change the ethos of the sport which remains amateur and “Corinthian” being organised by and for hunts and competitors. As an indication, the key recommendations are in the following areas:-

- Island fences should not have wings;
- There should not be any narrow fences in hedge lines;
- Striding – there should be 4-5 strides in pens and combination fences.

- Tyres being used as fillers;
- Loose horses;
- Portable fences;
- Jump judges having flags, whistles and Hi Vis vests;
- Emergency vehicles;
- Horse welfare in hot weather;
- Ground conditions and aeration of the course;
- Ground lines and mid-line bars;
- Ambulances, rapid response vehicles on the course;
- Crash hats and body protectors;
- Minimum height of 80cm for Novice fences;
- Amendments to the Stopping procedure and application of this to Open Classes;
- Walls are to be capped with timber;
- Width of fences to be proportionate to height;
- Ridge and furrow;
- Demarcation and vehicle access to every part of the course;
- Warm up area should be sufficient to accommodate up to 50 horses and the pulling up area should be free of spectators;
- Where there are rails in natural fences there should be 18 inches of hedge above the rail;
- No jumps into woods unless there is a clear view;
- Use of rope/ string to separate areas;

PC confirmed that the two recommendations that were not going to be included in the changes but remained as matters of discretion for riders and event organisers were:

1. Restrictions on competing after suffering concussion, albeit that riders should be deterred from riding again on the same day and should be encouraged to see their own Doctor before next competing;
2. Making Risk Assessment forms more detailed and robust and requiring them to be signed off.

## **8. Administration of Events – any points of interest for Organisers.**

- The running of a Team Chase requires a minimum number of 75 volunteers.
- Timing should be by the use of light beams or electronic timing. Stopwatches are unsatisfactory.
- Teams should attend prize giving in team colours and the timing of the presentation is key, it is essential to get the presentation right and to ensure that the announcement from the commentator of timing goes out across the entire course and lorry park.
- Fence judges should be carefully briefed on the operation and use of radios and whistles and the stopping procedure. They should be issued with hi-vis vests and good quality whistles.
- Recommended minimum entry fees are: Novice £90; Intermediate £100 and Open £120.
- There will be a requirement for course plans to be published and available on the course and for the rules to be printed in full in the event programme.
- The standard of the commentary is very important but varies enormously across events. To get this right the commentator needs to understand the sport generally and have some knowledge of the competitors involved so they can highlight what is important and exciting.
- There have been issues caused by mud from vehicles on the road – Eg at the recent Heythrop event they used a metal track through the first field which was very effective.
- There was a discussion about timing and it was commented that technology had moved on and at the Fernie they had used live timing rather than a light beam and it is likely that this will be the way forward if it can be achieved to 1/100<sup>th</sup>s of a second.

## **9. Course Design and Construction.**

PC expressed thanks to the Course Inspectors, in particular Bryan Allen and Andy Clarke who are following on from the excellent work done by Netty Nevill and the team over the years in improving our courses. It should be remembered that this is a speed sport and whilst the courses should be technical and challenging we do not want to introduce too many eventing and skinny type fences.

**10. Promotion of the Sport – local, regional and national media.**

The press thrives on stories of competition in particular at Open Level –there has been a lot of interest in the autumn season with new people coming in

**11. Medical, Veterinary, Safety and Welfare issues.**

There have been concerns expressed over the safety of headcam equipment which provide good YouTube footage and have become controversial, although there is no detailed evidence that they are unsafe. We will continue to allow these at the competitor's own risk and it is thought that any issue will be resolved as new technology is introduced.

There has been an EU directive in relation to hat standards but this does not appear to affect our current rules which will remain as they stand.

The issue of "Equine Trauma Trained" medical staff has been considered as these may not come within the strict definition of a "paramedic". Following consideration it was understood that such "Equine Trauma Trained" personnel did have an appropriate qualification, and should therefore be permitted at events where appropriate qualifying certificates are available. The national rules will be amended to provide for this although it is the event organiser's complete and entire responsibility to ensure that they have a suitable level of medical cover on the day.

**12. Recognition Fees, Course Inspection Fees and Sponsorship Levy.**

Recognition fees and Course Inspection fees payable by events will remain the same. The Sponsorship levy payable by teams will be re-labelled as the Promotion Levy and will remain the same.

**13. The Accounts.**

The accounts were tabled and approved. They show that we are at "break even" despite not having a National Sponsor and paying a consultancy fee to Peter McNeille.

This will allow us to make the Payment of £200 to Open Qualifiers which took place during the season with 8 or less teams competing in the class. The funds will in effect be paid from the accumulated Promotion Levy.

**14. Dates for 2015—2016 Events.**

The dates for Autumn 2015 have been finalised and published. Spring 2016 events will be discussed and circulated shortly. Once finalised, full details will be posted on to the website.

**15. Any other business.**

There was a discussion about the suggestion of the introduction of a Novice League as a way of rewarding younger competitors for competing regularly. There were concerns expressed that as novice classes are run on a bogey time this is open to a great deal of variation and also that the introduction of a new league would create a substantial amount of additional administration for organisers, and require additional sponsorship which would be another burden for the organisers. Whilst it was agreed that it is a good idea to encourage the novices, the novice classes are generally fairly full and we want to encourage these competitors to go on to intermediate and open speed classes as soon as they are old enough to do so. Consequently the idea was placed on hold for further review again in the future.

It was commented that the production of cheap but good quality signage to events was a good opportunity for sponsorship and event organisers should consider this. William Grant confirmed he would be happy to assist events with his own company's signage.

**16. 2016 Annual Conference.**

It was agreed that the current date and venue worked well for many people, being both reasonably central and accessible for the majority of people and also being on a good day with the Hunter Chase meeting following on conclusion of the Annual Conference.

The Directors and Executive at Cheltenham Racecourse were thanked by the Chairman for their generosity in providing the facilities. It was hoped that a similar arrangement could be concluded for 2016. Rise Vestey was also thanked by the Chairman for kindly initiating the arrangement – which she had said she would try to achieve again for 2016!

The meeting closed at 4.10pm.