



■ BEIJING BOUND?: Dressage rider Simon Laurens.

# Laurens looking to Beijing

GLoucestershire dressage rider Simon Laurens has been shortlisted for the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing.

Laurens, 41, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, was a dedicated dressage rider before he was diagnosed in 2004, putting his future in the sport in serious doubt.

Laurens' natural reaction was to quit, his career was in tatters, he sold all of his horses and was ready to give up the sport completely.

He said: "I'm a perfectionist. If I can't do something properly, I don't want to do it.

"I never considered or thought of myself as a para dressage rider, people just egged me on.

"I went to a paralympic event at Hartpury College that really inspired me to just have a go, it

## Para dressage

was a new avenue I could explore."

In spite of his illness, Laurens has battled on, and it is a remarkable achievement for him to be shortlisted for what is the pinnacle of any paralympian's career.

Laurens' mother and grandmother have both suffered from the same disease.

He has lost strength in his right side, making balance difficult, and suffers from general fatigue, tiring quickly with frequent spasms, particularly in his legs.

It was only when a friend introduced Laurens to a horse called Ocean Dream which ignited his passion for the sport again.

After he went on to win all four of his para trials on Ocean Dream, he

decided to channel all of his energies into the sport.

He quickly went through the ranks, competing in his first international in Germany in 2006, finishing second in his first test and third in freestyle.

Last year he scooped two gold medals in the World Championships at Hartpury College.

Later in the year retained his title of national champion in the grade three Para class.

"My progression, seeing as I have only been competing competitively for three years, is extremely rapid," he said.

"I am very lucky to have done so well. At least I can take something so positive out of my illness.

"I am thrilled to bits to have been shortlisted for the Paralympics."