

RDA National Championships Programme

Events Information Pack 2026



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A message from the **RDA UK CEO**

Welcome to the RDA National Championships 2026

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2026 RDA National Championships, a highlight in our calendar that celebrates the very best of inclusive equestrian sport. This is a moment of outstanding achievement for every competitor taking part. Your dedication, progress and partnership with your horses and ponies are what make these Championships so special, and we are proud to celebrate everything you have done to qualify.

This year we are excited to expand our live stream, bringing even more of the competition to life, including Carriage Driving and Countryside Challenge, alongside behind-the-scenes stories that showcase the people, preparation and moments that make RDA, and these Championships, so special. We are also delighted to introduce a brand-new family-friendly outdoor cinema on Friday evening. Open to all, this will help raise funds to support delivery of events like the Championships, offering athletes, volunteers, coaches, families and supporters a chance to come together and relax within a busy weekend.

Finally, sincere thanks go to the RDA volunteers, coaches, equines, sponsors and supporters who make these Championships possible, and to those whose commitment continues day in, day out, at RDA groups and centres across the country. It is this everyday dedication, as well as the work behind this event, that creates opportunities, builds confidence and makes achievements like these Championships possible.

A stylized, handwritten signature of Michael Bishop in white ink on a green background.

Michael Bishop
RDA UK CEO



***National Championships:** A Celebration of Achievement, Partnership and Possibility*

The RDA National Championships is the highlight of the RDA calendar,

bringing together participants from across the UK to celebrate achievement, determination and the power of equestrian sport. For many competitors, it represents the culmination of months and often years of dedication and hard work.

Made possible by the commitment of volunteers, coaches, sponsors and partners, the Championships provide a platform for participants to showcase their skills and enjoy an unforgettable experience.

Over three inspiring days at Hartpury University & College, competitors take part in a wide range of disciplines, including dressage, showjumping, carriage driving and vaulting. As one of the largest equestrian events of its kind for disabled competitors, the Championships not only highlight sporting excellence but also demonstrate the life-changing impact of RDA and the unique connection between horses and people.

Championships at a Glance

9	Disciplines
178	Classes
412	Participants
650	Entries
99	Groups



What's On

Visit the **Taylor Rose** hospitality stand throughout the event



Friday

- Full day of competition across multiple disciplines
- **Learning Zone** open 09:00 - 16:00 (Pony Club & RDA activities)



- Visit the **Legacy Lounge** for informal conversations about leaving a gift in your Will

*Hosted by **Pearl Smith** (RDA UK) alongside estate planners and **Octopus Legacy***

Evening: outdoor cinema showing of The Greatest Showman to round off the first day of Championships

Sunday

- Final day of competition across **multiple disciplines**
- **Learning Zone** open 09:00 - 16:00 (Pony Club & RDA activities)



- Come along to **support** participants in their final classes
- A fitting close to an **inspiring** Championships weekend

Saturday

- Full day of competition across multiple disciplines

Additional activities throughout the day:

- **Horseback archery** demonstration at 16:30

- **Arts and crafts** sessions

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- **PolyJumps** fun challenges



- **Learning Zone** open 9am-4pm



- **Legacy Lounge** resources available for those who missed Friday's session
- **RDA Disco** in the evening

Watch the Livestream

Missed a class or want to relive your favourite moments? Selected classes and highlights from the Championships are available to watch on our **YouTube** and **Facebook** channels.

*Event details found in the **What's On** guide*

@RDANational

What the Championships means to our RDA participants & families

I'm so proud that last July my daughter entered the vaulting class. Her patience and professionalism made me immensely proud. Yes, it put her out of her routine and we all know how hard that can be for an autistic person - but she still did amazingly well!

- Parent of RDA Participant



Coming to the Nationals every year, my favourite part is challenging myself to beat my score from previous years, meeting new people, meeting people that can connect with what I've been through and look at RDA in the same light I do. RDA has changed my life in a really big way, mine and my family's life.

- RDA Participant, Khianna



I like how friendly the national champs is and I really enjoy it and it's really nice to come. I've got quite a few friends here, who come to champs. Competing with RDA makes me feel like you can have fun and work towards something, but it's not really pressured. I've got a lot of anxiety and being around horses is really good and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the horses.

- RDA Participant, Lily



I wouldn't be here today if the RDA wasn't formed, and yes the rest is history! You can accomplish things and get rosettes. I've picked up a lot of rosettes, you could fill a wall honestly! Of course, thanks to the RDA that made this so that disabled people can actually be in horse riding.

- RDA Participant, Elliot



It's been massive for Elliot. Just seeing that smile on his face and getting the opportunity to get out there and take a rosette back to Murfield RDA melted my heart, it was an amazing thing to see.

- Parent of Elliot, RDA participant

The Promise of your Legacy

the Power of Horses

*"RDA gave me a purpose
when I was struggling to find
one. The comfort I get from
animals is like no other."*

Jenny - RDA Participant & Volunteer

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lives of disabled people.**



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Arts & Crafts

The **Arts & Crafts** competition is one of the highlights of the National Championships and is open to all participants. It provides a wonderful opportunity, especially for those unable to attend in person to be part of the event and have their work celebrated in front of a wide audience.

With Junior and Senior sections for both individual and group entries, participants can submit a wide variety of creative work, including drawings, paintings, collages, sculptures, textiles and photography.

Artwork is first judged at regional level, with winners progressing to the final at Hartpury on Saturday morning. All entries are proudly displayed in the Marquee.

Be sure to come along, enjoy this year's inspiring finalists, and perhaps find inspiration to take part in the future.



Best Turned Out

The **Best Turned Out** competition has its roots in military tradition, where horses were essential working partners and their condition directly impacted performance and reliability.

Today, these principles remain just as important. Judges assess the overall presentation of the horse, including cleanliness, condition and the fit and care of saddlery or harness. Well-maintained equipment is essential to ensure the horse's comfort and wellbeing.

Grooming also plays a vital role, helping to maintain healthy skin and identify any potential issues early.

This class reflects the dedication and care shown by participants and their teams, celebrating the importance of horse welfare at the heart of everything RDA does.

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Dressage

Dressage gives riders the opportunity to demonstrate the skills they have developed through their RDA sessions.

Competitors perform a set test in a 20m x 40m arena, with each movement marked out of ten. Scores are combined to determine the final placings. Classes are available at walk, walk and trot, or walk, trot and canter levels, depending on ability and experience.

As a multi-disability discipline, dressage is inclusive to all, with specific classes also available for riders with learning disabilities or visual impairments.

Freestyle to Music classes allow riders to showcase creativity and expression, combining technical skill with artistic interpretation. On Saturday evening, the popular Costume Freestyle brings an added element of storytelling and fun.



Countryside Challenge

The **Countryside Challenge** is a fun and engaging discipline that gives riders the opportunity to develop practical riding skills while tackling a course of themed obstacles inspired by the countryside and everyday riding activities.

Designed to build confidence, communication and partnership between horse and rider, the course may include tasks such as opening gates, navigating bridges, weaving through markers, handling objects or guiding the horse through a variety of sensory challenges. Obstacles are adapted to suit different abilities, ensuring the competition remains inclusive and accessible to all participants.

Judges look for control, accuracy, rhythm and horsemanship, as well as the rider's confidence and effectiveness in completing each challenge. The emphasis is on partnership, problem-solving and enjoyment, making Countryside Challenge one of the most supportive and rewarding disciplines at the National Championships.

With classes available across a range of levels, the discipline continues to grow in popularity and provides riders with valuable opportunities to build independence, coordination and trust with their horse in a relaxed and encouraging environment.

Both Dressage and Countryside Challenge are **proudly sponsored** by:



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2026 RDA Challenge Events



Superhero Series

You can fly solo & take on all three stages (a swim, cycle & push/run), or share the fun in a team relay! Everyone is welcome. All we ask is that all solo entrants, or at least one team member, considers themselves to have a disability of any kind.

August
15th
2026



Snowdon (Yr Wyddfa) at Night

Starting in Llanberis, this night-time trek takes you to the summit of Snowdon, guided by expert leaders. You'll be fully supported, celebrate with breakfast at the finish, and raise vital funds for RDA.

August
29th - 30th
2026



South Coast Ultra Challenge

Take on the South Coast Ultra: 100 km from Eastbourne to Arundel via Beachy Head, the Seven Sisters, and Brighton. Epic views, full support, and flexible distance options for every challenger.

September
5th - 6th
2026

Discover
more





Showjumping

RDA **Showjumping** offers a structured pathway for progression, from poles on the ground through to courses of 80cm.

With five levels available, the discipline caters to a wide range of abilities and continues to grow in popularity across RDA groups.

At the National Championships, classes include Level 1 (unled), Levels 2 (unled), 3, 4 and 5, alongside a Level 3+ class designed to support progression to higher levels.



Vaulting

Vaulting combines gymnastics and dance on horseback, requiring strength, balance, coordination and creativity.

Competitors can take part individually, in pairs or as teams, performing routines on either a horse or a barrel. When on horseback, the horse is controlled by a lunger, making them an essential part of the team.

Performances include both compulsory movements and freestyle routines set to music, showcasing a wide range of skills and expression.

Highly adaptable, vaulting offers opportunities for people with a wide range of disabilities and is a powerful example of teamwork and trust in action.



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Performance Showing

Performance Showing is an increasingly popular discipline within RDA.

Judging focuses on the partnership between horse and rider, overall turnout, and the impression they create together. Above all, it celebrates harmony, confidence and enjoyment.

Winners from each class progress to the RDA Performance Showing Championship. Riders are encouraged to be neat and tidy, with suitable tack that prioritises comfort and practicality.



Endurance

Endurance is a growing discipline within RDA, with increasing numbers of groups taking part across the UK.



Carriage Driving

Carriage Driving has been part of RDA for over 50 years.

Across the UK, RDA groups offer specially adapted carriages suitable for both ambulant and non-ambulant drivers, ensuring accessibility for all.

At the National Championships, qualified drivers compete in a driven Dressage Test and a Conobstacle course. Dressage assesses harmony, control, accuracy and the way of going, while also considering turnout and presentation.

The Conobstacle course combines cones and obstacles to test the horse's fitness, obedience and suppleness, alongside the driver's skill and precision. The winner is the competitor with the lowest combined penalties across both phases.

Now in its third year at the National Championships, the competition continues to expand, with classes held on Friday and Sunday. Distances range from 1km to 5km, offering opportunities for a wide range of abilities.

First Aid & Medical Arrangements

RDA National Championships



First aid and medical support during the event will be provided by **GWP Medical Services**.

“What if I need first aid, become ill or am injured during the event?”

- **7am- 7pm-** you can present at the first aid post located in the indoor arena, or by speaking to any member of the RDA staff who will direct you to us.
- If it is an emergency, a member of RDA staff will call the onsite medical team to attend your location.
- The medical team will be able to deal with the majority of medical problems; including minor illnesses, wounds and injuries on site.

“I am staying at Hartpury College all weekend; What if I need medical help or advice overnight?”

- **‘Out of hours’, Thurs, Fri, Sat 7pm- 7am-** For people staying at Hartpury College there will be an Advanced Paramedic Practitioner (APP) ‘on-call’ overnight for any urgent health concerns that cannot wait until the next day.
- The medical team is equipped for emergencies and minor injuries and illnesses (e.g infections, painful conditions, asthma flare ups etc) including problems with urinary catheters.
- If you think you need to call 999, 111, or go to A+E, please first phone the on-call APP on the number below who will advise the best course of action, which may include coming to see you at your accommodation.

For urgent medical advice
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Megan, Ming Sun & Coach Emma, Journey to the RDA National Championships

Megan (14) and Ming Sun (15) began their riding journeys at Bank Farm RDA, where they have ridden together for the past three years.

Both RDA participants have autism, and through RDA they found not just riding lessons, but a place where they feel understood, supported, and like they truly belong.

RDA has become a huge part of both of their lives. It has helped them grow in confidence, independence, and friendship. Being with the horses gives them calm, focus, and happiness, and it has become something they look forward to and feel proud to be part of every week.

Their coach, Emma MacDonald, began her RDA journey as a parent in 2021 and became a qualified coach in 2023. She has supported both riders as they have progressed and has watched them grow in confidence as they have worked towards the RDA National Championships.

"RDA has been life-changing for me, both as a parent and as a coach. I first came to RDA when I brought my daughter Megan to her



first session, and I quickly saw the difference it made to her confidence and happiness.

What began as volunteering turned into becoming a coach because I wanted to give something back to a place that had already given us so much.

Seeing riders work towards moments like the RDA National Championships is incredibly special. It is where all their hard work, confidence, and progress comes together, and where they can feel proud of how far they have come. For me, the most powerful part of RDA is watching those moments of achievement and joy happen on that stage." Emma

The RDA National Championships are one of the most inclusive and exciting events in the equestrian calendar, bringing participants together from all over the country. For Megan and Ming Sun, it feels like a really special moment to be part of something so big, where every rider is welcomed, supported, and celebrated.

Coming to Championships means being part of something that feels accessible and made for them. It is about the excitement of travelling, preparing, and stepping into an environment full of other RDA participants

who understand the journey. It is also about pride- pride in how far they have come, and pride in being there.

For both participants, it is a chance to enjoy riding in a different environment, meet other people in the RDA community, and feel the buzz of a national event where everyone is cheering each other on.

Horses feel like a second home to me, somewhere I feel safe when everything is going a bit wrong. When times get tough, I have somewhere to go. Horses don't talk back, but they listen and keep me company.

RDA is a truly special place to me. It makes me feel welcome, happy, and safe. It allows me to be myself and connect with others.

I love getting to know everyone at RDA, and it helps me come more and more out of my shell. The horses inspire me to be myself, sharing cuddles and giving them pats and grooms. I really do adore all of the horses.

- Megan

Megan will be competing at this years RDA National Championships in Dressage class 95 and mounted best turned-out class 137 both on the Saturday., and has grown in confidence through her time in RDA, becoming more independent and comfortable in her riding.

Megan is really excited about being at the Championships and being part of something she has worked towards.





Being around the horses makes me feel calm. I like being around the horses and being able to learn a new skill. I like just being with the horses and not having to talk to them. RDA has given me an opportunity to try riding, I am not sure I would have tried it otherwise. It has given me a sense of achievement and it is a safe space for me to be me. I find competing a little bit stressful but it makes me feel as though I've achieved something. I would really love to win the national championships.

- Ming Sun

Ming Sun will be competing this year in Dressage class 87 on Friday and Countryside Challenge class 165 on Sunday. RDA has helped Ming Sun grow in confidence and belief in himself. He enjoys being around the horses and feels proud of what he has achieved through his riding.

Their coach Emma has supported them both through their journey and has seen how much RDA can change confidence, independence, and happiness.

Together, Megan and Ming Sun's journey to the RDA National Championships reflects the pride, joy, and sense of belonging that comes from being part of an event where every participant is celebrated for their achievements.

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Who we are & RDA's impact

RDA is a pioneer in the therapeutic use of horses, a leader in disability sport, and the only major UK charity to focus specifically on the health and wellbeing benefits of bringing disabled people and horses together.

We use the power of horses and the strength of community to enrich lives, supporting disabled people through innovative programmes that promote wellbeing, physical health and confidence

Our goal is for disabled people, and those with long term conditions, to experience freedom and connection, feel valued, included and live fulfilling lives.

When I'm riding, I feel like I'm flying and part of the horses. It's beautiful.

- Young participant
at Park Lane RDA



A national movement with local roots

Our transformative work is delivered in every corner of the UK by a network of nearly 450 local RDA's embedded in communities across the UK.

RDA At A Glance:

39,000	participants
346,500	RDA sessions delivered
400+	RDA Groups & Approved Centres
1,700	Coaches
2,800	Horses
13,700	volunteers

A growing need & RDA's unique role

Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions face barriers such as discrimination, inaccessible services, and financial challenges, limiting their participation in society. As a result, they are more likely to experience poorer mental health, loneliness, lower life satisfaction, physical inactivity, and exclusion from education. These challenges negatively affect their wellbeing and reduce opportunities for personal development, employment, and community involvement.

The difference RDA wants to make

At RDA, we harness the power of the human and horse connection to enrich lives and support disabled people and those with long-term conditions to experience freedom and connection, feel valued, included and live fulfilling lives.

Our Impact

80% of parents/carers think the changes in participants would not have happened without RDA

95% of participants feel calm and focused during sessions

82% feel more connected to others

90% feel more confident in themselves

88% have better posture, balance and co-ordination

RDA is the highlight of the week. It's my daughter's favourite thing. It's life-changing. I mean that – what you enable is amazing.

- Parent of child participant at Chipping Norton RDA





EQUINE ARENA

Catrina, Journey to the RDA National Championships

Cat (17) joined Isle of Man RDA in September 2024 when she was 15 years old.

What began as a participant experience quickly became something much bigger. Through RDA, Cat found a place where she feels safe, supported, and able to be herself.

Living with anxiety, Cat says RDA has become one of the most important parts of her life. It has helped her grow in confidence, improve her physical wellbeing, and connect with people of all ages through a shared love of horses.



RDA means everything to me. I feel seen and heard in ways I never have before. They have provided me a safe place to be myself, where I'm constantly counting down the days until the next time I get to go there.

When I'm at RDA, all my worries disappear. My only worry is whether I get to ride Junior or not. I've been able to grow my confidence, gain new opportunities and become happier within myself. Being part of RDA makes me proud, both as a participant and a volunteer.

- Cat

After several months as a participant, Cat's enthusiasm and dedication led her to become a volunteer in January 2025. Arriving early for sessions because she never wanted her time at RDA to end, she began learning how to tack up the horses before taking on a regular volunteering role alongside her riding.

Every Friday, Cat spends her evening at RDA helping prepare horses for sessions, leading during lessons, and taking part in her own riding sessions. Her favourite horse is Junior, whom she especially enjoys grooming and riding.

Horses and RDA have given me something to look forward to every week. Spending time with the horses, especially Junior, makes me so happy. I love grooming them and being around them. The horses help me forget about everything else and just enjoy the moment.





RDA has also had a positive impact on Cat's physical health. Riding has helped strengthen her leg muscles, which supports her mobility and helps manage ongoing knee pain, while keeping her active in a way she enjoys.

The friendships and connections she has made through RDA have also been life-changing.

I've been able to meet new people of all ages, have fun with them and enjoy conversations with them. The volunteers are amazing and make me feel seen and heard in ways I never have before. I know that when I'm at RDA, I'm in a judgement-free environment where everyone wants to help participants thrive.

This year, Cat will be competing at her first RDA National Championships. Having previously taken part in the 2025 Virtual National Championships and successfully qualifying through Regional Championships, she is looking forward to experiencing the excitement of the national event for the first time.

Qualifying was an achievement she is incredibly proud of. Competing at Regionals brought new challenges, including riding an unfamiliar horse in a new environment, but it also showed her how much she has grown in confidence.

Regionals was exciting and nerve-racking. I was in a new environment and riding a horse I'd never ridden before, which made me nervous. But afterwards I felt really proud of what I'd accomplished.

I've never been to the RDA National Championships before, but I'm most looking forward to competing, watching other riders and learning from them. The idea of such a big event feels a little scary, but I know I'll be in a safe and supportive environment, which helps. I'm excited to take on this new experience and can't wait for Nationals.

Cat's journey to the RDA National Championships reflects the confidence, friendship, opportunity and sense of belonging that RDA creates. As both a participant and volunteer, she embodies the spirit of the RDA community and is proud to represent Isle of Man RDA on the national stage.



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Stay **connected** with RDA

As the Championships come to a close, there are plenty of ways to stay part of the RDA community and keep the inspiration going all year round.

Follow Us on Social Media

Stay up to date with the latest news, stories and events from across RDA. From participant achievements to behind-the-scenes moments, our social channels are the best place to see the impact of our work in action.

Follow us, share your highlights, and help spread the word:

Facebook: RDANational
Instagram: @rdauk
LinkedIn: Riding for the Disabled Association
YouTube: RDANational

Sign up to our newsletter at rda.org.uk



What's Next?

The RDA journey doesn't stop here. You can find us at events across the country throughout the year, where we'll be sharing our work, meeting supporters, and showcasing the power of horses to change lives. Upcoming events include:

The Game Fair

24 - 26 July 2026

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Blenheim Palace International Horse Trials

17 - 20 September 2026

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Thank you for being part of the RDA National Championships. Your support, whether as a participant, volunteer, supporter or spectator - helps make everything we do possible. **We look forward to seeing you again soon.**



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