



Polocrosse is a fast and furious game, testing the skills of horse and rider to the limit

Fast and furious polocrosse

by Theresa Odendaal

Polocrosse is a combination of lacrosse and conventional polo. It is also referred to as “king of the one-horse sports”. Unlike polo, where four horses are needed per rider for every match, only one horse is used for the entire game of polocrosse, making it much more accessible to the average rider.

The game is fast-paced and tests a multitude of skills, both the horse's and its rider's. SA *Horseman* spoke to Jackie Shaw, secretary of the Polocrosse Association of South Africa, about this exciting sport and its place in the South African equestrian landscape.

The game

Six players are divided into two sections, playing eight alternate chukkas of eight minutes each. The players are:

- No 1 attacker
- No 2 centre
- No 3 defence.

Players use a long stick with a net on the end, in which to catch a soft rubber ball. A polocrosse ground is smaller than a conventional polo ground, with a 27 m line at either end over which only the no 1 of the attacking side and no 3 of the defending side may play. There is a 9 m semi-circle in front of every goal post – a goal cannot be scored from inside this area.

The object of the game is to throw the ball from player to player or gallop with it in the net to the goal-scoring area, from where the attacker will throw it between the goal posts to score. Of course, the opposition team has the

same goal and must try to take the ball from the other team to prevent them from scoring.

Unlike most other equestrian sports, polo-crosse is a team sport in the true sense of the word. It is fast and exciting, high in adrenaline and a fantastic spectator sport – quite addictive, says Jackie.

Polocrosse is an easy game to learn on the ground, with the riding skills added later. Because of the fast pace, it requires considerable riding and ball-handling skills. Players need to be disciplined in order to operate as a team. They must also be extremely fit.

The horses

The horses need to be light on their feet, agile and super-responsive to the rider's aids. A horse must be able to accelerate from a standstill to a gallop, with almost no strides in-between. Then it should be able to come to a complete dead stop again at the slightest touch of the reins and perform roll-backs, something resembling the western spin. In South Africa, Thoroughbreds are mostly used because of their athleticism, suppleness, agility and speed.

Polocrosse in SA

Polocrosse has grown immensely as a sport in recent years. There has been a major drive to promote previously disadvantaged riders. Two of these riders earned their Protea colours.

In 2003, a South African team went to the first World Cup held in Australia and came third overall. The next World Cup takes place in April 2007 and South Africa will be well-represented by a team of four men and four ladies, this time holding out for gold. To raise funds, the Polocrosse Association is hosting a high goal, a sponsored tournament, at the Lion's River Polo Club in the Natal Midlands in March 2007.

If you want to find out more about the tournament, or would like to get involved in this exciting sport, e-mail the club on pasa@futurenet.co.za. SAH

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