

**The MFHA Team Chasing Committee  
Annual Conference  
Cheltenham Racecourse - Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

**Minutes**

**1. Apologies.**

Apologies were received from James Buckle, Rosie Vestey, Fred French and a number of event organisers and competitors.

**2. Minutes of Annual Conference on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013.**

The minutes of the 2013 Annual Conference were approved.

**3. Chairman's report:**

**a. Review of the 2013-2014 Season.**

This has been one of the best seasons for Team Chasing for a number of years. The only event that had to be cancelled was the Taunton Vale in early March, and all other events were well attended and successful. This is reflected in the accounts which show a 50% increase in sponsorship levy income for the year.

**b. National Committee matters.**

There have been two meetings of the National Committee since last year's Annual Conference, in December 2013 and earlier during the day. A summary of the minutes of the December meeting will be posted on the website.

A number of matters were discussed during that morning's meeting:

- i. Certain recommendations have been put forward by the Safety Review Panel consisting of Philip Cowen (Chairman), Netty Nevill, Debbie Topping, Jonathan Clissold, Mike Fenton and Tony Berry. The report and recommendations will not detract from the "Corinthian spirit" of the sport or change its ethos in any way, but are instead targeted to make the sport as safe as reasonably possible, and to bring it up to date in terms of today's standards and thinking for equestrian activities. There will be changes to the rules, stopping procedure, administrative guidelines and risk assessment forms. The general safety record for Team Chasing is good and the Committee has concluded that major reform is not necessary. It is hoped that the report will be published by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014 which will allow plenty of time for the Autumn events to make changes ahead of next season.
- ii. The website and social media statistics were reviewed and discussed. They showed a slight fall in visitor traffic to the main site, but that interaction with Facebook (and to a lesser degree Twitter) had increased dramatically. Up to 2,500 people had viewed some of the key messages relating to the sport during last season. The effect of the website has been to change the dynamics and create a stronger commercial platform. This combined with the excellent reports and articles by Jane Carley in Horse and Hound and other publications mean that we are now able to portray our sport to a very wide

audience through different forms of media – which can only assist each event in its efforts to attract sponsorship and entry income. It is up to the individual events to market themselves locally, and to provide a quality event which attracts maximum numbers of competitors, spectators and sponsors.

- iii. In relation to the staging of events the use of radios and briefing of officials on the day is extremely important, and has not been satisfactory at some events in 2013/14. The Stopping Procedure is clearly set out as part of the Administrative Guidelines, and works well provided it is properly administered. It is essential that all officials are made aware of it at the beginning of each event. As a result of the report of the Safety Committee, and following an incident at Heythrop event in Spring 2014, it has been decided that the Stopping Procedure will be extended to Open Classes.
- iv. Communication during the event is key to efficiency and success, and as part of the officials briefing it is important for organisers to fully brief all radio operators as to which radio channels to use, and the line / order of communication in the event of a major incident on course.
- v. Good upbeat public commentary on the PA system is essential and makes a huge difference to the public appreciation of an event, and hence the sport as a whole. The announcement of provisional interim times for Intermediate and Open classes is recommended to add to the excitement, and it is important that the commentators have accurate information about which teams are on course. Any event that does not have the services of a recognised, competent commentator was asked to contact either Philip Cowen or Belinda Walkinshaw up to a month in advance of their event.
- vi. There have been some concerns with regard to the ages of competitors competing in speed classes, where under 16's are prevented from competing by the National BTC rules. It is important that event organisers make it clear within their schedules that entries can only be accepted from individuals who have attained the age of 16. Thereafter, organisers will have to rely (to a great extent) on individual competitors being honest and truthful.
- vii. There was a problem at one particular event during the Spring with a dog getting loose on the course during the Open class. Events should make it clear to spectators that dogs should be kept on a lead at all times. Had the organisers been able to stop the team on the course at the time this would have been an advantage. It was commented that this season there had been other issues with the Stopping Procedure in Intermediate classes as fence judges had not been properly briefed. The Chairman confirmed that we will reiterate the importance of the Procedure, and the use of red flags, in a pre-season message.
- viii. There was a discussion about split times and timing generally. Provisional split times are recorded at a fixed point using a stop watch. Technology is moving on from the use of infra-red beams to “live time” on course systems for timing each team's round. This can slow the day down slightly as it requires teams to start at a fixed point during the minute (normally, 0.00, 0.25, 0.5 or 0.75 of each minute) and the starter has to organise teams carefully at the start in order to ensure timing is accurate.

**c. Committee Appointments.**

William Grant and Ben Pauling were both due to retire this year and have both been re-elected to the committee. They have contributed an enormous amount and play key roles. Ben will be taking a more active involvement in the Heythrop event in 2015, and William will be involved in the development of commercial opportunities for the sport. There are 1 or 2 spaces on the committee and several names have been put forward for consideration. Any suggestions of other people who could add value, in particular event organisers, would be welcomed – with nominees to the Chairman.

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

Jane Carley thanked those who had posted photos on to the website and encouraged further postings of comments and photos etc as it brings the site to life. She is interested in a series of articles as to what riders and horses do in the summer months when there is no Team Chasing, and would like to do some profiles on this. She also intends to promote the use of a blog highlighting people's activities when away from Team Chasing.

It is important that we all interact and engage with social media to generate coverage and enthusiasm about the sport throughout the wider equestrian industry. The increased volume of activity in 2013/14 has undoubtedly given rise to a significant increase in the number of teams competing at certain events, and in particular participation in Novice classes. Spreading the word and broadening the net using Facebook and Twitter positively, and with good humour, benefits both the sport generally and individual events. Open teams were asked to update their Team Profiles on the web site, which Jane Carley can help with providing that she is given the necessary information to create the profile.

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

The BTC initials and logos are being used by most events but not all and should be used more widely and consistently. All artwork and logos are available from Philip Cowen via the Drop Box shared site.

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

Dominic White and Ben Pauling were asked to report on the BTC National Championship day, held at the Heythrop event in 2014. They commented that the Heythrop Committee appreciates that they are on a continual learning curve in particular in relation to the size and routing of the course, but they were encouraged that this year more teams got round and less people failed to complete. The weather played a role in 2014, with entries being up and good numbers of spectators and supporters. The comments received from competitors have been discussed with the committee and Ben Pauling is going to work with the committee to address these. In the early years of the event at Little Compton, the height, size and length of the course were too big and last year the course came under renewed scrutiny. This year the organising committee appointed a new course builder, Charles Frampton, who has taken the job on with great enthusiasm. The fences were all extremely well presented but were perhaps slightly too small (for the National Championship) and the courses were shorter than previously. It was commented that the Open was more like a large Intermediate course, which was not therefore the "ultimate" test to determine the National Team Chasing Champions of the year. There were some areas where ground conditions were not good and these will be fenced off in advance next year. There was no pen this year and this will be re-introduced. The ridge and furrow continues to be a problem and there have been discussions about running along the top to reduce its effect

and create more rhythm and flow. The start and finish have improved but there are still some other areas for improvement.

The Chairman confirmed that, following Committee consideration, 2015 will be the third year of the current arrangement for the National Championship to be hosted at/by the Heythrop event. He thanked everyone at the Heythrop for their hard work in making the Championship such a successful and popular event.

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

Both Leagues continue to be very successful, with an excellent profile. It is generally acknowledged that they provide significant impetus to the Autumn season. It has been agreed by the National Committee that the top eight teams in the Open League will be excluded from the following year's Intermediate League henceforward. It is also important that emphasis is not taken away from the National Championship in the Spring.

It was suggested from the floor that there should be more Novice speed classes and possibly a Novice league. The Chairman again mentioned the importance of under 16's being excluded from Novice speed classes.

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

The Chairman reported that discussions were ongoing with Global Recycling Solutions regarding their continued sponsorship of the Open Qualifying events and National Championship. We are hopeful that they will be prepared to renew an arrangement for the 2014/15 season, but simultaneously the Committee are actively looking at other options within the sponsorship market. Unfortunately discussions with one potential sponsor in 2013 came to nothing, and that company has now put money into British Dressage - as they were prepared to operate within any of the equestrian disciplines. The Chairman made the point that National Sponsorship has to be committed at a reasonable financial level to be worthwhile for the sport as a whole, not least as it ties down events with a degree of exclusivity.

The sponsorship sub-committee had considered a proposal to engage an expert to search for key potential sponsors and to secure an arrangement if at all possible. One or two other names have been suggested and will also be considered. It is hoped that the individual in question will dedicate a limited amount of valuable time to the project, coming from the position whereby he understands the wider equestrian sponsorship market and consequently who is best to approach. The sub committee will look at the proposal in detail and at other possibilities over the next few weeks. The financial commitment will be between £500 and £5,000. Commercial rights to the sport have a value and the right sponsor will make the most of them.

It was suggested from the floor that Team Chasing could have national fence sponsors who sponsored fences at several / many individual events and that lower level sponsorship and income could be generated from the web site, although we need to be careful that this does not detract from the National sponsorship opportunities. We need to get maximum value from the website and Facebook is a vital part of this and so we cannot give too much space away to other smaller sponsors.

It was confirmed that each Open event (which ran) during the 2013/14 season would receive £650 of national sponsorship income, with the exception of the £3,000 for the Heythrop event as host of the National Championship in 2014.

It was confirmed that Coombe Farm Wines had generously agreed to continue their sponsorship of the Open and Intermediate League competitions in 2014. Philip Cowen thanked Rosie Vestey

for both her own and her family's generous and substantial commitment to Team Chasing, and expressed his appreciation of all the support which she gave him during the 2013/14 season.

It has also been confirmed that RoR (Retraining of Racehorses) will continue to be a National Partner with Team Chasing to cement the relationship between Team Chasing and the wider racing community. They have committed £1,000 to national sponsorship for 2015.

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

The Safety Review, as detailed above, will give rise to a number of rule changes which need to be formulated. Specific points which were mentioned include:

It is important that there is at least one 4 Wheel Drive ambulance on the course as a rapid response vehicle at all times.

Air jackets do not meet the required standard, unless worn with / over a standard BETA-approved body protector. This will be reiterated in a pre-season message to all event organisers.

BSJA approved hats with fixed peaks will not be permitted in Team Chasing from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014 onwards.

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

Prize money was discussed. It was suggested that the top four teams should at least get their entry fee back and that any prizemoney should be commensurate. However it was also noted and agreed by the conference that in general the level of prize money for the Open and Intermediate teams is not an overriding factor. However the Chairman reiterated to all Event Organisers the importance of a clear description of prizemoney on offer within the relevant Event Schedules.

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

The standard of design and course construction has improved significantly in recent years, and the reports from course inspectors were very encouraging.

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

Philip Cowen thanked Jane Carley (in her absence) for her huge contribution to the sport throughout the past season. In particular he noted that there had been excellent coverage of the sport at all levels, with articles in local, regional and national media. Horse and Hound have started to include reports for Intermediate classes on occasions and are always interested in good news stories. Horse and Rider magazine had also published a very positive article in their February issue. Local press are interested in their local events and local riders – and are always interested in good pictures and interesting stories. Social media has been used effectively in the build up to events, in particular the National Championship.

Horse and Country TV covered footage of the National Championship and this will be aired on Sky 280 in the week after the Annual Conference.

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

Details of Medical suppliers are to be collated from each event and a list will be made available within the Drop Box account.

There was a concern about the use of bibs with side-ties in respect of situations where air jackets are activated. It is understood that guidance notes are available from the air jacket manufacturers, and these will be obtained (if possible) and circulated to event organisers.

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

Following Committee discussion, it was agreed that the recognition and inspection fees, and the sponsorship levy, would all remain at the same level for the forthcoming season.

## **13. The Accounts – to be tabled.**

The accounts were tabled and approved.

Although they show a healthy position it is important to retain a financial buffer in the light of uncertainty over sponsorship. It was also reiterated that the sponsorship levy is a levy on the teams that enter each competition, rather than being a levy on individual events. The accounts show that BTC has around £20,000 in the bank which will be retained and invested for the benefit of the sport as a whole.

## **14. Dates for 2014—2015 Events.**

The dates for Spring 2015 events will be discussed and circulated in the next 6-8 weeks. Once finalised, full details will be posted on to the website.

## **15. Any other business.**

The Committee are looking at the possibility of obtaining trophies for the Open and Intermediate League winners. The Chairman invited delegates to come forward to Belinda or himself with any suggestions.

It was suggested that it might be helpful for some Novice riders if course walks with experienced Open and Intermediate competitors were made available to provide some general assistance, tips and encouragement. This is to be considered in further detail at the next BTC Committee Meeting.

In order to encourage more Open entries it was suggested from the floor that consideration should be given to special prizes for teams with non-thoroughbred horses. Other comments from the floor included encouragement for more Team Chasing events to run Hunt Classes similar to that at the Fernie. For further Committee consideration.

It was also suggested that the use of directional arrows to events (from main roads etc) would be helpful where not already being used, and could provide a good local sponsorship opportunity.

## **16. 2015 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 2015.