

Past Side Saddle Rider of the Year

Karen Lyles (nee Dudley) 1979

Karen took the title of Side Saddle Rider of the Year in September 1979 riding Damask. The final was held at Stoneleigh during a British Horse Society open day. Reigning young rider of the year Sue Bland graduated to open ranks when standing reserve on St Lawrence Question Master. The Junior Rider of the Year was Victoria Thorne riding Longclose Guilthwaite.

Karen had competed for the senior rider title two years before at Hickstead, and went on to be a finalist at Knebworth the following year. Karen and Damask were also second to Jane Williams (nee Rackham) in the inaugural running of the Langston working hunter final at Greater London Horse Show. Both young ladies were members of Area 4 and regularly followed hounds side saddle with the Suffolk Hunt, which most certainly gave them the edge in workers.

Karen also had great experience as a member of Mrs David (Bill) Barham's display teams in the 1970's and 1980's in Denmark and Essen in Germany – as well as performing at the Royal Tournament, Royal International Horse Show and Horse of The Year Show – the latter two of which were both at Wembley in those days.

Damask was owned by Mrs David (Cherry) Barclay – at the time a master of the Suffolk along with Paul Rackham – with whom Karen hunted him regularly.

Karen worked for Christopher and Victoria Coldrey at their pre-training yard Herringswell Bloodstock Centre, near Newmarket, Suffolk. In her nine years there, many group one winners were resident and Karen spent hours long reining them before they were started under saddle. During this time Karen's side saddle career took a back seat and although she still had a horse, which she evented, she never took up the art again due to her marriage to farmer Mike Lyles.

As a farmer's wife Karen continued to hunt with the West Norfolk and the shire packs, when bringing up her two children allowed. Both her son William and daughter Annabel rode and in turn Karen became a West Norfolk Pony Club mother. Karen has now returned to her first love of the bloodstock industry, at Barton Stud, near Bury St Edmunds. Karen's son William has followed in his mother's equestrian footsteps and works for William and Pippa Funnell at their Billy Stud riding the youngsters. William's younger sibling Annabel swapped the saddle for a stethoscope and become a doctor.

Karen loved her time as a side saddle rider and still remembers fondly the fun she had with her side saddle friends.



Karen riding Damask being presented by Directors of the Blue Ribbon Group with their trophy and a handmade double bridle



Karen and Damask on their lap of honour.



An 18-year-old Karen poses in her winner's sash with the Blue Ribbon Group trophy later to be named The Age of Elegance Bronze.



Victoria Thorne riding Longclose Guilthwaite being presented with her trophy and bridle by Directors of the Blue Ribbon Group