



Lying in a hammock soaking up the Argentine sunshine, I'm starting to remember why I was seduced into re creating this polo lifestyle in Sussex seven years ago! Here, surrounded by young horses grazing and grooms preparing my horses for chukkas I realise that polo is so addictive that you only remember the highs and develop amnesia about the lows. A key low is that the UK, unlike Argentina, is wet and cold for at least 150 days of the year and someone has to trudge through fields in Dubarrys and shovel endless poo to enable you and your beloved horses to share the dream when the sun decides to shine again.

But right now I'm in polo paradise just two hours outside of Buenos Aires in a small village called 25 De Mayo populated by at least two ten goalers and UK's Tomlinson family. The Lent family are taking their annual pilgrimage to the El Casal Polo Estancia, the place where our dream began. The Estancia is owned by the Raschia-Grau family and filled with ponies, dogs and kids everywhere, a real family atmosphere. Argentine laughter fills the warm air whilst our English guests get ready to play polo in an inclusive and relaxed environment that is pure fun yet still competitive. No pretence, no airs and graces just pure farm polo at its best.

This inclusive feeling is what I wanted to recreate back home, especially after briefly experiencing clubs that exude exclusivity rather than warm and inclusive. Plus I wanted to create a club where a whole family could play so not just 4 goal polo onwards but a place where I could play a lower level my husband could play with the big boys. Also harbouring a secret ambition to become of the infamous Pushy-Pony-Club-Mums (PPCM) our son got over his fear of horses and he can play in

junior matches all on the same weekend. My dream was just starting...

As we were going to be a new club we knew we had to make it easy for new players to get started and provide everything so they could just turn up and play. So with the help of my husband Duane we dug deep and set about providing a full service including rental ponies, HPA instructors, and on-site full livery with Argentine grooms. We put teams together for everyone, we even had the Patrons' bespoke team shirts made and then laundered ready for the next match.

Growing up in central London did not give me the experience required to run a polo club. I had never owned a pet and lunching at Harvey Nichols in Jimmy Choos was not a winning CV for a polo manager however, the determination it took to make a success of my previous career as a working TV & film actress for 10 years and also working within the advertising business did. Getting on the phone and finding sponsors was relatively easy and has provided a superb backdrop for our full fixture list which ranges from Novice to 4 Goal. We now have lots of big name brands who faithfully provide the much coveted trophies and that extra touch of prestige each season.

Here at Sussex Polo we prefer to combine the best of the English and Argentine ways, with the ponies grazing naturally in over 100 acres of countryside which surround the sanded and beautifully maintained pitches. Sussex Polo's ethos is all about the polo and not about the posing! It's more about where you are going and not where you've come from.

Roll the clock back to that first trip to Argentina. Now, seven years on and six-figure sums later, we have the inclusive polo club that I dreamed of: Having started with just one pitch we have now grown to four. We have over 70 playing adult members plus the old Surrey and

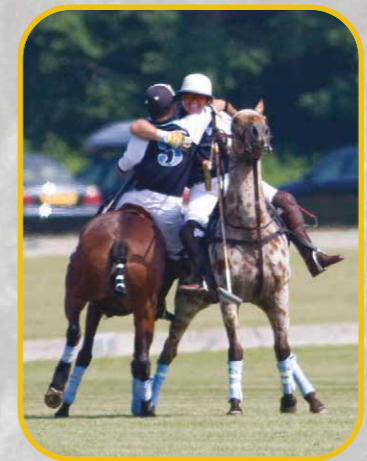
Burstow Pony Club based with us so we have lots of additional junior members. Thanks to the Pony Club and my emerging status of PPCM our son has also taken up the sport and shows a real talent (thank the Lord because his maths would indicate he will not be a rocket scientist). So much so, that his team won the Jorrocks UK junior polo championship in 2008 and Handley Cross in 2009 and led the parade at Cartier for the last two years. How great is that, and we all get to play polo together every summer!

If you are thinking of starting a polo club a few words of advice, it's not for the faint hearted.

Firstly you will need deep pockets for many reasons but one that springs to mind is pony welfare. It's vital and you can't look after ponies on a shoestring budget. You will also need a network of dedicated staff plus one that will work 24/7 spending many hours ploughing through the endless yet important mind numbing paperwork involved with work permits, public liability insurance, health and safety and employment law that they can only glance out of the window at their beloved polo ponies as they are often too busy to actually ride them. If you're looking to make

a quick buck, take up lap dancing as there is no easy money to be made in polo. Only start a polo club for the love of the sport and the ponies, you have been warned.

Well my name is being called, "Sallee! Ees time for chukkers" (I have learned to translate Spanglish) and so will now step down from my hammock and onto a pony, ready to follow my son and husband onto the polo pitch for chukkas before the asado. I cherish these moments as soon I will be too old and creaky to play polo with my family and friends but I sleep well knowing that we have enabled our son and countless others to live the dream on a budget for at least a few months each summer. That's what it's all about in the end. Living the dream when, where and while you can!



Field of Dreams

by SALLIE-ANNE LENT

