

COMPETING AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

INTRODUCTION

The sport of TREC has its roots firmly planted in equestrian tourism, so it's no surprise that its International Governing Body is the Federation Internationale de Tourisme Equestre (<https://fite-net.org/en/trec/>). FITE arranges training for trainers of judges and assists host countries with the organisation of the World and European Championships for Senior, Young (age 16-21) and Junior Duo (pairs – age 14-18) TREC competitors.

TREC GB (<https://trecgb.com/>) is the National Governing Body (NGB) for the sport of TREC in Great Britain and an Associate Member of FITE.

The FITE Senior World Championships occur in Olympic years (2024, 2028, 2032), with the Senior European Championships held in between (2022, 2026, 2030). Young and Junior Duo Riders have a FITE Championship organised every year to encourage and develop new talent. To date the competitions have always taken place in Europe (including Britain – we hosted a Senior/Young Rider Championship on Exmoor in 2006), however, Saudi Arabia and Madagascar have both recently joined FITE so who knows where they may be held in future years.

Due to the Covid pandemic the 2020 Senior, Young Rider and Junior Duo FITE Championships were postponed but will hopefully take place in early September 2021 (venue to be confirmed) followed by the European Championships in 2022. This section removed by Cath Cromarty!

SO YOU WANT TO BECOME AN INTERNATIONAL RIDER

Start by having a look at the TREC GB International Riders website at <https://trecgbinternationalriders.wordpress.com/>. You will no doubt recognise and may already know some of the current team members. Also worth checking out is the Facebook Group GBTrecTeam (<https://www.facebook.com/GBTrecTeam>).

If you wish to be considered for selection for any of the TREC GB International Teams read through the appropriate Selection Criteria documents (email international@trecgb.com to request) which will tell you more about eligibility, qualification, selection, registration, costs and obligations. The next stage is to complete an application form (email international@trecgb.com to request). Seniors return their completed forms to the TREC GB International Riders Treasurer with an initial payment of £100.00 towards selection costs (refundable if you don't qualify) and Young Riders and Junior Duo Riders to the International Riders Young Rider Representative.

For Seniors and Young Riders each country is invited to send a squad of up to six riders, four form the team and two ride as individuals. For Junior Duos two pairs are invited to compete with one pair being designated as the official 'team' (both riders must finish all three phases of the competition to have a chance of completing).

If you are lucky enough to qualify and be selected to be part of one of the International Teams you will receive a Riders Contract to complete and sign. You would usually have confirmation of your selection early in July of the competition year (as the qualifying period runs from 1st July of the previous year through to 30th June of the competition year).

PREPARATION AND PAPERWORK

Formally registered and potential International Riders are invited to join TREC GB's International Rider's Development Group. The Development Group aims to help prepare riders to compete at International Championships by providing specific training events to help riders hone their skills both in and out of the saddle and provide support in preparing their horses to undertake the challenge of an International Championship.

Seasoned members of current and past international teams and the Chefs d'Equipe (Team Managers) will be more than happy to guide and mentor you through the whole process. Don't forget everyone was the newbie once!

Team members also keep in touch via a closed Facebook page (TREC Team GBR).

It is useful experience to have already competed in a competition abroad and in some circumstances a requirement for selection. This could be on your own horse or you could fly out and hire a horse. Please note that you must have the official approval of TREC GB in order to compete abroad. This can be obtained by emailing your request to the irwg@trecgb.com

Riders need the usual passports and paperwork for travelling abroad but you should double check what this includes going forward as there have been several changes to requirements since we left the EU (for further information see <https://www.gov.uk/visit-europe-1-january-2021>).

During the months prior to the competition, as well as training and getting out and competing, riders should spend some time studying the schedule, current FITE rulebook and FITE PTV obstacle datasheets (<https://fite-net.org/en/trec/>) and research map(s) and satellite images of the venue and its surrounding area. Maps vary country to country, they can usually be obtained from specialist map shops in the UK but sometimes have to be specially ordered so it's best not to leave it until the last minute – usually the riders get together and organise to buy a batch.

Horses must have valid passports and up-to-date flu vaccinations in accordance with the FITE rulebook (plus any other vaccinations specified by the organisers or deemed a sensible precaution due to local disease risks). Again rules on taking horses to Europe have changed since we left the EU but don't worry, there will be plenty of help and guidance available to you.

The organisers issue a competition schedule early in the year of the competition which includes a provisional timetable and lots of information about the competition itself and the local area including tourist attractions and accommodation together with details of the entry fees etc. Pre-entries and accommodation and or/meal package bookings are submitted by the Management Team Administrator followed by the final names and numbers in mid to late July. Family and friends of team riders are welcome to come along but must book any official accommodation and/or meal packages through the Management Team Administrator.

WHAT DOES IT COST?

Currently riders have to pay for most of their own participation in FITE Championships although fund raising, sponsorship and donations do help to reduce the overall costs. Unavoidable costs include entry fees, accommodation, stabling, food for both human and horse, transport to and from the FITE Championships and a contribution towards reasonable expenses for your Chef d'Equipe (these are partially funded by TREC GB). The overall cost varies according to the location of the venue and how the horses are transported but as a rough guide could be anywhere between £2k and £5k.

HOW DOES EVERYONE GET THERE?

The horses usually travel to the venue together in a horsebox hired from a commercial horse transport company who provide their own driver(s) but this does depend on the location of the venue and how many horses are travelling. There is usually a small amount of space allocated to each rider for tack, equipment, feed etc. Sometimes riders share their own horsebox/car transport – and we have occasionally shared transport and costs with riders from TREC Ireland.

Everyone usually meets either at a lairage or the yard of a generous TREC rider near to Dover the night before travelling across to Europe and the horses are stabled or corralled overnight depending on the facilities available. The horses need to be vetted within 24 hours before starting an international journey, sometimes a vet comes out to the lairage or yard and vets them all together or in some circumstances this can be done by your own vet before you leave home.

The horses travel across the Channel by ferry (it's very expensive to transport horses via the Channel Tunnel and requires the lorry to be extremely high spec). The riders either fly out to the venue or drive. We recommend that at least a few meet up with the horses at any overnight stops to help with their care. The horses travel surprisingly well despite the long distances sometimes involved – but do think ahead re clearly labelled pre-packed feeds etc. The main benefit of driving over flying is that you can take more equipment, feed etc with you. The quality of hay and/or haylage that's on offer is at the venues is not guaranteed and it can be quite expensive (and changing your horses feed or forage immediately prior to a competition is not a good idea).

The TREC GB horses, riders and Chefs d'Equipe plan to arrive at the venue a few days before the start of the competition so they can rest after the journey, acclimatise, settle in to their temporary stabling/accommodation and familiarise themselves with the venue and surrounding area.

In some circumstances competitors hire horses to compete on in which case they would usually request that their hiring be available a few days prior to the competition so that they can get to know each other.

The horses are normally stabled, sometimes in permanent stables but often in temporary stabling (small, with earth floors). It is useful for the squad to take corraling equipment but not guaranteed that you will actually be able to corral. Sometimes if there is space the teams will set up a corral(s) which can be shared so the horses get some turnout. Some venues have very little available grass even for grazing in hand especially in the dryer climates of countries like Spain, Portugal and Italy – but it's nice for the horses to have space to roll and look around.

The riders, Chefs d'Equipe, judges and supporters stay in a variety of accommodation. There will be an accommodation package but some choose to opt out and camp or rent a villa or Airbnb nearby. The official accommodation is sometimes a distance away from the venue so some prefer to camp on site to be near their horses – we recommend that riders stay together if at all possible as it makes sharing information and getting to team meetings or official briefings so much easier.

There is usually a food package and mealtimes are a great time to socialise with your own team members and with the competitors, judges and supporters from other countries. You will definitely make some new lifelong friends. The food on offer can vary in quality and quantity but is usually based on the local cuisine (FYI – Italian breakfasts are pretty much non-existent). You will be given some form of ID to show at mealtimes – this could be a wrist band, punchcard or tokens – whatever it is, don't lose it (it is nearly as important as your POR record card).

It is very useful to have more than one vehicle per squad so that riders and supporters can easily travel between the venue and their accommodation as well as getting out and about to recce the local area independently. If flying out consider hiring a car.

In the days leading up to the competition the riders will recce the venue and possible POR exit routes and explore the local countryside in groups and on their own, on horseback, on foot and by car, sometimes accompanied by their Chef d'Equipe. It is really important to split up and head in different directions and then to debrief the other squad members at the daily team meetings as to what you've found – in the past we've found it useful to pair a newbie, or young rider(s) with an old hand so they're not overwhelmed by the mental overload of foreign map, new language etc... Any restriction on hacking out will be advised in advance (eg in 2000, riders weren't allowed off tarmac until they were at least a 3km radius away from the Belgian venue).

The riders are fully responsible for the day-to-day care, welfare and exercise of their own (or hired) horses – this is not part of the Chef d'Equipe's job! There is a formal document which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Chef d'Equipe but basically, they are there to support you, oversee the safety and welfare of you and your horse and deal with administrative matters between the organisers and their squad.

WHAT'S THE FORMAT OF THE COMPETITION?

Accommodation packages usually start from the Wednesday although many teams including TREC GB book some extra days prior to this (we usually aim to arrive on the Sunday/Monday prior to the competition). There is usually a meeting for the Chefs d'Equipe on the Wednesday.

THE OPENING CEREMONY

The opening ceremony usually takes place on the Thursday afternoon. It may be held at the venue or at a nearby historic site or local town which could be some distance away. Smart, matching team clothes and numnahs are required, the competitors and their Chefs d'Equipe parade, sometimes mounted, sometimes on foot – if it's mounted it's useful to know if your horse will tolerate flags/crowds/brass bands/ethnic dancers, if it's to be on foot think about whether you can stand comfortably through long speeches or whether you might want a shooting stick to lean on and make sure your shoes/boots are comfortable.

THE INITIAL VETTING

The riders are allocated a time for their vetting on the Thursday morning and must dress appropriately to present and trot up their horse. This can be quite nerve wracking after travelling such a long way to compete – breathe, smile and remember to warm your horse up before the trot up.

THE TACK CHECK

Tack and equipment is not checked before you compete but there is a list of compulsory equipment in the FITE rulebook which can be checked at any point on the POR so needs to be carried. The team usually has a check through all equipment in the days before the competition to ensure that everyone's kit is up to scratch (working torches, valid dates on 1st Aid equipment etc) when there's still time for shopping. Top tip: it's way better to check your kit before you leave the UK and to know that you don't have to find a suitable chemist/supermarket/tack shop in a mad hurry.

THE MAP ROOM

If you have done your homework and are au fait with the local maps and the layout of the venue this should not prove too stressful an experience. If there's anything unusual about the competition maps, samples will be shared before the competition to allow you to test pens on the surface and to get to grips with the legend (Spain 2002).

THE POR

The POR takes place on the Friday. The starting order for teams is known long in advance and the Chefs d'Equipe declare the order for their team and individual riders on the Wednesday/Thursday. Team riders go first followed by any/all individuals.

Language is not a problem. The official languages of TREC are French and English and, because we have our sport in common, everyone understands enough about what's going on to manage to communicate. There is usually someone at a controle (check point) who can speak some English even if it's their second language. You will soon get used to the odd things like 'CP' not standing for check point but controle de passage (ticket to you and me) – and if the question 'what's the next speed?' gets blank looks, asking 'kilometre?' is always understood!

Typical technical difficulties you will be presented with depend on whether you are competing as a Senior, Young Rider or Junior Duo. The terrain can be harder to read and match to the map than in the UK as many of the paths and tracks are less well defined than they are here. Much of the European forestry is a maze of different and often similar paths and tracks. In some countries there is a noticeable lack of field boundary definition with fewer fences and walls than we're used to here – but, generally, ditches and streams are well marked and can be used as defining features whether in woodland or open country.

On returning to the venue riders are often met by crowds of helpers and supporters of all countries who cheer them home.

VETERINARY CHECKS

There will be a vet check during the POR (sometimes with lunch provided).

At the end of the POR you will have another vet check. Chefs d'Equipe, helpers and supporters are allowed to help prepare the horses for the post POR vetting (if it's been a hot day this can involve a lot of cooling buckets of water) – please advise your Chef d'Equipe if you'd rather keep the 'crowd' to a minimum to help get/keep your horse's heart rate nice and low.

There will be a further vet check on the Saturday morning prior to the MA and PTV. The horses' return travel paperwork will be checked/stamped after this vet check.

THE MA

Depending on the type of venue the MA might be in an arena with all the distractions that go with that although it could equally be on a grass/sand course. There are likely to be several more judges alongside the track than you're used to in the UK.

THE PTV

The PTV is designed to be spectator friendly where the terrain permits and some or all of the obstacles could even be in an arena. You **MUST NOT** venture onto the course until it has been officially opened for walking. This will not be until the Chef d’Piste has led a course walk for the Chefs d’Equipe and judges (usually on the Thursday) – any concerns re build quality or placement of obstacles have to be raised during this official walk and will not be listened to after this time. Your Chef d’Equipe will then have a short time to escort you and your squad on a course walk, after which you can walk the PTV as many times as you need so that you’ll know it in your sleep.

THE CLOSING CEREMONY

The closing ceremony takes place late Saturday afternoon once the PTV and results have been issued. It’s followed by a celebratory meal attended by every country – tickets for supporters usually need to be bought in advance – and it’s an event that shouldn’t be missed! After the meal the teams from each country swap gifts and then there is a traditional team cap/shirt/jacket swapping session. Most of the horses and competitors leave for home in the early hours of the Sunday morning, some hungover and some having had little or no sleep, but all with a huge sense of achievement.

This quote from Senior Rider Jackie Bennett sums it up well :

‘I have been privileged over the last 10 years to have been selected to represent Team GB at several European and World TREC championships. It is a true honour to fly the flag for your country doing a sport that you love. TREC has given me opportunities that I would never have had without this wonderful sport. To be asked to travel to the European and World championships and compete with like-minded people gives you amazing experiences and memories.’