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# Dragon Racer: First Flight

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[Jana Novotny Hunter](#) [4]

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BfK Rating:

5

Move over Pony Club, make way for dragons - here comes a group of animal lovers who have more speed, passion and flying power than any earth-borne creature could dream of. And it's the flying that is the key, for as creatures routed to the earth by gravitational pull, the mystery of flying has long captivated human imagination. This series of books works on that innate desire to conquer the skies. The fact that such mastery is done with dragons makes it all the more fantastical, and when there is the element of alchemy thrown in, it becomes rooted in medieval wizardry.

[Margaret Bateson-Hill](#) [5] has created a private world where a wonderful secret, known only by a select audience, is contained and guarded from the public, for it's a world you can enter by invitation only. As in Harry Potter, the fantasy is running concurrently with our more prosaic world, in this case, under our very feet where underground caves hold the dragons and their breeders. The big secret is not just the existence of dragons but *Dragon Racing*, a sport officiated by the World Dragon Racing Federation (WDRF). However, as all encompassing as that sounds, only special TV channels can access the sport and only the chosen ones know of it, gathering in huge feverish events to cheer on their favourites, much like the fervor displayed at Ascot. But this is not elitist in any way, for the commonplace thread of an average family, where an ordinary girl, not especially beautiful, not overly clever, is chosen when she accidentally spies a newly-hatched dragon skimming up the wall of Brixton Town Hall, whispers to readers that this magic could happen to them. Here, it is not the heroine but the dragon who chooses his rider and this dragon, Excelsior, has decided on Joanna. It is a rare honour, but dragons must be obeyed, and Joanna is thrilled to accept. Kids can relate to JoJo for the usual family issues of sibling rivalry and not being heard beset her, though what is so compelling is that through racing dragons this ordinary girl becomes respected, successful and important. (A valuable lesson for all those who want to achieve excellence in a chosen field.)

Dragons are wild and formidable representing a great challenge to a trainer, but JoJo takes on the job with courage. Any kid used to being small and powerless in a world of bossy adults loves to have a pet they can train and be responsible for, and when that pet is a dragon the power is immense. This dragon is naughty, playful, funny and energetic, testing his boundaries like any recalcitrant puppy, so it is JoJo who must take control. That is a satisfying idea to any young reader.

This is a series that can be equally enjoyed by boys and girls. Racing and speed are sure winners in the adventure stakes and there is nothing soppy or saccharine in these stories with strong characters, both male and female.

Added to this, it is not easy to combine an exciting adventure story with an otherworldly atmosphere yet [Bateson-Hill](#) [6] manages it. She uses the idea of telepathy, or 'mind blending' to communicate with the dragons weaving a kind of transcendent concept in a concrete world. The passive quality of 'mind blending' thus becomes gently calming, set as it is against the taut angst of competitive racing and creates texture to the story. Indeed, there is an almost spiritual calling from the beginning in the way the dragon gets into Joanna's mind and alerts her to her destiny. And since even the training of the dragon takes place with mind blending, the whole process becomes mystic. Alongside this the fast paced adventure where good and evil fight a battle over ownership of the caves give the story drive and make the books exciting. A winner!

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