

## PARA EQUESTRIAN

### Philippa Johnson

Campaign for the 2012 London Olympic Games



I was involved in a car accident in 1998 which left me without the use of my right arm and a very severely weakened right leg. It was the love and support of my family & friends, but especially the love for my horse and my passion for riding that pulled me through. All the doctors said I would never ride again and it has been one of my greatest joys to prove them wrong! Just riding was not enough I had always dreamed of riding and competing in Europe and even the accident couldn't make that dream go away.

In 2002 I was privileged enough to be a member of the first Para team to be sent overseas to compete in an International competition in Moorsele, Belgium. This was when I met and fell in love with my equine soul mate, Benedict. This meeting changed my life drastically! I moved to Belgium in 2003 to prepare for the Athens Paralympics 2004. We surprised everyone, including ourselves, by winning 2 Silver medals. This set us on a new course towards the following Paralympics.

The next four years were filled with many ups and downs. One of the ups was competing in the 2007 FEI World Para-equestrian Games held in Hartpury, England. We came away with an Individual Silver and a Bronze in the Kur. All of this in the middle of the famous Gloucester floods!! One of our downs was a few weeks after returning from England Benedict got very bad laminitis, it was only due to the incredible team of vets and farrier that he came out perfectly in order.

2008 was a phenomenal year with it culminating in us winning our 2 Gold medals in Hong Kong. It has been a huge sadness for me to retire my brilliant partner, but I will forever be grateful to him for all he has taught me and the memories we have made together. As they say when one door closes, another opens and Benedict's retirement has started me on yet another exciting path with my new horse Verdi.

Verdi is very different to Benedict. I call him my 'pocket rocket' he is built for pure power. He is the most difficult horse I have ever ridden but undoubtedly the most rewarding. He tries harder than any horse I have ever known but sometimes his power does get the better of him. If I see how much he has improved in just the year that we have had him I'm very curious as to what the next 14 months hold for us!!



Philippa and Verdi at a show in Meerdonk (Belgium)