

Riders invited to take on the Danes

Horse riders in Scotland are being offered the chance of a lifetime in a bid to bring back an exciting mediaeval equestrian sport to the country.

The British Horse Society is looking for riders willing to travel to Denmark to learn the art of 'tilting' – riding towards an ever-decreasing ring with a lance. Tilting at the ring has formed part of mediaeval jousting demonstrations, but it is only in Jutland that it has developed into an intensely competitive and skilful sport.

Riders aged between six and 80, on mounts varying from Norwegian fiord ponies to thoroughbreds, canter or gallop towards a ring suspended from a 'gallows', attempting to catch it with a steel-tipped lance. In the first round of the competition, the ring is 22mm in diameter. Competitors are allowed 10 runs – to move on to the next round, they must spear the ring every time.

It then becomes a straight knockout, with the ring reducing in size every round until it is a mere 5mm in diameter. The winner of this amateur sport is crowned 'king' of the contest, while the runners-up earn the title of 'crown prince' and 'prince'.

Tilting festival weekends are similar to our Common Ridings, with hundreds of horses, flags, processions and bands. The Danes are to export this unique equestrian sport across the North Sea to the Scottish Borders, with a working party of Danes and Scots looking at ways that the Scots can learn tilting and take part in the 2012 Sonderborg Ringriding Festival.

The Danish hosts will return to Scotland in 2013 with a view to staging the first tilting contest in Scotland for about 450 years at the BHS Borders Festival of the Horse.

The only cost to any rider interested would be the flight to Denmark, where they would then enjoy the hospitality of a Danish family. If you would like to find out more about this exciting opportunity, contact Borders Festival organiser Ann Fraser at abfraser@btinternet.com.

For more information about tilting in Jutland see www.ringriderfesten.dk, or to find out about tilting in the Borders and how to be a part of it, visit www.bordersfestivalhorse.org.