



Offa's Dyke Group
Of Endurance GB
Newsletter – July 2011
www.offasdykeegb.co.uk



Chairman's Comment

I hope those of you with injuries to you or the horses are soon recovered, seems to happen about this time of year.

Rides:

Blaenavon 10th Anniversary ride thanks to Belinda Stewart for running it and booking some beautiful weather. We could see the people who missed the last turn home this year and phoned them to turn around, how about that for efficiency!

Ludlow was tough as always and I had last ridden that route on Harriet when doing a 100 miles and it brought back some wonderful memories. I will never know how Dick and Judy Taylor managed to find all the tracks, thanks for all the weekends they spent planning the route and work over the week of the ride.

Help plan groups future at Open meeting - email now or come along:

Thursday 24th August we are having an open meeting to review and discuss what the group can offer for members, but we do need some input from you. Either drop us an email via Website detailing your suggestion or come along and put your ideas to committee. We have invited Pam James the EGB coach to come and give some suggestions of how we can help you with competing and horse care. See directions to Venue on p4

Inter regional team still chance to propose yourself for the team or come and gain crewing experience by helping the team members. Contact Chris Wray to volunteer.

Forthcoming events:

Cranham 21st August with route alterations from last year

Tintern 11th September

Plump Hill social ride 18th September to finish the season

I am back in the saddle but don't ask me to get on and off and hopefully I will have seen some of you at Cirencester.

Gina

Editor's Comment

Now into August and I still have not done a ride but maybe someday soon! I did go and help at the Vet Gate at Ludlow. It was not too hectic as the entries in the longer classes were low and it was a huge relief to me that I was not organising it this year. Dick and Judy had put in a huge amount of work researching a new route to avoid crossing the A49 where traffic every year goes faster. I hope they were not too put off by adverse criticism and will be willing to run it again next year.

Offa's Dyke riders were well represented at Golden Horseshoe with representatives doing well in classes across the board, reports and photographs in this newsletter.

Our members also did well at Mont le Soie which just came in time for stop press in the last newsletter and a full report from Andrea Champ in this.

The next ride is Cranham where we have improved the route in the hope that riders will be able to achieve better speeds than last year. (See our website for full details & map etc) I am still rather short of helpers. Last year we were able to man a few gates and even 2 watering points which the riders very much appreciated, so if you are not planning to enter Cranham how about offering to help, even for half a day? Remember each time you help you have another ticket entered in the draw for a voucher at the AGM. Also some of our Annual trophies can only be won by someone who has helped at least at one Offa's Dyke ride

The World Endurance Championships are to be held in the UK (Euston Park) in 2012. Delwyn Hall suggested some of our members might be interested to go along and watch as a group and support the UK team. Opportunities to help the Organisation are likely to be limited but if you are interested please contact Delwyn.

Note: entries for Cranham are very low. If you want this ride to go ahead please enter immediately (closing date 8 August)

Dates for your diary

Open meeting	Wed 24 August 7.30pm
Cranham – National Ride	Sun 21 August
Tintern – National Ride	Sun 11 September
Plump Hill – social ride	Sun 18 September
Annual Group Meeting	Sat 10 December (note change of date)
Schooling lessons	Late October – March dates TBA

[More information on the website 'rides & events' page](#)

Open Meeting Wednesday 24 August 7.30pm

This is an opportunity for any Member or Associate Member of Offa's Dyke Group to attend an open meeting of the committee and let us know what you'd like us to do as a group.

Pam James has kindly agreed to come along & explain her role as EGB coach and what she can offer the group in the way of training opportunities.

We find in our normal quarterly committee meetings that we are so busy with day to day business of organizing rides etc that we don't have chance to look at the 'bigger picture', so we thought an extra meeting open to all members would give us a chance to talk about any topic including training etc.

Directions: *Whitchurch is between Ross on Wye and Monmouth on the A40.*

From Ross on Wye take the turning off the A40 to Whitchurch and Symonds Yat West. Follow the signs to Whitchurch and when you have crossed the bridge over the dual carriageway take the first left. A few yards on turn left again and the hall is on the right.

From Monmouth take the first exit off the A40 after the service station. The hall is a few yards along on the left.

Parking is limited in the hall car park but there is plenty of parking along the side of the road.

Cranham 2011 - Improvements to the Route

We have worked hard on this year's route to make the times much more achievable. We have kept the best bits, taken out more stony sections & ridden others in a different direction, which we think will make them ride better.

The 40km route now has no repeat sections. Only the 50km route repeats the top red loop, but this gives the advantage that they no longer have to return to the venue part way round. The 64km class does the 40km route followed by a short 24km route, which we think will ride well.

The Non Competitive Ride (NCR) now has a choice of 30km or 24km - you can choose which on the day.

Class distances are now different to those in printed schedule -see our website for details and copy of map

ENTER NOW TO AVOID CANCELLATION OF THIS RIDE – CLOSING DATE 8 AUGUST!

Abbi Tennant competing in South Africa

Abbi Tennant who was our previous Junior Representative has been out in South Africa working with Endurance horses where she took part in the *Lightweight* category, honorary Eastern Caper, coming 10th on **PSV Liberty!** Abbi, who has competed for Great Britain's endurance team at international events in Germany and Spain, is on a 3 month working riding holiday at the Perseverance stud in Graaff-Reinet. This was also the first Fauresmith for Abbi and “pocket rocket” Liberty

STOP PRESS: Delwyn(Abbi's grandmother) told me tonight that Abbi has just won her first FEI 2 star and also Best Condition on Albertinia. Another girl from the same yard won the FEI 1 star

These horses are all competed barefoot and we hope this coming winter that Abbi will come and talk at a group meeting perhaps paired with an expert on barefoot trimming Chador the mare that Abbi used to ride has recently had a colt foal to Chatanz which hopefully will be a successful Endurance horse in future

Read Abbi's blog of her experiences in South Africa <http://atennant-endurancerider.weebly.com/abbis-blog.html>

PLUMP HILL SOCIAL RIDE

Shapridge Farm, Flaxley, Forest of Dean

Sun 18th Sept

A ride covering slightly undulating soft Forestry tracks in the northern Forest of Dean, with one big hill. Good views of the river Severn. Start and finish across open fields. Unlimited Parking

Choice of circa 10kms or 26k routes. Minimal roadwork.

Entry fee £10 EGB members & AMs, £18 non members.

Cheques payable to Offa's Dyke Group of EGB. Social ride entry form

Entries to: Sharon Parr, The Granary, Silverstone Farm, Drybrook, Gloucestershire, GL17 9BP. Email: silverstonefarm1@tiscali.co.uk

Tel: 01594 544559

Please enter early!!

PLEASE READ YOUR RIDE TALK THROUGH

Margaret McKiddie

I was once told by a rider who got lost on the Cranham Ride, between passing the Scout camp on the right and turning left up to the Black Horse Pub—two easily recognised landmarks- 'I do not expect to have to read the talk through' I accept that it should be possible to follow the route by the markers alone and I personally would only be reading the talk through if I was lost, BUT markers do get moved or it may be a difficult part of the route to access to mark. I do however always read the talk through and look at the map before the ride day.

I may be influenced by the first ride I ever did, the BERA Clent hills ride. In the talk through it said 'at the roundabout take the third exit' It probably made a big impact because the very thought of riding round a roundabout was very scary!

On the ride day I duly came to said roundabout, remembered what I had read, went round the roundabout and sure enough on the third exit there was a big white arrow.

Writing a talk through does take quite some time. This year we have changed the direction of part of the Cranham route and although in theory it should be possible to visualise the route backwards I felt obliged to ride it again, armed with paper and pen (Have you ever tried to write while sitting on a moving horse and holding the reins!)

I was extremely grateful to Dick and Judy for taking over Ludlow this year. The police were very against us continuing to cross the A49 and they spent a huge amount of time and energy WALKING a new route. There were a few problems with it. As Judy said as they were only able to walk a few miles at a time they underestimated the number of gates. There was also an area that the National Trust were willing to give access to riders and walkers but not vehicles even to mark it so Dick had to do a lot on foot. There was one long straight stretch between two gates. To avoid a very long walk he stated clearly in the talk through 'there are no markers on this section, go through the gate and follow straight track to next gate'. Despite this a number of riders got lost because 'they went through the gate and there were no markers!' THEY obviously had NOT read the talk through.

People put in a lot of time and energy running rides and it is up to the riders to do their share!

Mont - le Soie 2011

Andrea Champ

The euphoria of Luxor and I being selected to go to Belgium was quickly overtaken by the anxiety of how I was going to be sure that my horse was fit enough to go from a flat 80k to a hilly 120k five weeks later. Also there was the small detail of preparing for such a trip, when only days earlier I wouldn't have dared think that we might be fortunate enough to go. I had had very loyal crew of Chris Wray and Georgina Bull for the last 2 rides and suddenly they too needed to make big adjustments to their calendars. Georgina wasn't able to take the time away from her own business so the search was on to find replacement crew. I was lucky to be able to enlist the help of Sarah Turner who is from our local competition livery yard and her complete lack of knowledge or experience of endurance riding didn't worry me in the least, such is her professionalism and her ability to pick things up fast. She also knows Luxor, which for me is very important as, lovely as he is, he is not without his quirks!

The squad management had provided written guidance as to training, involvement of physios and farriers etc leading up to our departure, with the training emphasis to be on hill work, but not to overdo things as the temptation might be with so little time in hand. Luxor and I increased our interval training somewhat, by using a useful long pull on some local common land and also worked in the local arena 2 days a week. Otherwise it was long rides with lots of walking.

The departure day came round astonishingly quickly. My husband and son were to join me later at Dover, whilst Sarah and I took Luxor down to the Dover lairage and met Chris there. Fortunately, my horse travels well, so all was fine when we arrived. We had the chance to meet the other squad members once again, which was lovely, but it wasn't until Luxor went into the lorry that was to take the majority of the horses over, that I suddenly felt very excited. What an amazing thing to be doing, travelling and competing abroad on your own horse and best of all, as part of a team.

Again, all went smoothly, with my son Freddy thoroughly enjoying his first experience of a ferry ride on P&O and the horses were reported to be settled. Then followed the long journey down to the Ardennes around 250 miles south of Calais. The squad management texted at lunchtime to let us know that all was well but it was with great relief that we greeted the lorry at the final destination of Mont le Soie. The horses were grazed in hand and then settled into a lovely, spacious American style barn, where us Brits had the top end to ourselves. Further down, horses from France, Norway and Sweden arrived over the next day or so, including those of Jacques Begoud, so we were in illustrious company!

We arrived on the Wednesday but the ride wasn't until Sunday, so plenty of time to settle in. The horses had their health checks done by riders and crew both morning and evening, including the taking of temperatures, pulse recordings, monitoring hay and water intake etc. All horses seemed well and happy. We were then sent off in groups to ride in the Ardennes forest on Thursday and Friday, both of which were beautiful days. On the second day Fiona Griffiths and I went out together and had a great ride, not even minding getting rather lost, although we did alarm our respective crews a little by turning an hour and a quarter's exercise into over two hours!

I had never coralled Luxor before and this proved testing to us both, he because he didn't like it when the wind blew the tape and so started running up and down the fenceline and me, because far from the coralling experience being a relaxing one, I was permanently anxious that he was going to do himself harm or upset all the other horses and start a stampede. Eventually we had to take him out and he spent the rest of the week being hand grazed, often by my long suffering crew.

Saturday arrived, the day of the vetting. We were asked that our horses be beautifully turned out and so everyone went to work, bathing and plaiting. During the week, we had had practice trot ups and Luxor's behavior with all the hours of stabling had been showing signs of declining. He thought it was great fun to run as fast as possible back to the disapproving squad management, often not in a straight line and Sarah ended up lunging him in the indoor school so that we might be able to get a more sensible trot up when our turn came for the vetting. In the event, we needn't have worried - Luxor trotted up like a pro and actually looked rather bored with the whole thing and we were through to the ride. The idea was to ride in pairs. I was having difficulty thinking beyond the start, which was in a field going down hill with quite a sharp turn

onto narrow forestry tracks, but provided we managed that okay, Fiona and I were to try to find each other and ride together.

The day dawned beautifully - how lucky we were with the weather. Luxor and I warmed up with everyone in the outdoor school and then at the last minute, we made our way to the start. I am inexperienced at mass starts, but think it's not a good idea to hang back as Luxor will probably go mad, so I aim to be in the middle, with a big red ribbon warning others to keep away. Luxor, true to form, showed his heels for much of the first half hour of the ride and was very strong. I had problems with him bunching up behind the bit and refusing to go forward, and yet I feared that if I let him go we would cause carnage, so I hung on and within half an hour had sores on the inside of my knees because of gripping (in my new endurance tights!) to stay on!

Fiona and I eventually found each other and for much of the first loop we rode near each other. He vetted fast at the first vet gate and my astonishment, we were the first Brit out, but only briefly as Sue and Louise Rich, Clare Bruce and Sue Higgins soon caught up with us. Then I heard that Fiona's horse, Dear Kate, was out, which I was very sorry to know. All was going well, until during a long canter I felt Luxor hesitate. We were behind the Riches and Clare but I thought that I must slow my horse's pace down as we were going too fast on our first 120k and the sort of training that I had done did not justify this speed. Normally Luxor is okay with this, but whether the whole Belgium experience, with stable confinement that he was not used to, had got to him, I don't know. I slowed him up and as the other riders disappeared into the distance he got more and more stressed, until 10 minutes on I had a horse that simply was not listening and was in high anxiety. At this point there was a main road ahead of us and a minor crew point with one Frenchman waiting for his rider. I thought we were in a dangerous situation and so jumped off and tried to calm my horse and the French crew joined in to help too as did another when they arrived. It actually took the three of us to hold Luxor such was his state and I was mortified that he was under such stress. We were very lucky in that another rider riding in a CR class came by and we were able to ride with her until the situation was more manageable. Despite this, we vetted successfully at vet gate 2 and went off again on the third loop, with no unpleasant incidents.

When we came into vet gate 3, Luxor's pulse was a little high, although still a pass, but when we came to the compulsory represent, it was still stubbornly at 64. I was alarmed and anxious. Luxor had refused to pee all day, but nothing I did would tempt him to relieve himself. We were given a warning by our own excellent squad vet, Annamaria Nagy and the official vet, to take things cautiously. Off we went again, alone. This time, I knew I had lots of time in hand. It was about 3.45 and Chris told me as long as I was back from doing the last 20k by 7.30pm, we were okay! The sun was now lower and casting beautiful dappled light through the trees. Luxor and I quietly hacked along in the peaceful countryside and after the stress of the start and the ghastliness of the

second loop, this was heaven. I joined up with a very nice Belgium girl for the last few miles and we chivvied each others horses along in broken English and French, and then, we were back at the venue. I can't tell you how good that felt!



Now we just had to get through that last vetting. Luxor still hadn't staled. We patiently took turns to walk him round, plant him where another horse had obliged, but he was having none of it. Finally, we gave up and took him to the vet. He passed with a pulse of 56 and a beautiful trot up and I was bursting with pride and some awe for my lovely horse.

We couldn't have managed half of what we did, without our fabulous crew with their cheerful faces at crew points and vet gates and their calm ways of deflecting my fussing and bossiness. We also benefited hugely from the team vet, osteopath (who set me right from a sore back) and farrier, not to mention the uplifting pep talk we had from our Chef d'Equipe, Andrea Baker, before the ride. Accommodation was perfect, in a small hotel with hearty food and plenty of chance to get to know other riders and crew. The venue was both picturesque and professionally managed as one would expect. It was all in all, a fantastic experience.

And now? Well I took Luxor to Euston Park 2 weeks ago and he was spun at the first vet gate and we still don't really know what the problem is. Since then, I have been in a state of high anxiety. Endurance really is a great leveler!

Stop Press! *We see from the Cirencester results that Andrea & Luxor were 2nd in the 120km FEI ER. Fantastic news Andrea. Glad you are both back on form!!*

Offa's Dyke riders at this year's Golden Horseshoe awards evening.



Pictured from top left Rob & Gill Talbot, Belinda Stewart, Piers Geddes, Sue Loveridge, Chris Wray & mum, Karen Jones and Sue Rich.

We had riders competing in every single class at this year's event from pleasure ride up to 160k and trophy winners in 3 of them. See reports below from Gill Talbot, Piers Geddes, Chris Wray & Gina

Golden Horseshoe 160km 'A Dream Come True

Gill Talbot

Over the years I have been lucky enough to compete in this ride on many occasions, mainly in the 80 and 120km classes, with one completion and a Bronze Award in the 160km class back in 1994 with my first endurance horse, Warrens Hill Rustam. I well remember sitting at the prize giving watching Gill Smedley collect the coveted Premier Award, presented to the horse the vets voted as the one most capable of travelling a further 40km's, and thinking, one day I want to win that.

Malabar Storm (Danny) has been to Exford to compete at Golden Horseshoe just twice before, once in 2008 when he won my long awaited Gold Award in the 160km class, something I was especially pleased about, but I still felt disappointment when the Premier Award passed us by. Our second venture, again in the 160km class, was in 2010, and everything was going to plan to secure our 2nd Gold Award until disaster

struck just before the halfway on day two, when a pot-hole in a short piece of tarmac brought Danny to his knees - lots of blood but little damage luckily - but the end of our ride.

2011 saw us back in Exford and starting once again in the 160km class with more than a little trepidation after a small fire on the moor. Sirens and flashing lights upset Danny and when we returned from the Sunday evening briefing we were greeted by a horse dripping in sweat galloping repeatedly up and down his paddock fence line. The next 5 hours were spent trying to get Dan to calm down, drink and eat (he was resembling a whippet – not good the night before embarking on a tough 80km ride..... followed by a second...) Every hour, on the hour I went out to the stable and hand fed him a large bowl of sloppy Alfalfa Hi-Fi, mixed in with Allen & Page Calm & Condition, Alfa A with oil and Cherry Show Shine chaff. Just after midnight he agreed to eat the food from his bowl from the stable floor, so he was left over night with a large sloppy feed, a bucket of sugarbeet juice and plenty of fresh water..... along with soaked hay and haylage. At 5am the next morning, Dan was again fed the same sloppy mixture, this time with added electrolytes. He looked much better than the previous evening, but still a bit too tucked up for my liking, but I decided we would ride to halfway and see what he felt like then.

Day one was extremely windy. It was dry and quite bright, but the wind was strong and tiring for the horses, it made the gates extremely difficult to open and close, making riders feel disorientated with the constant buffeting. Unusually Dan was thirsty within the first 10 miles of the ride and searched out Rob at the crew spots keen to take on fluids and pulled hungrily at grass at the gates. I was concerned, but he felt full of energy. A crew car nearly caused havoc at a cattle grid when it failed to slow down

and hit the grid at speed making a dreadful noise that nearly had me on the floor (quick change of mind about dismounting at speed in mid-air!) but unfortunately he did unseat Alison House! Luckily no one hurt just dented pride. We arrived at Honeymead, the halfway, in Gold time. Dan was hungry and thirsty so we let him drink and eat for a few minutes before taking him to vet. 'B' for gut sounds, but otherwise he vetted well with an excellent recovery and back at the crew car he ate every scrap of food we put in front of him, plus anything he could steal from out the back of the Car....



!Dan Leaving the Halfway venue at Honeymead Day one(photo Liz Hining)

Leaving the halfway Dan gave several impressive bucks and squeals..... I think the intense feeding overnight was starting to have an effect The homeward route on day 1 was not without incident when Alison House once again suffered a fall from Briar Rose, both horse and rider completing spectacular somersaults several times out on the moor after stumbling in heather. I had visions of air ambulances...but both were soon on their feet and appeared fine. As we trotted into Exford Dan decided he was definitely on a mission, he knew exactly where he was and exactly where he had to go to get another meal..... he ploughed up the steep bridleway back to the venue field, head straight down into the lush grass as soon as I dismounted. 'A' for gut sounds at the vetting and we complete the first day at 13.2kph with a pulse of 48 to give us Gold time. Dan is full of himself as we walk him back to Withypool, dragging Rob off his feet back to his paddock and the lush grass waiting for him there. Unlike last night, he's settled in his paddock tonight, so we leave him out, feed him several sloppy meals during the evening and encourage him to drink by leaving several differing varieties of fluid for him to choose from.

Day 2 starts again at 5am with a large sloppy feed for Dan. He's looking better than he did on day 1, not so tucked up and he's absolutely full of himself, insisting on marching at top speed back to the venue field for the start of Day 2. He trots up for the vets and we are soon cantering away across the venue field bucking and grunting happily as he goes. We catch up with Sir Stephen Whaley-Cohen who is pleased (he says), to be riding with another 'grown up' horse and is surprised when I tell him Dan is only 15'2". Sir Stephen's huge hunter makes very light work of the moorland and I cannot help but be impressed as he canters effortlessly down a steep gradient, never altering his stride or rhythm. (Sir Stephen is riding the 2 day 160km on 4 different horses for charity and is the owner of Honeymead, our halfway venue).

We are joined today by some new blood, riders competing in the one day 80km class, and Dan is soon happily cantering across the moorland upside Piers Geddes and Karen Jones, keen to show both he is just as keen as their fresh mounts. The wind is kinder today and we have a steady, gentle drizzle which is making some of the dry grass sections a bit slick. I ride again with Alison House into the halfway and just before we drop down into Honeymead Alison again tries to kill herself when, at full stretch at canter, her right hand rein breaks!! Luckily my crew Rob is at the next gateway and ties a secure knot in them – and Dan decides to spook at some scary heather and unceremoniously dumps me over his left shoulder as he executes a dramatic canter/stop/right turn!

Dan is put quickly through the vet as we have to present again within 10 minutes of our departure time and I want to give him the maximum eating /rest time I can. As we depart Honeymead for the last time I feel I have a very strong horse under me who knows he is now on the homeward stretch. We ride briefly with Alison and Briar, but out on the common Dan is flying and when I stop to open a gate, I realise we are alone with no one in sight. Dan canters away from the gate. He is now on his way home and

nothing will convince him we can actually slow down. No, his rhythm is set and we arrive back at the venue with an identical time to day one, 13.2kph.

The venue field is tricky today, the wind is cool and the sun deceptive. It is much warmer in the crewing area than in the vetting area and the vet we get allocated does not have the best 'bed-side' manner and, as many of you know, it is never a good sign at a vetting to have Dan put his ears back as the vet 'man-handles' him into his favourite spot in the vetting area! Luckily we don't get into an argument, yes Dan is feisty but remains amicable (phew!) and the final pulse is taken – and it's a Gold award!

At the prize giving I sit anxiously awaiting the presentations for the Golden Horseshoe class, I know Alison House has also completed in Gold time, I know her horse has good recovery rates and I know she trotted up well for the vets. I could burst with the tension of waiting, I so want that Premier Award!

The presentations start, Dan and I are presented with the Laybrook Challenge Trophy for the best Pure Bred Arab, The Hilton Herbs Veteran Horse Award, The Top Woman Rider, The Arab Horse Society Summer Sheet (presented to the Pure Arab with the best recovery rates throughout the competition) and then the final announcement is made...."and the Premier Award goes to... Gill Talbot and Malabar Storm"..... I could happily have cried! We did it! I punch the air, big sigh of relief - at last!! A dream come true.



2011 Golden Horseshoe Exmoor Experience (2 x 40km) class By Chris Wray

Up until this year, I have always chosen the rides to enter with an annual target (trophy!) in mind, so the GHS has never figured in my plans, though I have always considered that was “one for the future” when it would fit in with my plans.

In 2010, I started riding Zawadi again following a break since Ludlow 2006 – mid way through her Open Class season – when she became lame. On investigation it was found she has a slight malformation of one of her lower pastern bones which causes her to land on one corner of the affected hoof and thus generate splints. I decided to give her some time off, and have another foal, and then restart her endurance career – but limited to 40km and never more than 14kph. In last month’s newsletter, you read about the foal she had – Peponi – and doing the BEF Futurity with her.

We did a few CRs last year – she was definitely very pleased to be back, as keen and competitive as ever – the highlight being her giving me a most fantastic ride on the Red Dragon Friday – 42km of extended trot up over the mountains while it was too wet for the Ryder Cup down in Newport!

So competing Zawadi is just for fun now – she is 18yo after all, with no annual targets and no pressure – so this seemed a good opportunity to try out the GHS. Zawadi’s early training this year went well – Maryland (thank you Dessie for riding her!) and a good stretch round the Wentwood Forest route (thank you Kathy for riding her) – both in company with Takwenya who I was riding. Unfortunately Zawadi lost quite a bit of condition in March, so she went onto “light duties” – just ticking over – until I judged her good enough to test her fitness over the Saturday Bluebell NCR (of course I was on Ride Organiser duties on the Sunday). I was pleased with the result so apart from a few days off while I was crewing Andrea at Mont Le Soie, she did some good hill work, and I rounded off her training on my return from Belgium. I also did a lot of preparation on the computer, checking the route by aerial photos, and building up an elevation profile of the route. I planned crew points (my mum had agreed to crew me) as far as possible close to the top of the climbs, and identified the big uphill pulls where I would dismount, and the less demanding ones where I would stay mounted but do at walk.

So off we went to Exmoor! Camping with 4 dogs, and Zawadi in corral. We stayed at Halse Farm near Winsford which was adequate, convenient, and very good value! When we arrived, we dropped the front ramp for Zawadi to look around and went to the venue in mother’s car to register. Afterwards we put up the corral, and then went to the pre-ride vetting. All was well, and of course nice to see friends! We then recce’d the crew points for the following day with a midway stop at the venue for the briefing

Monday dawned clear but very windy – it soon clouded over but it was dry all day. The ground showed little sign of the recent rain – but was not too hard, the moorland stretches which I imagine are usually rather soft were quite rutted. We started about halfway down the Exmoor Experience class – all my close friends were either at the front or at the back, so I didn’t expect to ride with others for most of the time – and Zawadi is fine with or without company. She was very keen all day – she doesn’t really pull, but shook her head in frustration for quite a lot of the time due to me refusing to let her canter. We spent the whole day overtaking other horses, only 2 of which passed us back towards the end.

The first section to CP1 was all moorland aside from the short road section just after the start, and Zawadi got into her swinging trot and warmed up nicely. Mother crewed us in 2 places, but it was too early to drink so we just sloshed. There were some lovely grass fields after CP1 where we picked up time for later with a steady canter, then the long, long descent to Marsh Bridge which we did at steady trot (where possible) and walk.

The section from Marsh Bridge to CP2 was very technical – alongside the River Exe, with very short trots interspersed with clambering over stony bits. Absolutely beautiful tranquil scenery, but too much concentration needed to enjoy it! There was a sharp little climb out of the river valley, then a nice field to stretch legs in canter before the road through Hawkridge and to CP2 and the next crewing opportunity. I was well satisfied with the speed, after CP1 we had picked up about 5 minutes in hand on the Gold target 12kph average, and what we lost along the river we picked up again once we were back on top.

We then had some fields and a road section before another crew spot, Zawadi was drinking well by now, before we were onto moorland for most of the rest of the day. Zawadi took off over the moorland at a fast extended trot with me trying desperately to stay balanced. It was pretty uneven and we had a few lurches and some forging over the next couple of miles. Mother crewed us again at the peak of the moor, then we had the steady descent to Landacre Bridge and CP3 crewpoint which Zawadi did at full extended trot, getting us to 12 minutes in-hand. At CP3 my mother said she really couldn't remember where to go next – she'd been very worried for days about finding the crew points and had got rather lost with several other cars looking for CP2 earlier. Fortunately Carolyn & Rob were there taking photos of us and volunteered to solve that problem so I could press on.

Just out of CP3 I overtook someone who asked if I knew that Zawadi was missing a shoe! Of course I didn't as we'd been on soft going for miles, so it was just as well I was told! It must have been pulled off by an over-reach on the moorland several miles before. Of course this was just about the worst place to be missing a shoe – from there to the next crew point was stony plus a road section. Zawadi really didn't want to slow down, but I insisted, and spent a couple of miles trying to put her on soft edges and not to end up with her footsore or bruised. We lost a bit of time, but not much as she trotted every time her feet touched grass. I was so relieved at about a third of the way back from CP3 to the venue to see not just mother waiting to crew but Carolyn and Rob as well – and as soon as I said what the problem was and where the hoof boots were in the van, they hared off with the plan to meet at Comers Gate (which was about two thirds from CP3 back to the venue).

Fortunately I still had adequate time in hand so we pressed on as before, but it got even more stony which slowed us down until a couple of fields where we could canter before crossing the Exe on the edge of Withypool. The river crossing was the third of the day, and Zawadi knew she was nearly home so she walked the deep bit, trotted up the bank and her second stride off the bank was straight into canter. There were some lovely easy fields which I let her canter, then the biggest and steepest hill of the day out of the Exe valley up onto the moor. As planned I dismounted and we walked up, then remounted and a couple of lovely flat fast fields to Comers Gate where we shot past some other competitors before walking through the gate to the crewing area.

I jumped off while Rob held, Carolyn sloshed and mother gave a drink to Zawadi, and was most relieved to see no damage to the hoof – slapped on the hoof boot and did up all the Velcro and buckles – on again and immediately caught up those we'd just overtaken! Still got about 10 minutes in hand! So we trotted up the road section to familiarise her with the hoof boot (she'd never worn one before and I'd decided to vet in it), then I made her walk the last section of moorland and the last field. She was absolutely incensed at being made to walk – threw her head around, and did all but throw herself to the ground in frustration, but she settled down gradually and was starting to relax up the final field to the finish. We crossed the line at 3:18 elapsed – 7 minutes in hand. I dismounted and as I walked her down to the crewing area, a lady came up and told me that she'd been very impressed how I'd ridden the moor, and how I'd regulated my speed to the conditions – well, nobody has ever said anything like that about my riding before – so I thanked her very much and went to try and pass the vetting!

Zawadi has never been much at getting decent grades (she's never learned to switch off), but I thought sub-56 shouldn't be too difficult. She barged us around for the first 10 minutes – pushing mother into the beet water – generally being very silly with all the adrenalin; but then started to settle by which time she was cool enough and had her rug on, and we just let her graze while the excitement and adrenalin slowly faded away. Her pulse started coming down from the 60s, we stopped her grazing and she was by then relaxed enough to accept that. When her pulse hit 50 we lined up and presented with a few minutes in hand, and she went through vetting with straight As and a pulse of 48. Back to the farrier to remove the boot and put a new shoe on! He said there was minimal damage to the hoof, the boot hadn't rubbed, and so we lived to fight another day.

Tuesday dawned a bit less windy, but overcast with rain threatening. It did start drizzling during the morning and stayed that way most of the day – perfect Endurance weather! I didn't know how much energy or determination would have been left over from the previous day as I'd only competed her once before on consecutive days – 2 x 40km at Berkshire Downs 2006. I needn't have worried, she was well up for it. The route was the reverse of the previous day, and we'd recce'd some slightly different crew points on the previous evening – to fit in with the up hills in the reverse direction.

The first target was to pass the trot-up, which we'd prepared for by walking her in-hand round the campsite for some time earlier in the morning, and then doing so again when we got to the venue. I'd also done some of the stretching exercises we were taught on the Development Squad. She appeared to be walking evenly, and stretching her back legs forward well. And we passed the trot-up, and went to tack up. From the Restart, we walked out of the venue field, then trotted the first bit of moor, then the road section, and we turned into the field we'd cantered in the afternoon before. She knew then exactly what we were doing, so we broke into canter before walking the steep downhill. Cantered the fields along the Exe, across the river and a couple more fields and onto the stony moor section where I'd had heart in mouth the previous afternoon. And I was absolutely horrified I'd taken her over that ground with a shoe missing! It was really stony and rough – I'm sure we went no quicker than on the day before! Eventually we got to CP3 crewpoint, only a couple of minutes up on time, then I asked her to walk up the next section of moorland that she'd

really shot down the day before. We trotted when it levelled off a bit, but it sure was rutted, and we crewed at the top of the rise.

The next section was the long fairly level moorland stretch where we must have lost the shoe the day before, but Zawadi just shot across the moor at a very fast extended trot, leaving behind 2 horses that were trying to canter – mother registered considerable surprise to see us so soon at the crew point where we came off the moor, then onto some roads and fields to CP2. We walked up the hill just before CP2, crewed there, then pressed on through Hawkridge at a trot and canter on the field before the descent down to the Exe. Zawadi dropped off the canter some yards before the gate, so I knew I had to start being more cautious with her energy. We were about 5 minutes up on time – there had been more hills to walk up than the previous day – but we were seeing few horses, and none from CP2 to just before CP1. Also, there were no crewing possibilities from CP2 to CP1.

I dismounted and walked her down the sharp hill down to the very technical section following along the Exe, and she took that much as the day before but with a little less eagerness and a bit more tripping. We were still about 5 minutes up on schedule at Marsh Bridge, and I had known all along that the next mile would determine what our ride result would be. The climb up from Marsh Bridge was a steep gully that went on for nearly a mile, with a height gain of 650 feet. So I dismounted and walked up the steepest part, then remounted and let Zawadi walk until we were nearly on level ground. At the top we'd burned off all the time we had in hand, so I asked her to trot – which she did until we had another slope to go up where she dropped back to walk. At this point I knew I was behind time and I was carefully considering whether to push her on, or settle for Silver speed. I knew we had 20 minutes in hand for Silver speed, but we did still have about 12km to push to the finish if we wanted to try for Gold speed. She could really have done with a slosh!

Well, while I was deliberating and checking time in-hand for Silver, Zawadi jumped and 4 horses shot round the corner behind us, and I needed to deliberate no more. I was back again hanging on for dear life as Zawadi was determined not to let them get in front and away. After cantering a couple of fields there was a gate onto the moor, and they said to me "go on" while they were securing the gate. Having left the 4 horses behind, we didn't see any horses again until the venue, Zawadi just went into a steady trot for the short remaining distance to crewing at CP1, where we were back to our time schedule, and then we pressed on over the undulating moorland to the final crew point. We were back at 5 minutes up on time there, and then I just kept her in a steady trot, carefully picking her route along the moorland tracks. I knew she was tired, but she's always had huge determination to get back to the venue without anyone overtaking! So we just trotted on hoping there were no disasters, which weren't that unlikely as her balance was suffering with her tiredness.

However we made it all the way back at trot without problems, and I asked her to walk the last 2 fields as we had time in hand, which she was very happy to do (in contrast with the previous afternoon!!). We walked across the line, and I was astonished later to see on my vet sheet that we had taken 3:18 – 7 minutes in-hand, exactly the same time as we'd taken the previous day. She was easier to vet than on the Monday afternoon – a lot less adrenalin! - though her pulse took longer to come down. After a few minutes of 52/54 jumping up to 60 every time the tannoy came on, I waited what seemed an interminable time while a long,

long list of finishers average speeds were read out, then presented. Straight As again, with a pulse of 52! I could not believe it. Mother went back to clear up the crewing stuff into her car and bring it round to the trailer, and I led Zawadi up to the trailer telling her, while I dampened her mane with my arms around her neck, what a star she was and how enormously proud I was of her, and what a huge achievement she'd completed.

After tea and cake and some window shopping in the marquee, we went back to the campsite – luxury, no recceing to do! So I had a lovely shower, and we returned for the prizegiving. I knew we'd met the criteria for a Gold Award, and was a little confused when they went through the bronze, then silver then gold awards and on to other prizes without my name being called! Eventually my name was called. But to my amazement it was for something called the "Progression Award" – we'd apparently been talent-spotted for a free entry to Class 1 or class 2 in 2012! When it was being announced, I saw on the stage the lady who'd briefly spoken to me the day before when I crossed the line, so it seems that the execution of all the carefully planning I'd done had been observed and recognised. It was a great moment – as good as last August at the Futurity when the assessors thought Peponi was as lovely as I think she is! And I did get my Gold medal and rosette, and mother her crew's rosette in the end!

It was great also to see so many friends doing well – it was a very successful event for the Offa's Dyke Group, and I was pleased to see some good friends from other Groups also getting Gold.

I was a great team effort – mother's crewing had been exemplary, and thanks are due to Carolyn and Rob for keeping us sound on day 1, and to Dessie for her encouragement at multiple places round the route! She and Mervyn had the camper van at Halse Farm as well, though Dessie was not too mobile having hurt her back parting company with her new horse. The amount of organisation and manpower that goes into providing the Golden Horseshoe Ride must be immense – I am sure all of us are so grateful of the time and effort expended for us to have such a good time and such a competitive challenge. I am certain to return – though whether I will have a horse to take up my free entry for next year's Class 1 (Golden Horseshoe - 2x 80km) or Class 2 (Exmoor Stag – 80 + 40km) is another matter. It certainly can't be Zawadi – she will then be 19yo, and with a mis-shapen lower pastern bone I would never consider asking her.

Flynn's Horseshoe

Piers Geddes

Ever since last year when Flynn and I were lucky enough to ride the Exmoor Experience – two days of 40km a day – the thought of tackling the next one up stood like an implacable mountain at the distant edge of my riding life. Tell me, what do you do? How do you make your decisions? Half the time I have battles with myself and it's exhausting. The choices were: nothing at all, a repeat of the Experience – or the Exmoor Eighty. I took advice from a Panel of Experts created for the purpose, all oblivious of their appointment. "You'll kick yourself for not trying it," said one, and that seemed to settle the issue. But there was still an exit which some of us like, namely dropping down a class on arrival.

This suggests all you need do is make a decision, and of course we all know you need a lot more than that. First, a great crew, which I had in Barbara Rees, helped on the day by Frankie Turley who chose with wonderful unknowingness the Eighty as her horse's first go at that distance. A bit of encouragement, that. And she got a gold. Second, a run of good luck, so neither horse nor rider become ill or lame or bankrupt or anything worse in the months before. And thirdly, a horse equal to the task. Plenty are, but I'd never owned one. Perhaps that's unjust to Thomas, a sturdy cob who'd bravely carried me round the Experience several years before. Flynn though has a large heart, and it beats in a powerful body, strong enough to carry my unruly bulk which he's too polite to notice. His first 80km, and mine, was achieved at Mynydd y Gaer last August, enjoyable but not the easiest of rides. The Horseshoe then might be within his grasp.

And what for training? Less is more, as usual, for some of us are lucky enough to have time and hills. Here a horse can become fit without strain, climbing at a walk. Aside from that it's all I know, and what I enjoy and do anyway. So after Maryland, and a slightly wild 32km at Hopwas in February, the Quantocks called in late March – a fine ride, that one, and a first cousin to Exmoor in geography – where Flynn decided who he wanted to go round with and completed his 64km in fine shape. He's very good at this, I thought. Seven weeks to go.

Now began an easy sequence of slow but quite demanding rides every three days around the Black Mountains where he lives. No risk of him getting endurance-stale either. My own fitness, not as good as I'd like (whose is?) got a bit of reluctant attention too.

Cut to the day. Everything had brought us to this. He was utterly thrilled to be off, releasing a couple of explosive bucks and bursting with exuberance and energy, going almost unstoppably until he'd caught up with the hundred-milers who'd set out earlier. Now he was happy and kept pace with the experienced horse-and-rider teams I felt I had no right to join. Flynn thought otherwise, and held his own in pretty exalted company.

Halfway halt, and here I was stupid. Plenty of time, I thought, so we didn't leave as early as we could. This ultimately meant going on our own and Flynn became disheartened. Well, one doesn't know everything, and it's difficult to be the careful, disciplined rider success at the Horseshoe demands. Equally I just can't help flying along when Flynn wants to go, thinking to myself, this is how you know you're alive! Still, we finished in good time and he did wonderfully well, which I've never stopped telling him. Silver was his.

The Horseshoe must be one of the few unrepeated 80km in the sport, and worth it for that alone. Thank you, I cry, to everyone for letting me do it. The list is long. There's Flynn at the top, and the Blackpool nightclub owner who bred him and Sandra who showed me the 'for sale' ad, and the cleversticks who sketched out his progress to advanced; the organisers, helpers, crew, farrier, saddler, vet . . . thank you all. Only taken eleven years! Just think, in another eleven I'll have some idea of what I'm doing.

I nearly forgot. There was a secret formula, a miracle ingredient in Flynn's achievement. All horses are botanists but this was exceptional. The evening before, he spent some time grazing a grassy bank scattered with a tiny plant with a little blue flower. Its name? Speedwell.

Carolyn and I didn't expect to be doing the pleasure ride but due to a dog bite and 2 falls from the horses that's what we did. Carolyn was pleased to be allowed near a horse and as I could only ride at walk the week before I suppose I should have been too.

Well the moor and weather where perfect on the Sunday and we even had time to stop and look at the scenery with panoramic views, wonderful flowers bluebell, gorse, may trees and the cuckoo singing his tune. The crooked riders wanted to go more slowly than normal, however the horses where a bit fresh and confused by us wanting to do this at a ride. We completed without too much problems from the injuries although I would have been glad to let someone ride the last 4k.

We then went back to Riscombe cottages down the very narrow lanes having agreed a time slot not to meet the other trailers coming up. Horses turned out and off to watch everyone else vet.

We always make horseshoe into a week's holiday no phones and no hassle for us all. I took my new puppy so was first up and off with Rob Edwards to see horses out in big classes on Monday and then crew with John Jones for Karen. Carolyn and Rob went to see people out on route and take repaired pulse monitor to Gill Talbot at halfway vetting.

Offa's Dyke folks did really well on day one a windy but dry day. They all said the route rode great making Carolyn and I more envious. Day 2 was damp with light rain and less wind, Fiona Griffiths was out but rest of Offa's dyke group went out ok. Carolyn was looking at route for us to ride Cheriton ridge later in the week but mist was down and she couldn't see the horses so went to cottage and lit the fire and came up for final vetting. You will see from results they all got round and 3 got extra awards. Well done all from an envious couple of crocks!

We managed 2 more rides a short circuit on the moor on Wednesday and then down the Doone Valley on Thursday with an ice cream at the tea rooms and some great canters on the way back. Again a wonderful week on Exmoor good company and some excellent meals hopefully we can manage a bit further in 2012.

Lesson learned from what people did or forgot (oops!! Sue, Gina and Gill)

Don't turn your horse out 30 mins before you want to leave as you might not catch it

Don't forget water to wash horse even for pleasure ride

Don't forget test the pulse monitor and take big New Zealand even if it says fine weather

LUDLOW 80km ER Saturday 18 June 2011**Karen Jones**

I was really pleased when I learnt that Dick and Judy Taylor were going to be running the Ludlow ride from the racecourse again but over a different route with a vetgate out on course. Having crewed for both Gina and Marcy Pavord and ridden Ginny on this side of the A49 many years ago it was good to re-visit some different terrain.

For me this season has been concentrated on getting my 7 year old Arab Indian Princess to Open and fulfilling my goal of her of taking to Exmoor for the week and completing the Exmoor Experience. She has been languishing in the field ever since so now time to get Dakota fit and competing. I had earmarked Ludlow 80km ER as I wanted to test out the 80km route as a possible ride for next year to get Indi to Advanced.

Knowing that I had not done masses of preparation we decided to go up on Friday evening and stable overnight. Dakota settled well in the newly refurbished stables, passed the vetting and we were able to enjoy a relaxed start on Saturday. Ludlow is a great venue with everything on hand and excellent facilities.

There were only 3 entries in the 80km ER and 2 in the 100km – somewhat disappointing in view of the massive amount of preparation Dick and Judy had done in devising this new route. For me it was great, being Dakota's first ride of the season. Ken Mapp, Helen Newton and I started out at a relaxed pace and rode the whole of the first section into vetgate 1 together. There had been heavy rain overnight so the ground was quite slippery and it was good to ride at a sensible pace. We could see skid marks from the 2 horses in the 100km class who had set off 15 mins in front of us so knew where to take care.

This section of the route rode beautifully with some lovely long canter stretches. John and I had been out the night before to check the vetgate so I knew we had to ride past and do a loop which was only marked with arrows and then enter the vetgate from the far side. The three of us presented virtually together so after a 30 minute hold we were off again heading along the disused railway track to checkpoint 4. This land is owned by the National Trust and although we were allowed to ride it Dick was not allowed to mark any of this section. I was glad to be riding with Ken and Helen as with no markers I think I would have found this section a little daunting. We arrived at checkpoint 4 much to the delight of the steward who had seen very few people as only the ER's and the 80km CR route went this far.

Back into the vetgate for the second time with the three horses still going really well together, having been joined by Janice Cockley-Adams from the 100km route. We all presented together again with no problems and rode together until Janice turned off to do her extra loop.

I was really pleased with the way Dakota was going – she didn't seem in the least bit tired and had drunk and eaten well. Then all changed - having come down a very uneven, stony track and turned onto the road she suddenly felt slightly uneven in front. I checked there was nothing in her feet and then just walked a little way. We turned off into a field and she felt fine again so on we went but at the next road she was definitely not right. We were only about 10km from home now – damn! I asked the others to tell my crew and the venue that I was retiring and wished them luck. I walked on a short way until I met up with John who set off back to the racecourse to pick up the trailer.

This is only the second time I have ever retired on route and thankfully both times with nothing seriously wrong. When we trotted up for the vets Dakota was still looking sound on grass but clearly lame on the tarmac – bruised foot was thought to be the most likely cause. A few days later she was completely sound and has been fine ever since.

Ken and Helen apparently had a very exciting racing finish with Ken taking first place again – 80km ER at Ludlow seems to be his forte. Well done to both of them.

I would like to say a huge thanks to Dick and Judy for taking over this ride from Margaret McKiddie. They had to come up with a completely new route as the police would no longer allow us to cross the busy A49. They live miles from the venue so have spent numerous weekends and much of their holidays investigating paths and bridleways and talking to landowners. They were determined to make this a 2 day ride and to offer as many classes as possible. Nothing was too much trouble and they did everything they could to attract enough entries to make the ride viable. They knew there would be teething problems but I sincerely hope that they run it again next year. Ludlow is a perfect venue and yes the ride is a tough one – a true endurance ride. It will never be a particularly fast route but I for one will certainly be back next year if we can persuade them to do it again.

I might not have finished but I had a fabulous ride. THANK YOU Dick and Jude and the many people who gave up their time to help. Maybe I'll get to ride down the race course next year!

GRASS FOR THOUGHT By Neil Pickering and Martin (horse)

I've never given it much thought, that is until after this weekend at King's Forest . Martin was corralled in a green and lush field from Saturday afternoon to Sunday morning quite happily eating. At the end of the ride next day Martin was vetted out lame and appeared to be off his feet Monday morning and Martin was definitely off his feet big time! I called Bill the vet and half an hour later he diagnosed acute laminitis.

Martin's grazing at home is best described as on the good side of poor, so with hindsight a bad move to corral in lush grass, grown to feed dairy cows not horses but how many riders take a grass mask with them and it was our first visit to King's Forest as riders. Martin is always corralled at Haywood Oaks and the Dukeries but the big difference is those fields are grazed by sheep and leave nothing behind them when they are moved off for the rides.

Lessons learnt from this. If we travel to a new venue to corral, a phone call to the organiser and if the field is lush maybe book a stable instead.

This story does have a happy ending though. Martin had 4 days in his box having anti-inflammatory injections and Bute and is now back in the field with his mates enjoying a three week holiday, completely back to normal

Editor's note Perhaps there should also be a responsibility on ride organisers when arranging corraling to think about the richness of the grass and warn ride entrants accordingly. I have to admit this is not a problem I had been aware of but Carole Broad my riding instructor said it is a well recognised problem

This has always been a favourite ride of ours and completed many times with Dancer. Not lacking in drama, it seems to attract the fun loving, high spirited, adventurous riders and runners alike with a variety of horses, not just the Arabs, but a selection of thoroughbreds, cobs and appaloosas to name just a few.

This year saw some of our top endurance riders among them: Carrie-Ann Dark, Rachel Claridge, Sue and Louise Rich. All travel from far and wide to the smallest town in Britain, Llanwrytd Wells, to compete in this mad cap race over 22 miles, which is certainly not for the faint hearted. With stunning views, a mixed terrain course including tarmac, farm tracks, footpaths, forestry, open moorland (boggy, boggy, boggy), a total ascent of 3,000 ft with approximately 500 runners all leaving the centre of town 15 minutes before the 50 horses.

The heavens opened 15 minutes before the start, soaking everyone through to the skin, but didn't dampen the spirit of the race. Spyde was very well behaved with a pulse of only 32 at the initial vetting, unhappy with the rain and didn't react too much when a thoroughbred horse played up badly on the parade around the town. The pace car took off and seemed to speed up on the downward steep bit just before we hit the mountain track and then up, up and away! Spyde settled very quickly and took the steep incline fairly steadily. Unfortunately, as usually happens when all is going well, disaster struck. Spyde went down in the bog, throwing me clean over his head (soft landing, thank goodness). My heart sank when I saw his tail end disappearing off with a group of runners. Lots of runners and horses were passing me with good humour and asking me if I was ok to go on. After walking for what seemed like ages (the runners are so fit!) a fabulous good sported lady runner had caught him and waited for me. She kindly helped me on and I couldn't thank her enough (was 10 minutes too much time to lose?).

Into the vet gate and my crew were relieved to see us all in one piece. Several horses were already leaving but I knew we could gain vital minutes here and Spyde didn't let us down. Thanks to John Jones and Gill Talbot who helped crew us and we were soon away with hardly any time to draw breath. There were still a few very tricky places, not to mention the low hanging branches that somehow got caught up in my clothing, pulling me so far backwards. Just as I was about to fall (not again!) it released me and catapulted me forward onto Spyde's neck. Phew that was close! We lost count of how many horses we passed and I think most people were surprised to see us at the mill (about 1 mile from home) but no one told me that there was now only Beti Gordan on Next in line Taurus in front. Sam and Robert (crew) had only just managed to arrive at the finish before us. As we crossed the line I'm not sure who was more surprised, Sam or me, when he told me we were 2nd, 2hrs 09 mins and no runners in site.

It was a thrilling, heart stopping ride and I'm sure Dancer was with us in spirit and didn't want to be outdone so we now have a pair of runner up cups in pride of place. We also won a lovely engraved welsh crystal brandy glass for the veteran rider award, which I have given to my brother Robert, well deserved and he is older than me after all! Am I now really an official veteran rider?

On Cirencester Friday I took Warrens Hill Chanda to do 40 km.....

She retired to have babies after going out at the Aachen selection ride at Cirencester with a foot injury. She has a Tango D'Ayers 3 year old filly and a Murmansk 2 yr old filly .A slight attempt to cut down on numbers means we have no foals this year and have sold the horse I was riding so she went back into work last autumn.

Chanda has always struggled to put on weight and is not a good eater. She lost a lot of weight over the harsh winter and even after a serious go at her teeth was not really improving. I took her to Forest of Dean in April and hated it, She was deeply unhappy, stressy, pulled uncontrollably all the way unless there was no-one around us and had slightly jarred herself up on the hard ground. From there she went from bad to worse, would not eat and became too thin and weak to consider riding.

I concluded she either had liver failure, a serious melanoma, or if I was lucky serious ulcer type trouble. After a lot of internet research I decided to try an Equine Science product, Gastroplus, before going down the endoscope/ blood test route as I really wondered if the stress of a long session at the vets would do for her.

Treatment started on around 13 June. We were on holiday, leaving Sarah to look after her. A week later she had improved markedly, was much less pained in her face, her coat had improved and she could be tempted to eat most of the time. I put the weight tape round her and she was a pathetic, bony, 370 kgs. After 3 weeks she was eating like a proverbial horse and I could barely keep up with the buckets and trips to the feed shop. She is now 425 kgs and gleaming. She is a very much calmer horse than I have ever known and mostly wanders peacefully round loose at home being a lawn mower wherever the best grass is.

Oh yes, back to Cirencester. If she or I hated it again then no more competing ever. I had to pull her head up out of the grass for vetting. She was a minor pratt once I got on but by the time we were trotting down the back of the venue field she had relaxed and we had a wonderful ride, She cantered along calmly in a reasonable outline, got a little over keen to pass all she met but could be brought back to sensibility once they were behind her, jumped logs, did not try and kill a single horse as she passed it, grazed at crew spots, you name it. We broke no speed records as I was deliberately trying to do relax but as we cantered over the finish line ready to go again, the tears streamed down my face.

Grade 2 then back to the trailer for a large bucket.

We will have to decide where to go next.

Mary

Help please! Members Proposal re Gate Allowance

I'm considering putting a members' proposal at the AGM to change the rules re gate allowance and would like the help of Offa's Dyke members in coming up with some timings to show how long it takes realistically to slow down, open and close a gate & get back up to speed.

At the moment the rules give no allowance for the first 10 gates and then just 30 seconds for each further gate. e.g. a course could currently have 12 gates – some difficult & the rider would receive just 1 minute allowance

For rides in countryside with stock in fields and therefore unavoidably lots of gates– such as Cranham & Ludlow, this can put us in a very unfavorable light compared with other rides with no gates. We run the risk of riders avoiding these rides in preference to easier ones where they can make faster times.

I managed to get out and time a dozen gates of different types locally (Cranham ride territory). Some gates were lovely horse friendly jobs which took only 30 seconds, but more difficult ones took up to a couple of minutes. This gave an average over all the gates of 56 seconds. This does not take into account the added time lost in slowing to open the gate & then getting back up to speed.

I might add that I haven't ever personally been out of time due to slowing for gates, but I've been lucky to have horses which were brilliant at gates and also very fast, so easily made up the time. But I know that not everyone is as fortunate. The idea for the rule change was prompted when several friends from Offa's Dyke Group had problems with the vast number of awkward gates on the Cerne Giant ride. One was out of time on her first 80k ride & very disappointed when the horse had tried his heart out and failed to get a completion. This made me wonder if it was time to look again at the timing of this allowance.

Please help me come to a sensible proposal by timing some gates in your local vicinity & emailing the results, either to me personally at carolyn@edwardsglos.fsnet.co.uk, or via the website. I will then decide if the statistics justify an increase in the current allowance and use the information to support the proposal. I'd also welcome any suggestion as to what you think would be a reasonable compromise. Should we reduce the number of gates before the allowance kicks in from 10 to say 5? What do you think would be a realistic timing for the rest. 1minute per gate? Please email me your comments – or add them to the thread I have running on the EGB members forum under Rules – Gate Allowance

As I don't intend to attend the national AGM, I'd do with someone to second the proposal, as either proposer or seconder needs to be present on the day. Any Volunteers please?

Carolyn Edwards

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Photos Needed!!

Offa's Dyke Group is planning to produce a fixtures calendar for 2012 featuring photos taken by members throughout the 2011 season. This could be of anything from members riding at events (UK and abroad, Young Riders, FEI etc), action shots in the vetting area, crewing, dogs or panoramic views like Rob Edward's wonderful photo of the Forest's stained glass window that featured on a cover of EGB magazine last year. The idea is to produce the calendar as an A4 or A5 single card that will be sent to all our members and also made available at our rides to promote future events. Our webmaster will create a contact point through the website for you to email any photos that you would like to be considered for inclusion. Apart from being a fun memento of the competing season, this could be a really exciting promotional tool and an opportunity to show off the photographic skills of our members and their crews. Please don't send any professional photos taken at events as this will infringe copyright.

Suzanne Garlick

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Other adverts cost £5 per half page.

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Please note that the newsletter is FREE to members and associate members of EGB who have indicated a wish to be in Offa's Dyke Group.

For non members of Offa's Dyke Group, we ask for £5.00 subscription per year for the newsletter. Please send this form with a cheque made payable to OFFA'S DYKE BRANCH OF ENDURANCE GB to: Carolyn Edwards, Duart House, Brookfield Road, Churchdown, Gloucestershire, GL3 2PF.

Alternatively, the newsletter can be downloaded free of charge from our website 'news' page. Some previous newsletters and archives are also available

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