



Kate has the winning touch! Seen here winning at BDS Surrey 2009.

Country Park and we also achieved the qualifiers for Towerlands at this event. Overall we managed to win the show reserve champion; this is the biggest achievement to date for me and the pony!"

So you want to give it a go?

For anyone thinking of getting into grooming Kate has these words of advice, "There is not much riding involved in working with driving horses, but you do get to learn a whole new skill. Working with driving horses is different in many ways but the care, the mucking out and the cleaning is all the same. There is much more tack to clean, and always a vehicle, but the rewards are great. Standing in a ring receiving an award for the best groom is something to be proud of.

"Seeing the leather shiny and black, the brass gleaming and the vehicle spotless gives you a real buzz. Another positive is that the groom is always on show, grooms for other disciplines are never on display. We have to be in the ring, travelling on the vehicle and being judged. The turnout has to be immaculate every time. My advice for any person looking at grooming is to choose to be a driving groom.

Job satisfaction

"I have met many 'rich and famous' people over the years, including the Queen and Prince Philip, and I have showed at Windsor, HOYS, Hickstead and many other big events. The hours are long, the work is hard, but you soon forget that as the Queen is congratulating you on your turn out and how clean it is!"

Kate certainly isn't alone when it comes to enjoying her job, Douglas Callaghan works part-time for Andrew May, from Biggarsheils Farm, "I love my job, I work for really good people, it's hard work and long hours but very good fun," says Douglas, who is also a qualified veterinary nurse.

"My favourite memory from this season has to be driving through Windsor Great Park and passing the Queen who was driving her Jaguar; she pulled into an old shed to let us by! The hardest part about the job is at competitions, trying to keep four sets of four white legs clean, and keep yourself clean... the latter is the most difficult part for me!" jokes Douglas.

"My working relationship with my employers is very good, I couldn't ask for better people to work for. I really love working here. Even in winter it's great! I kind of fell into carriage driving, I was just roped in, but I love it! My advice to any aspiring grooms would be - be prepared for hard work, long hours and lots of harness cleaning, frequently in the small hours! But it's rewarding and excellent fun."

Douglas Callaghan at Windsor.



British Grooms Association (BGA)

Having an excellent working relationship is something that the BGA actively encourages, and offers support to both employer and employee to help achieve this. Founder Lucy Katan was inspired to create the world's only grooms' association following a bad experience, "I really enjoyed my job and loved being part of the British team, however unfortunately there was one particularly nasty employment situation where I was badly bullied at work. This brought to my attention that there was an obvious gap in our equestrian industry," explains Lucy.

Following years of hard work and a successful Grant Application to UnLtd (the Foundation of Social Entrepreneurs) Lucy launched the BGA in May 2007. "My life changed the day I won the grant. Suddenly I was responsible for something really important and to this day I am acutely aware that my actions with the BGA really do and will in the future make a difference to peoples' lives. I was so proud the day that I launched the association and simply have not stopped since!"

"There are literally thousands of grooms that care for our nation's horses and before I formed the BGA they had no official voice and poor recognition for the excellent work that they do," says Lucy. "It is so important that the industry begins to listen to grooms and hear their views, the BGA provides the opportunity for grooms to speak up with an educated voice."

Membership privileges

The BGA has been built on passion and belief and offers numerous membership benefits. Among many of its services the BGA offers a free legal helpline courtesy of Morrish Solicitors LLP, something which has proved invaluable for many grooms. The website is full of useful information about everything ranging from grooming tips and career choices to training and a help for parents page.

There are three membership options currently available, the Standard, Student and Premier Membership, starting at only £17.50. The Premier Membership is just £59.50 per year and is particularly relevant for those working with horses as it includes SEIB Personal Accident Cover, "This new band of membership has been created to tackle the worrying amount of grooms who work without any insurance, hence putting their livelihoods at risk. If they are self employed and get injured they will get no money at all," explains Lucy.

For more information and to join call 0845 331 6039 or visit www.britishgrooms.org.uk.