



The new 80 x 60 Arena at Escombe under construction



The Step and Upright Brush fence uses the natural 'lie of the land'

# BE Accredited Course Builder - Tom Hooper of Escombe Equestrian



Trained at Harper Adam's University College, Shropshire in Land and Farm Management, 27 year old Tom Hooper now runs Escombe Equestrian based at Ebbesbourne Wake, Salisbury.

His original thoughts on career progression were towards Farm Management or Land Agent but with the decline in the farming sector, Tom decided to diversify and convert some of his farm into a livery yard and run the farm alongside.

Since the original idea conception the farm has scaled down and the yard increased in size and facilities and employed a full time manager. Now looking toward a successful 2006 season the yard is being rented out to a top event rider, Nick Champbell ([www.performace-horses-for-sale.co.uk](http://www.performace-horses-for-sale.co.uk)) and the facilities include 2 separate yards, horse walker, 20 x 40 all weather ménage, impressive new 80 x 60 all weather arena, 60 x 40 grass show jumping arena, cross country schooling field, 2 BE designed and built cross country courses at Intro and Pre-Novice level and a

secure tackroom with office, toilets and restroom. Regular clinics, training days and competitions are on offer, including their first BE Horse Trials on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2006.

The complete building of the course at Escombe Equestrian has been a 2 year process. Working with BE Accredited Course Bulider and Designer, Adrian Ditcham ([www.dhaes.co.uk](http://www.dhaes.co.uk)), Tom gained his experience building courses at Pontispool, Bovington, Lackham College, Portman, Highclere and Brickly, where he was able to expand his knowledge of fence design and structure under Adrian's watchful eye. These courses had a mixture of existing fences that needed re-vamping and some that needed complete redesign and build. Although not primarily interested in the actual design of the course, Tom has learnt to assess the 'flow' of the course through the selection of fences that he has had to build, from the early fences that are inviting and require positive riding to the technical middle selection of fences that require bold and focussed riding.

The key factors involved in the production of the cross country fences are the size and specification, dependant on what level of eventing the course is for. Regardless of the level of competition the selection of types of wood, strength of wood and specialist joint designs are all important factors to the overall appeal of the course.

The role of fence building has become more influential following several severe accidents in 1999. BE decided to investigate the cause of these

falls and then develop a concept to minimise them if at all possible. After collecting photographic, film and documented reports of accidents over the years, BE presented their findings to a selection of companies employed to develop the new concept.

Following two years of analysis, research and testing, the relationship between rotational falls and the sequence of events leading to it was discovered and the Frangible Pin was developed.

Although not used at the lower levels of eventing, this concept has had an influence on both the design and the build of courses today. Safety for horse and rider is the top priority for all involved in eventing, and this is where the knowledge is used from course design.

Course building is not just about the construction of wooden fences. There is a key aspect of land excavation and management. Water Complexes, Ditches, Steps and Banks all need to be located at key points around the course, but quite often the natural lie of the land has a major influence on design and build. Depending on the complexity of the water jump, soil will need to be moved and a series of stages of construction have to be followed to provide a suitable grounding for the take off and landing. By it's very nature, water is difficult to work with and the fence has to be designed so that it can be used most of the season, where for example natural rivers and streams tend to swell through persistant rain and have a variable grounding.

Working with the natural design of

the land leads to a more flowing and influential course, where existing hedgelines and banks can be 'dressed' to add effect. Dresssing of the courses adds 'eye' appeal for the spectators but also has key effect on the way the course rides.

Over the years course dressing has become something of an art with many events having themed fences. Sponsors can now enhance their support by having their business theme incorporated in the fence design.

As well as fixed fences, Tom has built up a good selection of 'portables' which take the form of simple shapes such as roll tops and feeders, which can be located around the course to add variety in between the fixed fences. Local Pony and Riding Clubs can purchase these fences as part of their assets and they are easily moveable with a little man power. The bonus with these fences is that they can be moved to an artificial surface for the winter months, allowing riders to practice over them out of season.

Along with all the other pointers in course building today there is the budgetary factor. Materials need to be suitable for the job that they are purchased for but many societies work to a tight financial line and require value for money. Part of the role of course builder is to budget for materials, consumables and labour, and Tom is aware that whilst time is money, it is important to complete the job to the level of satisfaction desired.

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