



Offa's Dyke Group
Of Endurance GB
Newsletter – October 2009



Chairman's Comment

Well summer has flown by and the season comes to an end. I hope you have all achieved all or part of what you set out to do at the beginning of the year. Well done to those who did their first ride, quite often the hardest, although once completed it generally leads to more.

It has been great that we had lots of articles for the newsletter again so please keep them coming in. But we need info for the Website so if there is ride in different areas you have been to and enjoyed send in a bit of info and photo's if you have them.

Schooling lessons and Farrier talk organised for the winter. Info in the newsletter.

Annual meeting (AGM) and prize giving 5 December; please send in your trophy cards to claim your trophies and mileage awards. Hope to see you all there.

Congratulations to Gill Talbot on winning the 160k at Red Dragon

Gina Harris

This newsletter is free to Offa's Dyke members of Endurance GB. Annual subscription for non-members is £5.00. If you would like to subscribe, please complete the form on the back page.

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Newsletter

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Sharon Parr, Mark Holland**

Editor's Comment

Another season draws to a close. For me it has been a season of ups and downs. First there was Bonnie's travelling problem. Having solved that, she did 2ERs with a second and a third placing, missed her next ER because of a puncture in the trailer and the one after because of a cracked heel. Finally she won the veteran ER at Puddingstone in spite of falling and scraping her knees. Then she was lame at Cosford Grange so had to pull her out of Little Dragon! Misty substituted for her at that and finished 11th but was spun at pre-ride vetting for Dragon's Tail.

Other Offa's Dyke members have had a great season, notably the Rogerson twins, and Gill Talbot who rounded off an amazing season by winning the 2x80km Red Dragon.

I hope you have all had a good season. Please send in your trophy forms as soon as possible so that we can organise rosettes in time for the AGM, details of which are in the newsletter. Those of you who were fortunate enough to win a trophy last year please make sure that it is returned in time

On a less happy note Carolyn had an e-mail complaint from a car driver after the Woolhope ride who lamented the rudeness of riders who did not thank him for slowing down or pulling in to let them pass. It is to be hoped that these were non-members but it is salutary for us all to remember how important it is to acknowledge considerate motorists at least with a smile and a nod if you do not feel it is safe to lift one hand from the reins!

Margaret McKiddie

SAD NEWS

Most of you will know by now that Les Riley died on the 10th of August. He had had heart problems for many years, having a coronary followed by a by-pass graft while on holiday in France, but it did not let him stop doing what he enjoyed. He had continued working in the Citizen's Advice Bureau. Indeed it was only when Margaret went up to see why he had not got up for work that she discovered he had died peacefully in his sleep.

Margaret and Les were founder members of Offa's Dyke. Margaret was secretary for many years and Les was Membership secretary. He was also a familiar figure at many rides as Vet Steward, always with his megaphone. He not only did our Forest of Dean, Cranham and Tintern Rides but also was timekeeper at Red Dragon for many years. He will be greatly missed.

Several Offa's Dyke members and also Pat Conn and Roger Lunt attended his funeral. The church was packed, as he was obviously a very valued member of the village, Endurance being only one of many fields where he had made himself invaluable. Margaret seems to be very philosophical about her loss and was in action as a volunteer at this year's Red Dragon, though not carrying Les's megaphone. We wish her well.

Dates for your diary

National AGM	Sat 28 November	
Schooling lesson, Huntley	Sun 25 October	See below
Offa's Dyke AGM & Trophy evening	Sat 5 December	See page 5
Schooling lesson, Huntley	Sun 8 November	
Schooling lesson, Huntley	Sun 22 November	
Schooling lesson, Huntley	Sun 13 December	
Christmas cracker ride	Sun 3 January	See page 6
Schooling lesson, Huntley	Sun 10 January	
Schooling lesson, Huntley	Sun 24 January	
Farrier talk and social evening	Sat 24 January	See page 7

Schooling Lessons

Back by popular demand!

We've booked a series of schooling lessons at Huntley School of Equitation with Carole Broad BHS Fellow. These will be in the indoor school- so the weather is not a problem and will be in groups of 4 (occasionally 5).

Everyone who attended last winter enjoyed the lessons and Carole was really pleased with the way they all improved over the weeks

Dates: October 25
 November 8 and 29
 December 13
 January 10 and 24

Cost is £17.50 per lesson – an absolute bargain! The group runs this as a service to members and the price is aimed to ensure we cover our costs

For more information, or to book a place contact Carolyn Edwards – preferably by email (contact details on page 2)

You are invited

To the 2010

AGM and Trophy Evening

5th December 7:00pm

Same Venue as last year

Dingestow Village Hall, Monmouth

This year we are again having an 'American Supper buffet'

Please bring a plate of food to share, either savoury or sweet and your own alcohol & glass, though we will provide a glass of wine for each

We will also provide coffee, tea & squash

Please also remember to bring a prize for the usual raffle!

Directions:

Postcode for GPS, and Multimap/Google Maps: NP25 4BE.

From North/East - travelling on the A40 around Monmouth, after the traffic lights and before the tunnels TAKE THE SLIP ROAD and pass between houses to the end and TURN LEFT. You are now on the "Old A40" - follow AHEAD (DON'T fork left up to Trelleck), KEEPING LEFT after Mitchel Troy (don't take the slip road back onto the dual carriageway - follow the signpost for Dingestow) - then just after the Somerset Arms pub TURN RIGHT and follow the road through Dingestow until the first right turning, immediately before which is the village hall parking on the right, with the hall opposite.

From South (A449) and West (A40) - travelling on the A40 towards Monmouth from Raglan, go into the Raglan "motorway" services and exit from the rear of the services (at the end of the lorry park, before it narrows to the fuel station), TURNING RIGHT onto the "Old A40". Follow under the dual carriageway, round some sharp bends and on about the first decent straight section of road, take the LEFT TURN into Dingestow. Follow the road through Dingestow until the first right turning, immediately before which is the village hall parking on the right, with the hall opposite.

Christmas Cracker Ride

Sunday 3 January 2010

Staunton, Forest of Dean

A lovely ride on forestry tracks, no gates & minimal road work. 17km and 22km options.

Mince pie and mulled wine to follow! Come and work off those Christmas calories.

Entries to Belinda Josephi, Morgans Cottage, St Briavels, Lydney, Gloucestershire, GL15 6SG Tel: 01594 530598

Cheques payable to Offa's Dyke Group of Endurance GB. £10.00 members and associate members, £15.00 Temporary day members

Junior Report Abbi Tennant

Hey Guys,

Well another season is drawing to a close. Hope it's been a good year for you all! Not been a bad season for myself. Went out to Hungary with the team, was a good experience to see such a high level competition. The stud, where the champs were hosted, is a fantastic venue and a nice place to visit. We had three riders represent the Brits and all three rode a fantastic race unfortunately two did not make it through final vetting but one rider did complete the full race gaining 13th place in the World! Well that's pretty much all from me, better get back to my uni work. Hopefully see you all at the AGM.

Abbi Tennant

Farrier talk and social evening

Farrier talk and slides by Tim Challoner (AFCL)

Saturday 23rd January 2010 7.45-9.00 p.m.

Red Lion Pub, Huntley, Gloucester, GL19 3DU.

Tim has been a farrier for 30 years and is qualified to complete therapeutic remedial shoeing. He mainly shoes competition horses across all disciplines. Although he is experienced, he still attends regular seminars to gain info on changes in shoeing and new products available. We are amazingly lucky that Tim has agreed to come along and talk to us

The landlord has kindly given us free use of his function room for the talk, starting at 7.45pm

If you'd like to come earlier and eat at the pub, it's best to call and book a table, as they can get busy on a Saturday evening (Pub Tel 01452 830251)

Come along to learn a bit more about farriery and catch up on the gossip!

Please support this evening free of charge to group members and partners. Other people are welcome at £5 cost. Mail or call Carolyn 01452 857352 and let us know you are coming so we can ensure we have enough chairs.

Man v Horse Marathon From a first timers perspective!!!Gabbie Franklin

My Father is insane, I know this, he is a fell runner, and to him 26miles up and down mountains is a mere walk in the park! Around 14years ago he came home and said that he'd been to a race in Wales where runners race horses, I clearly remember him saying, "You should do it, you'd love it". Since then I've wanted to have a go, even though over the years I've heard tales of how tough it is. Now in my second season of endurance riding, I entered.

The day dawned warm and sunny even though the previous week's rain had been torrential. I thought, "It'll be fine!". I know the day dawned like that as I had been awake most of the night, excited, nervous and terrified! The previous weekend my beautiful horse Sengoran Bin Krayaan and I had a good ride round Margam Park, so I knew he could cope with 22miles/36km at a sensible pace. My concern at that time was the mass start through the town. At 6.00am we loaded and away to Wales.

Once at the venue, there were thankfully a lot of familiar faces from the group, and lots of helpful advice, the main one being “take it steady” and “trust your horse, let him find his own way”. As the time edged nearer to the rider briefing nervous chatter and pale faces were evident – I was beginning to wonder what I had let Sengoran and me in for. A large field of 45 riders and an incredible 600 runners had assembled. Everybody mounted up and the cavalry headed for the town on the parade/warm up lap. Being cautious of the red ribbons on tails, we tried in vain to keep calm – and failed!! The lap completed, a short delay, then we were told, we were to be off. Through the town again with the thousands of spectators cheering, under the start banner and away behind the pace car, along the road at a spanking trot then off up into the hills and forest. I had no idea where we were in the field, I was just worried about going too fast. Sengoran was pulling hard, as horses flew past us. He wanted to go but listened as I requested a steady pace.

The tracks were rough and stony but we were going well, as we started to catch up with the runners (who had started 15-20mins before us). The rough tracks got rougher and steeper, then gave way to farm tracks and open hill. “Oh good” I thought, that was short lived! What looked like lovely open hill wasn’t, it was the deepest bottomless boggy ground ever. This apparently sucked off many shoes, but thankfully not ours. Relief that we were out of the bog again turned to absolute horror as I saw the near vertical descent to the track below in front of us. I was about to get off when three runners simultaneously fell over by the side of us; I thought I couldn’t risk letting go of Sengoran if I fell, so I stayed in the saddle. We watched aghast as another rider in front nearly fell. Sengoran seemed to say “are you really sure???” Then tentatively we went for it, steadily at first. Then he lost his footing and we all but fell down the side of the mountain, sliding down the exposed sheer rock and rough mossy grass. How we stayed together I will never ever know. When we landed in a heap, a runner said “are you ok?? Wow, that looked amazing, I bet that was a buzz!!!” I couldn’t speak, I just shook!! A quick check that everything was where it should be and off we went again. Sengoran still pulling, we left the other rider behind us, I do hope she isn’t still there.

The mid way vet gate was chaos, horses and runners everywhere on a narrow forest track, and a very long queue for the farrier! But his pulse dropped quickly and we presented, no problems. The 10mins hold flew by and we were off again, more steep and varied going with me praying there weren’t any more mounted bungee jumps to do. A marshal then said “well done love, you’re horse number 16” I couldn’t believe it. We caught up with and flew by two riders, determined that they would stay behind us. Sengoran, ears pricked, then switched to locking onto runners in front of him and catching them. I let him bowl on where possible as he was loving it, just offering words of advice about the going under foot when I could, not that he listened!

Another marshal said “4 miles to go!” Sengoran felt full of running and I hoped that we could catch more riders. At every possible point there were many spectators all cheering and clapping. Sengoran lapped it up as of course everyone had come to see him!!!! A stretch of slippery road and then though a lovely deep river we plunged then the finish line, we had done it!

Off with the saddle and my crew took over cooling Sengoran down and walking him round. I couldn't believe his pulse dropped so quickly again so we went and vetted, pass. We finished 14th I was thrilled. Again lots of familiar faces all offering congratulations and hugs all round. It was just amazing, what a thrill, I am so proud of my wonderful horse.

Will we do it again – yup!!!

A sting in the tail..... Heather Evans

I was riding Swallow at Ridgeway Barbury Castle, about 7km into our 50km CR on Saturday, when the route passed through a Nature Reserve (thankfully gated). Swallow was pulling a bit, then started throwing her head & 'diving' frantically on the spot. After a few seconds swearing at her I spotted wasps on her mane & started to feel them stinging my left arm & see them flying around my head. She (obviously) was not about to calm down, & fearing worse (she might bolt, actually throw me, or a full swarm attack might follow) I made the snap decision to throw myself off (never done THAT before!!). I had a lucky fall to her right on my bum & elbow, & she was not lashing out & didn't tread on me, so I was on my feet instantly. I was able to grab her reins, but holding on became dangerous as she continued to pitch & dive, so I let her run. She stopped by the exit gate about 50 yards away, where other riders had just passed through, one of whom had also been stung twice. As I caught up with her, she leapt, spun & galloped away down the fence line, turning left with the fence, then right, & up a hill several hundreds of yards away to a ridge. She turned right again, then followed the boundary of the reserve out of sight.....

I was relatively relaxed about her disappearance as I knew she was in a huge enclosure, safe from roads. Two following riders offered to help by going to look for her, leading her back some 15 minutes later (no idea who they were, but THANK YOU again if you read this). I thanked them & told them to go on - reminding them to ask for a time allowance at the end.

While waiting for my horse I had rung the emergency venue line, & reported the occurrence & asked for 1st Aid to meet me as soon as possible. Reunited, Swallow & I continued, surprisingly calmly. A half mile further along the route I was met by my crew (Mark) walking to meet me, & a little further still there was the 1st aid man, who I hoped would have antihistamine cream - VAINLY - he didn't, but offered to take me to casualty.....I declined the kind offer and continued my ride!!

After about 5 minutes I met TRF bikers, dispatched from the venue to help find the lost horse. Luckily they knew me, & were reassured that I was now reunited with the horse they were looking for, and able to continue. At the next check point, another 5 minutes later, someone else's crew found me antihistamine cream (THANK YOU whoever you were), & at this point I spotted ANOTHER wasp, still trapped in the base of her mane, which was promptly removed by a TRF volunteer in gloves!

At the end of our ride I discovered that Swallow has 6 sting weals, one of which was centrally under her saddle! I had approximately 8 stings, mostly on my left arm, two on my right arm & one on my side, & I subsequently itched for more than a week..... At the venue Lesley Dunn gave me some antihistamine pills to take daily, which I am

sure helped enormously. (THANK YOU Lesley & Ray!)

Given that there must have been more than a dozen wasps in 'my' swarm, presumably angry about something, I think we were VERY lucky to avoid a full attack - letting Swallow run off probably took the attack point out of range of the rest of the nest, or else I dread to think what would have happened - no place to escape in the middle of nowhere!

An eventful, but successful Ride day - thank you to organisers Jill & Linda for their concern & prompt actions.

Two weeks later, add the skateboard being towed by a HUGE kite in a field next to the route at Cranham, and the helicopter taking off from the polo field a little further on, & I think that Swallow & I had a couple of 'interesting' mid-season Rides.....

For anyone interested, Woodstock (26), recently had a mystery illness (someone has subsequently suggested it may have been a cracked rib??), which caused him to 'stop' for about 24 hours, prompting a vet visit (with contractor on standby to dig a hole!). Thankfully he rallied, despite a new bilateral heart murmur, & appears to be back to his normal self. Bilbo (33 & counting....!) still continues to enjoy life to the full - outstriding his fellows, & eating for England!

Roll on Offa's Dyke Christmas Ride.

Euston Park 27th June 2009. Chris Wray

We had to get up on ride day before 4am, leave 4:30, to be in time for 06:45 vetting and the start at 08:00.

I'd worked out my race plan - we had 3 phases of 29, 26 & 26km each - 3 different routes where the outbound section was the same as the inbound section of the previous phase. There were only 6 entries for the 80km on the Euston website on Thursday, but there were a lot more horses than that at the start - looked like about 20 - of which only 4 or 5 were Brits! I researched the previous results of those horses and reckoned Hally should be the match of them, but I knew the UAE and European riders would be off at a mad gallop at the start, so I hung back with the Brits, and let the cavalry charge disappear over the brow before I let Hally get into a canter.

When the cavalry charge disappeared, I let Hally get into a steady canter, and I never saw any of the Brits again, except at the vetgates. 3.5 km in there was a river crossing and Hally was reluctant but I knew there were 2 other horses close behind, so I waited a few moments for them - still no luck as they also stopped, so one of the stewards there waded over and took Hally's rein - and we were off, with the other 2 horses as well. The other 2 then speeded up a bit and their canter was a bit fast for Hally's trot and a bit slow for her canter so it was really quite uncomfortable but she wouldn't let them go. After another 6km, there was the first Crew point so I crewed slowly so there was a big enough gap to persuade Hally to forget them, and off we went again. From here on it was trotting all the way, no cantering, but Hally's trot covers the ground well and I was well satisfied. We didn't see another horse until we were back at the venue. We finished the 29km in 1:44 - just slower than 17kph,

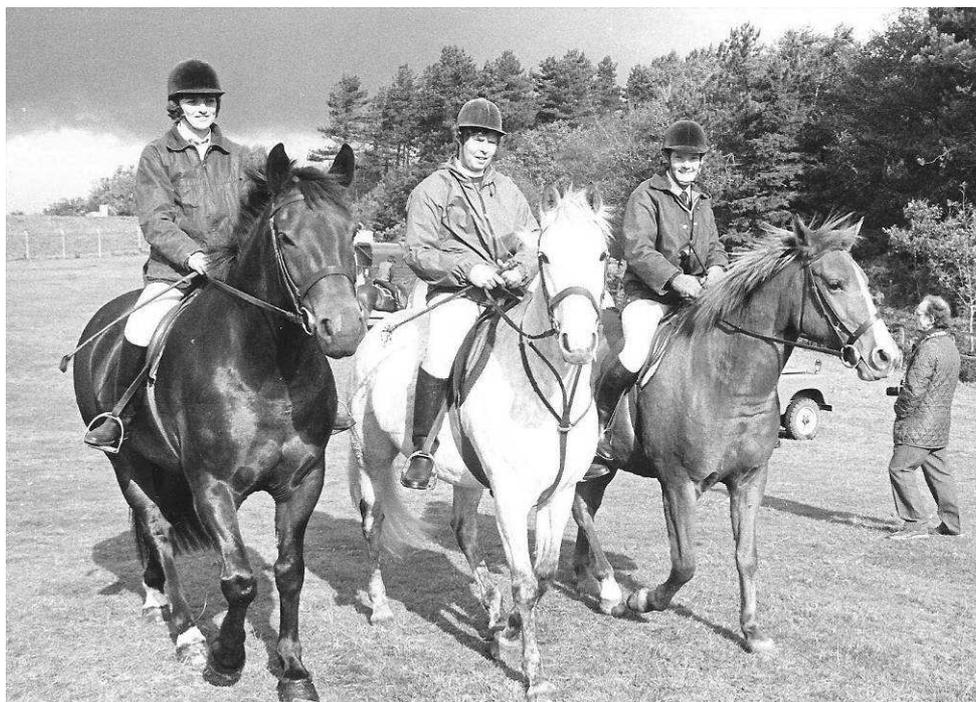
which was fantastic. It took us 10 mins to present, however, as her pulse kept hitting 60 then going back to 70. I think we'll walk her in circles to keep the hot blood pumping to the surface as we slosh, next time. This dropped us to 15kph, but we were passed with straight A's. She drank well in the vet hold, and ate fairly well as well - the carrots and apples went down well!

On the 2nd phase, we also didn't see another horse until half way round - and that was the leader of the 120km race - a UAE guy going at a very steady easy (for HIS horse!) canter. This perked Hally up well, and though I was able to keep her from cantering (mostly), her trot was transformed and he wasn't really moving far ahead - a great magnet! So we finished phase 2 well, still trotting. Average 16kph, reduced to just below 15kph when vetting.

As I warmed up to be let out for the final 26km phase, there was another in my class - her restart time she gave me was about 40 secs behind me, so I now had to think hard on how I was going to stay ahead! However, also warming up - and starting about a minute behind me on the same route in the penultimate phase of the 120km (on a UAE horse) was Alex Tennant. So about 3km in, Alex was with me (she was in the top 5 in her class) as was my competitor! So off Alex and I cantered, side by side, chatting away looking like best mates (exactly what I intended) - Hally of course was pretty fresh having hardly cantered at all up to that point. And as intended, this broke the resolve of my competitor who'd had to canter a good pace to catch me, and now it looked to her like I was going to canter fairly fast the whole 26km with the 120km leaders! And Hally was looking fresh and keen, so they decided not to chase me - every time I snuck a look when we turned a corner, they were further & further behind - we were then progressively caught by 4 or 5 other 120km horses, until there was a good group - all cantering together, with Hally more often than not leading the group - the other leader at this period was No.77, a young UAE Sheikh who later on I saw beaten in the racing finish for 2nd place in the 120km. Anyway, we were making very good progress and at the 3rd crew point on this phase I decided that we'd done enough to secure our position (it was 12km to home), and I thought Hally was showing signs of tiredness - so we crewed slowly, let them go, and back to trot again. Hally did pull quite a lot, but I insisted, as I did again when other 120km horses caught up and went past - but no signs at all of a green vest behind - only yellow. Blow me down - about 2km from the finish I saw 2 green vests IN FRONT! We seemed to be catching them quite quickly, so they must have been walking or very slow trotting - so I squeezed and we were back into canter, but they must have spotted us as when I came round a corner (hoping to see them just in front), they were still a good distance away and were cantering, so back to a trot for the last km. But we managed 16.7kph for the final phase.

Full results: There were 17 starters, we were 12th into VG1, but 10th out (2 leaders vetted out). 10th into VG2 and 9th out (1 leader vetted out). 9th into the finish but classified 8th (1 leader vetted out). There were 12 finishers - 2 Brits behind us (6 minutes (the one who started the final leg 27 secs behind us) and 25 mins behind), and 3 Brits behind us were vetted out. So out of the Brits, we were the first of 3 finishers and 6 starters.

Tintern 1986



Jan Rath, Delwyn Hall and Margaret Riley

I came across this old photo whilst having a much needed clear out at home. It was taken by a photographer from The South Wales Argus in October 1986 – and wow haven't styles changed since then.

I can remember very little about the ride but know that we would have had a great time as the three of us always did when we rode together. I believe that it was at about this time that The Offa's Dyke Group of the then EHPS was first established – either just before or shortly after this ride. It would be interesting to know if any other group members can remember any more than I am able to. The venue is obviously at Lesley Dunn's field at Maryland, which I assume was then used for the next 20 years and during which time entries have greatly increased.

The three of us are still very much involved with endurance and were co-incidentally all together vet writing on the Sunday at this years Red Dragon. Sadly Solitaire and Megan are no longer with us but Tara is still Miss bossy boots and is going strong at the grand old age of 32.

Jan Rath

Woolhope Ride 2nd August
Organiser's Report Delwyn Hall

A wet July, and a very busy Waterboard almost meant a cancellation of this ride. However on the day all our farmers and landowners came up trumps. The water board had opened up both the access roads and filled in the holes. The venue field had so much grass cover that only one lorry got stuck. Lots of riders paid on the day which swelled the coffers and made our ride a success. All our gate stewards (RDA volunteers) fulfilled their promises to help, and the ride ran smoothly. Holes on bridle paths, routes over quarries and uncooperative householders were forgotten about as the sun shone and the riders smiled. Remarks such as 'the best £10 spent for ages' 'the best ride in years' and 'fabulous ride' made up for the times we had become soaked whilst recceing and marking the route. The ride was organised jointly with the RDA and a donation from ride proceeds of £224 was given to RDA Chairman, Marcelle Lloyd-Hayes.

A rider's account from Helen Mayo

The day dawned fine, blue skies Lulu was on good form, loaded well, off we set to explore the Hereford countryside.

On arrival at the venue, I was met by smiling faces and wished a happy ride.

Soon Lulu and I were off on our way, passed by two other riders who Lulu thought she should really keep up with, then she realized I was not happy to do that and we happened to meet Gracie and Sheila who were quite happy for us to go along .

The trio went down through the woods into some field, passed by the loose dogs, no problem, up and onwards through somebody's garden and out into the lanes, passed by the cricket club, through the farmyard, and skirted a field of maize. We came upon a lady sitting on the edge of the field with only her magazine to look at while she waited for the riders to pass through her gate. What a kind person to give up her Sunday so we riders need not open and shut the gates. Then we went through a field of wheat, Sheila's Sovereign was so shocked he tripped up , and yet again we came across another kind person manning the gates. Our next meadow was beautiful, the lake at the bottom complete with swans and cygnets, and cattle quite unworried by the trio of intruders and Oh yes someone else kind enough to sit out and man the gates.

On we went, passing beautiful old farm buildings and country houses, along by the River Wye the smell of the balsam wafting through our noses.

Up past the old station long since become a private house although the old ticket office appeared to be a garden shed, but still had the familiar fretwork round the roof . Through parkland and country lane and through opening on to muddy lane back to the venue Refreshments awaited. Rosettes and smiling faces. Very many thanks to all who gave up there Sunday and days before. A truly lovely day

And another rider's report Piers Geddes

This, I remember thinking as we trotted along, must be one of the best tenners I've spent all year. Of course Delwyn being a talented organiser had arranged for the first dry day in weeks, and that helped. While competitive rides are the bedrock of endurance, an event without lists, log books, trot-ups, mounds of stuff – well it's like a day off. Trailer, horse and you; that's about it, and very welcome.

The ride though, that was the thing. A tour of Herefordshire countryside on a fine and quiet Sunday. It's remarkable country with beautiful hidden corners which nobody trumpets, and so very unspoiled. For riders, and there were a fair number of us to be swallowed up in the scenery; secretive bridleways and woodland tracks led into fields of plump dozy cattle, dipping across streams and down into grassy hollows. Every gate seemed to be manned. Even the roadwork – not much of that – was pleasant, for who minds silent empty lanes?

But it was the faster stretches which won the day. Exhilarating turfy canters on field headlands on that great extended stretch by the Wye, the air scented with Himalayan balsam. It's a hell of a life I thought, as Flynn bounded away along the riverbank in the morning sun, swans dawdling in the shallows. So thank you enormously to those cheerful volunteers, to the generous landowners, to those I rode with, and of course Delwyn who put it all together. She's going to heaven for this ride – I checked

Cranham Ride 23rd August Margaret McKiddie

It is ironic that the one thing that most determines how well a ride is enjoyed, which is completely outside the Ride Organiser's power to alter, is the weather (unless of course he/she has a direct connection to the weather God!). When I rode the route to mark it on the Saturday it was a grey dreary day. The tracks were alternately muddy or stony and I thought I need to look for a new route next year.

The day of the ride the weather could not have been better. The sun shone, but there was enough breeze to keep it fresh and at just the right temperature. Entries had been slow to come in but on the day there were about 100. Carolyn and Gina went off first to deal with the marker movers and were sufficiently successful that very few people got lost.

Riders came back to the venue saying what a lovely ride they had had (music to a ride organiser's ears!) Very few horses failed the final vetting and a good time was had by all. My grateful thanks to all those who came along to help on the day, several of whom had to be deployed to cover Check-Points as the Forest of Dean Motor Club who have helped us for years seem to be having a volunteer crisis. Perhaps in these days of mobile phones there is less to attract the amateur radio enthusiast.



Disappointingly there were only 4 entries for this ER this year, and at the start on the Saturday morning only three of us actually started, Candy Cameron, Phillippa Jupp and me.

The escort vehicle, driven by Roger Lunt and Pat Conn took us to the A49 road crossing, expertly manned by Neil & Gwen Pickering, and we trotted smartly along the estate road. Candy decided to hold her horse back, Dan wanted to take the lead, so we happily trotted on alone. As we reached the first grassy section Phillippa joined us and we chatted as we climbed the hill to the hunting gate.

The weather hadn't been kind on the Friday, torrential rain for most of the day had made the tracks deep in mud with lots of puddles to negotiate so riding was tricky as the horses

picked their way through the mud. Candy soon caught us up and all three of us slid our way into the first vetgate. As we reached the road Phillippa commented that her horse felt unlevel, he'd lost a shoe, and unfortunately, he trotted up lame at the vetting. Candy and I presented within seconds of each other and were soon departing the vetgate together.

As we exited from this first vetgate my intention was to stay with Candy as company for Dan, but as we pulled up to Bircher Common (the going was superb up there) Dan fell into his loping canter and we were soon leaving Candy and Loustic des Tunes behind.

The route from VG1 to VG2 was mainly canter tracks, so it didn't seem to take long to reach the woodland tracks that led down to VG2, however, the numerous other classes were now in front of us and the mud was getting deeper so the entry into the 2nd vetgate was slow. Once there Dan was more than a little annoyed that his newly acquired friends weren't stopping to vet with him, but were trotting off down the road. We vetted and exited this vetgate without ever seeing Candy, and I hoped she would catch us up on the 2nd circuit back to VG3, which was now very deep in mud and had to be ridden with extreme care. Dan and I joined several other riders competing in the 40km class as we picked our way through the mud, slipping and sliding back to the vetgate.

Candy arrived at VG3 just 10 minutes after me, so I was hoping we would be able to ride back to the venue together, but unfortunately Loustic des Tunes trotted up lame behind, so Dan and I were left alone to make our way back to VG4. The canter round Bircher Common cheered Dan, but he was soon searching for companions to race

into the final vetgate. The second common section proved to be a challenge as the farmer had decided to start moving his sheep, so Dan and I had to dismantle sheep hurdles before we could make our way to CP4.

At the final crew area before the final vetgate, Rob admitted he'd been getting concerned at the length of time I'd taken to get there. Unfortunately the muddy tracks had been so slippery I had taken this last section cautiously, no point taking risks at this stage of the game.

As we arrived at VG4 the 'Taylor' family, vets and vetwriters, jumped into action (I think they were very pleased to see us!), and Dan and I were soon trotting out over the road, back down the hill through the hunting gate and along the estate road home. I was pleased to see Neil was still at his post and Dan trotted smartly across the A49 and back to the venue, bouncing onto the racetrack and cantering smartly over the line.

Many, many thanks to Margaret and all her army of helpers for putting on this ride, such a lot of effort for so few of us, we really, really do appreciate you all.

Gill & Rob Talbot & Malabar Storm

Ride with the Stars Euston Park 2nd August Gill Talbot

We heard about this ride whilst competing at Ludlow, lots of controversy about Sheik Mohamed's motives, whether you would be seen as supporting 'drugs' by participating, would EGB be happy with riders who attended, lots of riders condemning those who planned to attend, rumours flying about huge monetary prizes.... the list goes on, but the bit that really attracted me were the 'rumours' that top, International horses would be competing from all over the world AND you would NOT need an FEI passport – and as my FEI passport had been allowed to expire and this had taken away the opportunity to compete at Euston Park, well, I was definitely tempted! During the following week and after speaking to Janah Management, the decision was made – we were going. I was not going to miss this International opportunity that just happened to coincide with my having a fit horse that was sound and ready to go.

It was a long journey over to Thetford for a horse who does not eat in his trailer, but Rob had found a good place for us to stop and get Dan out of the trailer for a leg stretch, drink and something to eat and we arrived at Sheik Hamdan's stables (all the British riders were given free stabling and camping at these luxury stables) just after lunch and in time to allow Dan to stretch his legs on the horsewalker and enjoy time in his corral before the short journey to Euston Park for the pre-ride vetting. The atmosphere at the Park was electric, so many foreign languages to be heard, horses and riders from all over Europe and beyond – and so many of them! (very reminiscent of the Europeans in Ireland 2003 when Rob & I went along as spectators to cheer on our team). Dan vetted well, but he was bouncing so legs had to be held whilst his number was chalked onto his rump. We were told at the briefing there had been 140 entries, but there would be approx 120 starters – bit different from Ludlow two weeks previously when there were just the 3 starters in my 100km ER class!

Ride day arrived, Dan was unloaded at the venue, quickly tacked up and I was soon riding him quietly away from the masses. My 'plan' was to keep away from the mass start at 9am, (he was never to know just how many horses were in his class) and to cross the start line at approx. 9.02am and complete the ride at sensible speed of between 16 & 18kph – SOUND – and all this we managed. Dan was very keen but extremely responsive as we crossed the start – no, we weren't the last to leave, horses were still appearing from behind bushes and trailers as we cantered away! As we rode along the straight exit from the Park the scene was amazing, hundreds of crew cars bumper to bumper were creeping slowly along the road we were riding next to and horses 4 and 5 abreast for as far as the eye could see. The start was not without incident, several horses bolted, riders became unseated, lots of excited shouts.

What can I tell you about the ride? It was amazing. The marking was fantastic, the route was fantastic (although I have to admit the river crossings were pretty hair raising as they were extremely deep after a night of heavy rain, luckily, we've been to Horseshoe!), so many helpers out and about to stop traffic as we crossed roads and ensure everyone was on the correct route. The only obstacles were the loose horses! The first vetgate was soon in sight, as were the HUNDREDS of crew waiting for their riders. Horses and bodies everywhere..... but no Rob! Oh he was there, I simply couldn't find him among all the bodies! Eventually, some 5 minutes later, we find each other, I quickly present Dan (we are in 95th place!) and we begin our hold. Dan is very much on his toes and mercilessly drags us round the vetgate area, but he's eating, snatching mouthfuls as he circles, stales and drinks. Tack back on and Dan is bouncing waiting for the 2nd loop to begin, much to the amusement of the timekeepers.

The 2nd & 3rd loops, very much like the first, lots of canter tracks, excellent marking and copious numbers of helpers were soon over and an extremely bouncy Danny arrives at the vetgates. Rob and I manage to find each other at these vetgates and our presentation to vet is much more slick. At the 3rd VG, we can actually get near the presentation area! (71st & 58th place!). Once again Dan eats very well, drinks and stales and insists on dragging us both round the vetting area. We are soon bursting out of the start gate for the fourth loop. There were 38 eliminations at the 2nd vetgate, and approx. 20 at the 3rd, many on re-presentations, 10 minutes before exit - luckily we are not one of them.

Out onto the 4th loop, Dan is still extremely full of himself and we thoroughly enjoy the ride. Rob can actually get into all the crewing spots on this loop as he is competing with far fewer crew cars. This pink loop takes us deep into pig territory, at one point we are trotting past large boar on the left with only 3 strands of low wire some 3ft from us, and pens holding masses of piglets & sows just 3ft to our right! - the 'Tunnel of Pigs'!! Luckily Dan ploughed through, much to the delight of my two companions who had voiced total despair when they saw the track we had to ride down.

Back into the venue for the final vetgate, and we arrive just as the winners are presenting for their final vetting, we try to hang back when we realise what's happening, but we are already forward and the vets call us into the vetting area. Just as our vet places his stethoscope, whoops, whistles and shrieks fill the air as the

winning horses are trotted for the vets...Rob and I exchange glances..... I hang my head in despair as Dan suddenly becomes 17hh and spins to see the trot ups..... we wait with baited breath for the pulse to be confirmed, “56” shouts the vet, well, you could have pushed me over with a feather! We are asked to trot, so a very animated Dan, neck arched, trots down the manicured trot up lane complete with shrubs and flowers. The vet checks him over, places the stethoscope again, “52” he shouts over the still whooping victors. The vet looks me straight in the eye and says “now please go and *ride* this horse”! He is obviously not as impressed as I am.

As we wait to start our final loop Dan is incredibly bouncy – definitely something in the air at this ride! He refuses to stand still, charging backward as we wait for the countdown on the starters’ clock, bouncing from front feet to back, and when the starter said go, he burst out of the start gate as though we were in a 5 furlong flat race. This last loop is tricky, we have a short two way section mid loop on narrow tracks, and there are a lot of riders out there pushing for a placing. I reach the two way section just as 15 + competitive riders are jockeying for position on the final couple of Km’s and we have to shout to alert them of our presence. Horses fly past us, riders shouting and whooping to encourage their horses on the last, short dash for home. Dan and I canter steadily in the opposite direction, thankful we are not joining the chase along the narrow woodland section. We still have a small loop to canter round.

As we rejoin the track that had been the scene of chaos just 30 minutes earlier, we pass just a couple of riders, take a slosh from Rob and head quietly for home. The finish line is in sight and Dan and I canter sedately over – we’ve finished, 120km’s completed, now for the final vetting. Dan is still full of energy, but hungry, so we give him 12 minutes to stop blowing, drink, grab a mouthful of food, have his tack removed and present to vet. The pulse is taken, we complete our final trot up, 2nd pulse taken and its 48, exactly the same as our starting pulse, much to the amusement of our vet, who tuts, sighs and shakes his head. We smile and hug and congratulate each other .

We completed our ride at an average speed of 17.11 kph and finished in 46th place, we had one crew car driven by my one crew member, husband Rob. The top ten winning riders completed at an average speed of between 22 and 23kph, had more crew cars and crew members than you could shake a stick at and operated in the vetgates like a top class Formula One team, crew members swarmed the horses as soon as they arrived, 20+ per horse, presenting to vet in less than a minute. Quite something to see.

Our Ride with the Stars was everything we expected it to be, exciting, amusing, informative and challenging. We had a wonderful time and if they do it again next year we will definitely want to be involved.

Gill & Rob Talbot & Malabar Storm

Little Puddingstone Ride 13th September Margaret McKiddie

The idea of doing a Veteran 80km ER in Thetford Forest was too good to miss and I therefore went there rather than Tintern. Neil and Gwen Pickering kindly offered to crew for me. It is quite a long journey but being nearly all motorway or dual carriageway, easy on the horse and we took just over three and a half hours to get there.

There were 3 separate classes in the schedule Open, Veteran & Tyro with no entries in the Tyro, 3 in the veteran and 7 in the open of whom 3 had withdrawn. It was therefore suggested that we all start together which all agreed with.

I rode the whole of the first loop with Jane van Lennep, whom I had never met but knew by reputation. She was in the open class, our horses went together well and the going was superb with long glorious canters and we completed the 32km in just under 2 hours. Thay Stephenson passed us just before the vet gate & presented first but we were not far behind.

The second loop was a repeat of the first. Initially Jane was keen to catch Thay. We did actually pass her at a crewing spot but she soon took the lead again & we let her go, though we were going even faster than the first loop. Shortly before the vet gate, on one of the few road sections, when we were walking Bonnie for no obvious reason tripped over her feet & went down on her knees but picked herself up. Jane said one knee was bleeding slightly but we were so near the vet gate I decided to keep going. On arrival I discovered both knees and her nose were bleeding slightly. I vetted as quickly as I could. The vet was concerned about her knees but she did trot up sound.

Off we went on the third loop, only 16km this time. Bonnie seemed fine and again I rode with Jane. I did say that I was going to walk in at the end so that hopefully I could present Bonnie straight away before she had time for her knees to stiffen up and she left me about a mile from the venue just as another of the Open horses was beginning to catch us up. I did walk the last half mile in, finishing with a pulse of 52 which allowed me to present straight away. We had to do a 3 card trick (apparently all the finishers did) but all 3 agreed she was sound and we had won the Veteran ER. Remarkably they very nearly stuck to their scheduled prizegiving time of 3.30 and we were actually home by 7.30pm.

Cosford Grange 27th September Margaret McKiddie

I decided to try this ride which was a new Competitive Ride of the Heart of England Group and only to be repeated next year if sufficiently supported . Although it was a fair distance to go, the venue was only a few miles off the M54 and therefore an easy journey taking less than 2 hours.

I entered the 64km class which was 2x32km loop. There were quite a few stretches of minor road but these were interspersed with long areas of glorious cantering on bridle ways and stubble and round the edges of fields. The local farmers have become heavily involved in the DEFRA initiatives to leave wide verges and the going was excellent. There were a few woodland tracks, not stony, and no hills. Apart from one short section where a marker mover had been at work the marking was excellent.

I rode both loops with Camilla Mascall, our horses went well together and we had a lovely ride. Sadly Bonnie was spun at the final vetting, probably a bit stiff on the knees she had skinned at Puddingstone. Quite a number of horses were spun, probably going too fast as there had been no rain and the ground was probably quite hard and too tempting to go fast!

However I would be very happy to do that ride again next year

Little Dragon 80ER 3rd October 2009 Chris Wray

On the morning, I got ready in good time, after briefing Fiona Griffiths (crew for the day!) on where everything is in the van, and clarifying what she would find at each crew point, and what to do at the vetgates with respect to de-tacking and feeding etc... Down to the start – there 7 or 8 mins before the off, and Hally started dancing around – wouldn't go forwards, only sideways and backwards. She even managed a few seconds of jumping up, spinning around, and a few bucks! Just as well the FnE saddle is secure and comfortable!

The first mile, to where we head up the mountain on farm tracks, is quite a busy road, so it's behind a pace car – so I put Hally's head just between 2 horses in the 2nd row of horses behind the pace car – she's pulling hard, but otherwise fine. When we get to the farm tracks, it's a charge up the cobbled track (heart in mouth, I'm sure we'll get another stone bruise!), then the mountain really steepens up and we're back to a walk. Some horses have gone ahead, and I'm hanging on to the back of the straggled first group – Hally tries to go with them over the brow of the hill into a trot and then canter, but slows to a medium trot for a breather. It's blowing a gale up here – the bib is flapping and banging and the map case is horizontal! We got several medium showers and a lot of drizzle, but I was the perfect temperature inside cycling long-sleeved shirt and body protector – just barely noticed the rain with all the wind!

Along the top of the first mountain we do a steady trot, alone, but with the back of the lead group just still in sight – and after couple of miles up there she's feeling better and we're on a downhill slope so we start to canter and catch up a group of 3 horses – there are 5 more further ahead, but now out of sight, though they only beat us into the first crew point (10km) by 2 minutes.

Following the first crewing, I'm riding with Dace Sainsbury – but she goes fast up some of the hills on this road section and I don't see her again (in fact she wins – she's by far the lightest rider!), but Sue Loveridge on Spyder and Robyn Catterall who we'd left a bit behind catch up – and that's how it stays to VG1 (nearly 40km) – the 3 of us riding together.

All the way Robyn was behind us, varying distances so she was probably riding her own race rather than just tagging along. ¼ mile before the Vetgate there was a gate, so I dismounted and we walked in – 11 minutes behind the leaders, average speed a minute quicker than 16kph.

At the vetgate, Paul and Janet Bitmead were there as spectators and they threw themselves into helping Fiona prepare Hally for vetting as quickly as possible – I was just pushed aside and told to sit down! And they did it in 5 mins 19 secs – a record for Hally – she passed with straight As, and due to the fast present we would only be 2 mins and 1 ¾ mins behind Sue and Robyn leaving the vetgate – should be able to keep in touch!

Hally drank pretty well, so I tried my new electrolyte method – paste in a syringe like wormer. With no electrolyte in her feed, she'd eaten well – and in fact the electrolyte made her thirsty, so she drank really well the rest of the day. She enjoyed her range of feeds during the 30 min hold – seemed to like the stud nuts this time! As well, of course, as carrots & apples!

I got her to the timekeepers early so she could see the other 2 horses starting, and so she went off after them, up the 4th mountain – a long 3 mile road section not too steep but kept on going up. We caught the other 2 about halfway up, after quite a bit of verge cantering, and it was cantering again on top of the mountain for the flat bits and trot downhill. It was very undulating and pretty slippery

I could see Sue and Robyn catch and drop the other rider (turned out to be Sarah Ollis), who I just couldn't reel in – and then I realised why Hally was slower and less happy – no front shoes! So from that point it was damage limitation – get back to VG2 (same place as VG1, 22.5 km after) in best possible condition to fit the hoof boots! We went a good pace up to the return road, but there I got off and we walked. I put Hally on every bit of verge (about 2/3 of the road section) and got her to trot, and ran beside her.

No Paul and Janet, so it was just Fiona and I, and we got hoof boots on her and vetted in 7 minutes – still not bad! I need to get some training from Paul & Janet! She had straight As again except for a B for gut sounds – but then ate

well, drank well, and I had some to eat & drink. We were well behind Sue, Robyn and Sarah – but we now had just 5 mins behind – Margaret McKiddie on Misty and Alayna Jupp . I reseated the boots as we were going to have to do the rest of the route in them (no farrier present at the Vetgate), and refitted all the tack.

After the 40 min hold, Hally went out of the vetgate fine, but wasn't overly enthusiastic at being presented with the 5th mountain of the day – we got up this one with the help of the 3 leaders of the 2-day 160km class who came past us on the way up. Back down again to a crewpoint – and there was Sue saying “he's had enough – won't go – switched off”! Fiona gave me a very strongly worded talking to about ignoring Sue and riding my own race while she sloshed us, and we were off again – up the 6th and final mountain of the day! I'm not surprised Spyder had had enough – I think Hally had as well! She would have preferred to walk, and I let her walk the steeper bits – but I kept putting her back into trot, as I was so well aware of Margaret and Alayna chasing us down. Actually Sue was a help – the 2 horses kept each others' spirits up – though we were caught by Margaret and Alayna as we crested the top.

Now it was the race for home. Spyder must have realised how close he was to home, and no more uphill – so they just disappeared at a cracking canter, but Hally was too tired to follow. Margaret and Alayna cantered off, slowing to trot the uphill and rough bits, and I was able to keep Hally going just quickly enough (trotting and quite a bit of canter – bless her, she's such a determined girl!) to keep them within about 200 yds. We then came to the really steep hill back down (the way we'd come up just after the start), and of course Hally's always done a great downhill trot – and now even wearing hoof boots. We were past Margaret in less than a minute, and passed Alayna halfway down – I walked over the cobbled section (looking over my shoulder!), as we left the farm track a final slosh from Fiona, then the last mile home along the riverside cycle path – all looking behind me! Not a sight of the others, and we trotted over the finish line to applause from the small crowd of spectators!

Final vetting was just fine – mostly Bs though, the boots had really done well – though there was a small rub on one pastern where one of the boots had slightly rotated. Of the others, Robyn had gone out of VG2 ahead of Sue, and overtaken Eileen Hackett so was 5th, Sue of course had let Sarah back ahead of her and was 8th, we were 9th, Alayna 10th, and Margaret 11th. There were 17 finishers out of 20 starters. Astonishingly good finisher % - I was sure I'd pick up some places due to horses failing the vet – but no, not a single one!

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Polo Shirts £16 Sweat Shirts £17 Fleece Jackets £20 Bumbags and Baseball Caps £8 each

For more details see Debbie at this year's AGM, or Contact Debbie Williams Tel 01600 891029

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