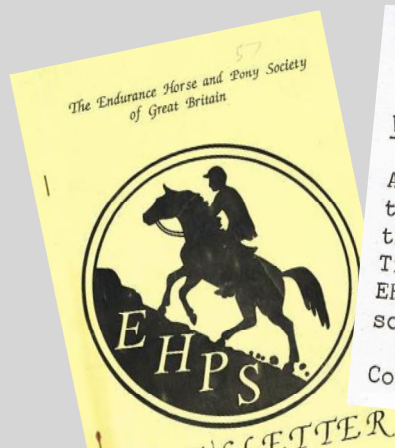




Offa's Dyke Group
Of Endurance GB
Newsletter – April 2013
www.offasdykeegb.co.uk



Silver Jubilee – 25 Years Old!



Group News Cont'd

WYE VALLEY/SOUTH EAST WALES/FOREST OF DEAN

Anyone who would be interested in forming a local group based in this area, please contact me as soon as possible. We have some of the best riding country anywhere in our patch (Black Mountains, Tintern Forest, Royal Forest of Dean and more!) yet only a couple of EHPS rides under three hours travelling in 1986! Can we do something about it?

Contact Fiona Wilton,

FOREST OF DEAN/E. WALES GROUP

Following the rapid growth of interest in this area, a local group is now being formed to cover a patch roughly from Brecon to Gloucester, Hereford to the Severn Bridge. All interested in joining the group send 3 x large S.A.E'S to:-

Fiona wilton,



Welcome to this Silver Jubilee Celebration edition of the Offa's Dyke Group Newsletter. We are 25 years young this year and the above extracts from the Endurance Horse & Pony Society newsletter feature our founder's initial proposal in 1986 and the follow-up in March 1987. It took several months to get affiliated to the EHPS, so this is formally our 25th year.

Special silver rosettes will be available at our Fun Rides throughout the year as part of our celebrations and proved popular at our recent Govilon and Bluebell Fun Rides!

This issue features a number of articles from our founder members about the formation and early years of the Group and how the sport and equipment has changed.

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Chairman's Comment

Welcome to our 'spring' newsletter!

Has spring sprung? I think it has....although the daffodils are at least 6 weeks late, & there are no signs of bluebells yet!

A few weeks ago there was a cancellation that became a postponement & I rode around Govilon with Elvis (many thanks to Nicola & all her helpers!) – wasn't it GREAT to be out & about amongst the remaining snow drifts with so many friends. The stunning views and a little bit of sunshine on our collective backs made for a very special day! Glad to say that the postal entry of about 30, was more than doubled on the day, & over 70 riders enjoyed a challenging route. Eggy, tea & cake most appreciated at the end!! This day marked Elvis & my first anniversary!

It's easier to feel positive, after a truly unpleasant few months, now that we've had a week or so of slightly warmer, & much drier weather. This added up to make our Forest of Dean Bluebell weekend such fun – even without the title flowers – the going was excellent, the venue spacious & the sun popped out. Two FOD rides this year & both with 'lucky' weather! Maybe we should arrange more. Thanks must go to many people for the most recent event, but the headline organisers Andrea Champ & Chris Wray do deserve a special mention.

This newsletter is packed with information about yet more rides to be enjoyed, & articles & notes from current riders & the not so long forgotten friends from earlier days of Offa's Dyke Group...It's our 25th...& we're celebrating!!

We have the special 25th anniversary silver rosettes at Fun Rides, & have arranged a new venue and hog roast for the BAM & Trophy Evening in December. Don't miss that!! There will be further details later in the season. This will be a year to remember!

On the Trophy front - in an effort to be fair to all, we are allowing one last chance to register for the end of season Offa's Dyke Team Trophy. You have until 31st May to register a team with Chris Wray, our Trophy Secretary – roll up folks – it's a fun trophy!

Last but not least - I'm sure all our members will join with me to wish Gina a speedy recovery after her nasty accident several weeks ago. Our collective thoughts are with you Gina!

That's all folks - now read on.....

Heather

Editor's Comment

Welcome to our special 25 year celebration edition of the newsletter! You will see from the front cover that the group was started by Fiona Wilton following her letter to the Endurance and Pony Society Newsletter in 1986. She had a great response and many of the founder members are still involved with the group.

I've emailed as many of the original members as I could find and asked for their memories and comments on the early days of the group and how things have changed over the years. Starting from page 11, this issue of the newsletter has articles and photos from some of them, including Fiona Wilton and Katherine Thornton. I hope that these will prompt more of you to come forward and share some of your memories with us for the July issue.

The eagle eyed amongst you will have noticed that the recent EGB magazine had three items from the Offa's Dyke January newsletter. It had Fiona Griffith's piece on her Championship Novice season with Talishla and also Abby Tennant's article on her first race season with Barik. Both looked fabulous with photos added by Cindy. There was also a piece about our young rider Vika's Engel's 100-mile ride to raise money for the Laurie Engel Fund. We have a further update from Vika's mum Hilary on page 28. If anyone would like to join Vika, please let Hilary know.

The group has had an action packed Spring, with all our rides going ahead and well supported. We also had the Novice Training afternoon in March. Thanks to Debbie and Rachel Williams for the hospitality of their lovely yard.

We have lots more planned for the next few months including two further training days to suit all level of horse and riders. See page 5 for the training day at Treworgan Farm with Level 3 Endurance Coach Pam James and page 10 for the Schooling and Massage training event at Huntley School of Equitation with Carole Broad FBHS and Rachel Williams BSc (Hons) Dip ICAT PGDip CABIC.

I will be organizing the next Offa's Dyke National ride in July and look forward to seeing many of you there riding. If you can't ride at any of our rides, please think of offering to help instead – even ½ a day would be a great help and spread the load.

Carolyn Edwards

HELP!

With the rising cost of printing and postage (now 50p for 2nd class stamp). It would be a great saving for the group if more people could receive the newsletter by email PDF or download it from the Website. If you'd like to try, please email the editor. If you try and don't like it you can always change back to a paper copy at any time.

How to make endurance more efficient, for YOU & your HORSE!

SUNDAY 26th May 2013

at Treworgan Farm, Llangrove, Nr Monmouth



Offa's Dyke group are pleased to be able to offer a training event for **all abilities**, Novice to Advanced, to be led by our very own

Level 3 Endurance Coach, Pam James

Training will consist of (in groups of 3 to 4):

Warm Up & Coaching Session : (to be held in an outdoor 20x40 sand arena) During the warm up Pam will take participants through a range of topics including **pacing, rhythm & efficiency**, followed by **set speed training tasks** (dependent on your horse's fitness) on marked routes around Treworgan Farm's beautiful grassy headlands.

Vetgate/Vetting Practice: Assistance and advice to be given by some of Offa's Dyke's most experienced ER competitors.

The day's session will be rounded off with debrief from Pam and there will be plenty of opportunity to observe & discuss with other groups.

The cost (for approx half a day) is **£25** per person - this includes the hire of the superb facilities and all coaching costs.

To book your place please complete the enclosed entry form and return with your payment & SAE to:

Gill Talbot, Moor Farm, Whitelye, Catbrook NP16 6NP

or if you would like any more details please get in touch with **Gill Talbot** via email at gilliantalbot247@btinternet.com

We look forward to hearing from you!!

OD Fun rides to look forward to in 2013:

Offa's Dyke Group is planning some great Fun Rides for this season thanks to all our great ride organisers. Keep an eye on our website for up to date information on all our rides & events for 2013. Remember – all our Fun Rides (previously known as Group Social Rides) have cheap entry fees of only £10 for EGB members and Associate members. Non-Members pay £18 (including temporary day membership).

Blaenavon is back as a fun ride on 16 June organised by Belinda Stewart.

Plenty of cantering over open hills with fantastic views. Incorporates part of the National Cycle Network. 16km & 26km routes (10 & 16 miles). Pub open all day. Non riding members can visit Big Pit National Coal Museum within walking distance of the venue.

New for 2013: 11 August Black Mountains Ride organised by Nicola Davies

It's a few years since we've run a ride in this area and now thanks to Nicola Davies (organiser of the Govilon Ride) we are due to have it back in the calendar. Nicola is working with former organiser of this ride Karen Jones to come up with a route, which should be absolutely lovely. Nicola says the ride will be a mixture of quiet country lanes, forestry tracks and open mountain with some fantastic views. Route options of 18 and 26km (11 and 16 miles). Venue- TBA although will be in a similar area hopefully.

22 September Bwlch Raid fun ride organised by Fiona Griffiths (note change from original date to avoid clashing with Cirencester ride).

This was run for the very first time in April 2012, although then due to the snowy weather Fiona had to cut some loops out of her original route. Hopefully, as it's being run in September this year we will get to ride the whole route. If this ride is successful Fiona hopes to develop it into a new National Ride in the future.

Other local EGB groups fun rides:

Saturday 27 April Wyre Forest – Heart of England Group Pleasure Ride

24km + shorter distance of approx 16km on the day. Forest tracks. Limited to 50. Entries will close when full!

See www.endurancehorseriding.co.uk for full details

5 May 2013 BIBURY - Cotswold Group Pleasure Ride

Come and enjoy approx. 14 miles of glorious Cotswold Countryside, mainly made up of tracks and grass with some roadwork through quiet villages and country lanes. Venue is on hardstanding at Ablington by kind permission of the Mason family

See www.enduranceegbcotswold.co.uk for full details

TEAM TROPHY

Nominations needed urgently for 2013 teams!!

We have a lovely silver cup to present at our annual awards evening to the top team Offa's Dyke Members or Associate Members.

This is awarded to the team of 3 riders (one horse each) with the highest total points from all kind of ride except CER's (race rides). There is no limit to the number of rides or distance. They all count towards the trophy.

So far we have only one nominated team!

Please get together with a couple of friends and have a go. Just send the names of horses and riders to Chris Wray Trophy Secretary by 31 May (contact details page 2)

Winter Schooling Lessons

Once again we ran the popular schooling lessons at Huntley School of Equitation with Carole Broad FBHS instructing groups of 4 or 5 in the indoor school. These ran from November to February and were very well supported – with 16-20 people taking part each time. We only lost one date due to the snow. Some of the participants have



been doing the lessons with me ever since we started several years ago and most people try to get to all of the sessions to get the most benefit.

Carole loves teaching our group and is very pleased with the progress she sees in riders and horses over the course of the winter. She was particularly pleased at the last lesson, as two riders who had been having problems getting their horses to canter for different reasons had both managed to 'click' with their horses and achieve canter.

This winter she made more use of poles and small cones for a variety of exercises. I certainly found this beneficial on the 2 sessions I managed to get to with Prophet, as I don't think he'd ever seen coloured poles before and at first thought they were dragons!

Me riding HS Prophet over the scary poles!

Carolyn

I asked some of this year's attendees to give me their thoughts on what they'd got out of this year's lessons:

Well once again the winter lessons have come and gone and just when everything was coming together again.



Personally I enjoy all the different lessons that Carole gives us but I know that the lessons that contain poles/cones are better for Gypsy as she has to concentrate more and it takes her mind of rushing around. The pole exercises are very useful for us endurance riders, teaching us to be more flexible, using more leg and less rein. It also teaches our horses to pick up their feet and learn to carry themselves making them lighter on the front legs which makes for less weight on the front legs and hopefully less injuries.

Gypsy's canter work is coming along nicely again. I'm trying very hard to give with my reins, even though she sometimes bombs off. The great thing about being contained in an indoor school is that it doesn't matter. I am determined this year to continue some lessons with Carole through the rest of the spring/summer.

Ally Knight

My aim for this winter's schooling lessons was to improve Faline's canter work. I found the last two lessons with the poles particularly useful as Faline "wakes up" when she sees poles in the school. Carole commented on the improvement in her canter and I was particularly pleased with the way she responded to my leg popping over the poles or cantering straight after them as required. She is now much more balanced in canter which is a help both in the school and out on rides.



Lin Tilt, Jane Smith, Theresa Emery and Janet Dobbyn

I'm looking forward to the schooling/massage lesson in the summer. Thanks for all your hard work organising the lessons - they are the highlight of my winter.

*Best wishes
Janet Dobbyn*

Reggie Goes To School

Saunders Pageboy, aka "Reggie" is a standard bred pacer I acquired on 13 Jan 2012. Definitely not my 1st choice of horse, should I be lucky enough to afford a choice!! He does, however, trot and canter when ridden though.

To cut a long story short, Delwyn bought us two lessons for my Birthday and Christmas presents. I was delighted as I had never been able to go before.

Reggie has never had a lesson nor has he been in an indoor school in his life! So it was going to be interesting in the least, as Reggie does 'lose the plot' on occasions!!

First lesson arrived, tacked up, mounted and headed for the outdoor school to warm up. Reggie then spotted others moving around in the indoor school....we grew two hands with tail over back and tried to launch himself upwards... SIT TIGHT KRISSIE!! ...glad I put my Velcro undies on!!

Our turn now, in we went with Delwyn, Margo and Janet. Shock, surprise, Reggie was a star. He really seemed to enjoy it but found it hard work as he actually had to use himself behind. In the first lesson we rode circles and leg yielding which I have worked on in the recent months since acquiring Reggie. Also using our seats to push them into trot without using our legs, although, I did cheat a little to start with.

In the second lesson we had poles to negotiate. Reggie's eyes came out on stalks and we dodged from side to side trying to avoid stepping over them – but once he braved it he was just fine. The poles were placed down the long sides of the school in a sort of shallow serpentine shape so we had to use our legs to push the horse into and over the middle of the poles then deep into the bottom corner and ask for a canter, Reggie has never cantered indoors before and nearly always favours the left lead when cantering outside. This was going to be fun...asking an x-pacer for a canter!! Reggie never gives any more than you kick, push, squeeze and niggle out of him either. This was going to be HARD work!! Well after only a couple of attempts we got canter! Oh yes, I think Carol was as chuffed as me. He did think he would try a head shaking bronco on a couple of times when asked to canter on the right lead, but I had him sussed and sat tight! Then we did the same but in circles at either end of the school where the poles were placed in a fan shape and we had to ask for canter as we got to the last pole before going into the corner. YES!!...Reggie got the idea quickly and never struck off on the wrong lead....

Well done Reggie and many thanks to Carole, we thoroughly enjoyed the lessons and will definitely go again.

Krissie Jones and Reggie

Schooling and Massage Training Event

Saturday 8th June 2013 4pm onwards

Following on from our very successful winter schooling lessons, we are planning a 'one-off' training session at Huntley School of Equitation. Focusing on the importance of physical health including horse flexibility, balance, coordination and core strength! Getting your horse into good physical health for Endurance.



We will have our usual instructor Carole Broad FBHS who will give a 1 hour schooling lesson geared towards the Endurance rider. Depending on the weather this will be either in the indoor school, in the bigger outdoor arena, or even in the field making use of the hills to work on our position & technique. Those of you who have attended our schooling lessons in the past will know what a fabulous instructor Carole is and how well she gears the lessons towards Endurance.

The lesson will be followed by an hour session learning about massage and stretching with our own Rachel Williams BSc (Hons) Dip ICAT PGDip CABC. This will be held in the 'Tie up Barn' and you will have the opportunity to practice the techniques on your own horse with Rachel's guidance.

Cost will be £20 per person for a group of 5.

If you'd like to attend, please email me. Places will be limited, so please contact me ASAP to avoid disappointment.

Carolyn Edwards: Email: carolyn@edwardsglos.fsnet.co.uk

25 Years of Offa's Dyke Group!

This is certainly something to celebrate and to start the ball rolling; I've been in touch with many of the founder members of the group asking for their memories of the early days of the group. I hope that the following articles will be of interest to all our members old & new and they may jog the memories of more of you to contribute your thoughts to the July newsletter.

The first person I contacted was Fiona Wilton, who started the group by putting a notice in the EHPS (Endurance Horse and Pony Society) newsletter. See the front cover of this newsletter. She was also the first Chairman of our group and is a life member. She said:

'I started the group from scratch. Literally drove round everywhere from Brecon to Gloucester with posters. In those days there were Freda Waycott and Leslie Dunn doing some Long Distance Riding as we called it then. I was new to that sport and discovered that the nearest rides were several hours away by trailer. Not appropriate when you are at the bottom end of it – and so I started things with a pleasure ride from Trellech and asked all of those who responded about that if they wanted a group. It took several months to affiliate to the Endurance Horse and Pony Society so technically this is our 25th year but actually our 26th though let's not fuss!'

Fiona

I'd forgotten until I received the following article from Delwyn Hall that she thought up the name of the Group.

It all started for me with long distance rides organized for Hereford and District riding club by Jane Friend nee Donovan (Gold medal team member at Stockholm). A ride organized by Lesley Dunn from her field came next and we were invited to attend a meeting at the North Village Hall to form a group affiliated to Endurance Horse & Pony Society, (EHPS). Enough of us attended to form a group and when suggestions were asked for a name I mentioned Offa's Dyke as my son & his friends were walking the footpath. The vote was taken & there you have it.

I rode my daughters Welsh x T.B. pony and rode in all leather tack with standard stirrups. I wore long black boots, cream jods. Tweed jacket, shirt & tie & black cap-not forgetting the obligatory hair net and yellow string gloves. Crews were the exception rather than the norm for us at the lower end & I often rode 40 miles without help. The clock kept running during the half way vetting so many people didn't do much to their horses but jumped straight back on. Also I remember horses being lunged before vetting to increase the heart rate as the gradings were for the difference between out and in, so the higher your heart rate going out the more chance of a good grade when

you came back in. Also leg protection was not allowed. If worn you got no grade-only completion and any cuts or abrasions were penalised.



I think overall the standard of horsemanship has improved. We know so much more and have access to so much more information, but sadly the general public still seem unaware of us.

Photo left (courtesy of Katherine Thornton) shows the vet gate of European Endurance Championships at Southwell, England 1993. Team and individual Gold medals to Britain.

vetgates would have seemed impossible and texting during an E.R. would be something out of Dr. Who!

Have we lost the camaraderie? Do we still want to ride the rough trails and deal with the broken gates on course? Whatever will the next 25 years bring-flat tracks galloped at breakneck speeds at only one or two venues? I hope not.

Delwyn Hall

My best memories of the Group prior to 1993 are The training weekends held at Dougie and Barbara Bonds' home where we stayed and had good riding, flatwork and veterinary advice from Tony and Marcy Pavord who helped organise these weekends. I also remember a ride on Sugar Loaf being quite special. The training weekends at the Bond' home in Staunton were supported by riders from all parts of the Country. I remember 2 from as far as London. Most of us stayed in the house and enjoyed the good hospitality of the Bond family. The riding was fittening work on the Hills in the area. Flatwork was in an open field, which proved interesting for some. Marcy and Tony Pavord gave good advice on trotting up for the vet and how to help your Horse and yourself in vet Gates. We all went home wiser after the w/e. The weekends at Trewscoyd were likewise with wonderful outriding on the Black Mountains .Good company with horse loving people all going home having enjoyed ourselves. I can remember the riding on Sugar Loaf Mountain but not sure if it was part of a Training weekend or not.

Margo Barry

Early Endurance Experience

My first real contact with long distance riding was in April 1982 when on holiday with friends and our horses on Exmoor when coincidentally the route was being marked for Horseshoe. I know it was then, as Falklands war was on & the only time I ever watched news while on holiday. It took me all year to find out how to get involved, as less was happening then and the first ride I ever did was Bronze Buckle qualifier at Clent Hills April 1983. I think I did not discover EHPS until the end of that year but there were not

many rides. Then sometime later, I read a letter in the EHPS newsletter written by Fiona Wilton suggesting the need to form a local Group. A meeting was arranged which I attended and ended up on the steering committee. Fiona was the Chairman and others on the original committee were Debbie Williams, Katherine Thornton, Bryan Gilbey Margaret Riley, Jane Donovan and Sue Whitehead. Lesley Dunn was also involved but did not want to be on the committee.

The first pleasure ride that I organised was in 1988 when I had 10 entries, one of whom was Margaret Barry. I thought it was a huge amount of work for the number of entries but everyone came back so enthusiastic that I repeated it every year until we had the proper Cranham Ride. In 1989 I had 26 entries which included Lyn Brown, Gina Harris, Margaret Riley, Jan Robins and Lesley Dunn and in 1990 45 entries and 54 in 1991 after which I think it became a graded ride. In Feb 1992 I had a newcomers' seminar here at home. 15 people came including Gina, Debbie Williams and Lyn Brown.

Margaret McKiddie

The following from Fiona Wilton – founder of Offa's Dyke Group on the changes in the gear we use over the 25 years since she started.

Kit and caboodle. From Black and White to Full Colour



Photo shows 8am Wiltshire Doves ride. Had to break the ice on this water as was the first competitor through it! (had slept (actually not slept but passed) the night in a literally freezing trailer whilst Madame had a lovely Salisbury Racecourse box. Warrens Hill Shimara (Shimmer) at her best.

1986. 20 miler under BHS rules and I have first to pass the tack inspector. I am assured that it is all about safety but I haven't been inspected since pony club. Not much has changed. I obey all the rules and trot her up for the vet and farrier in full tack and ratcatcher cub hunting kit. Newly washed breeches are a bit tight for this. Polished soles of the polished top boots slip from the irons so am legged up onto a whirling dervish of a grey arab mare. Velvet cap, tweed coat, shirt, tie, hairnet, cream breeches. Glittering BHS badge. Tack judge compliments my cleanliness but thinks that the mare should stand stock still for inspection on the start line as at a show and that was a pity that I ruined the look by using webbing

jumping reins (I know I need the grip!) AND I am missing the requisite hoof oil (poor farrier!). Plus I should have pulled and plaited all that "unsuitable arab" mane. On the route we will have few brakes due to wet leather gloves and a thick mild eggbut snaffle with cavesson noseband . At the end I am soaked through and soggy with absorbed rain and sweat. My ankles ache from the effort of retaining pedals. The numnah and girth are hot and wringing and would have rubbed her raw if we had gone much further. But we complete fast and with no penalties.

Next ride. 25 miles under EHPS rules. People in jumpers and canvas smocks (some of them DONT WEAR NOSEBANDs!) Daringly I leave off the hacking jacket and replace it with a polo neck, barbour and rubber top boots (still very Pledge shiny but I can at least mount on my own which is essential given the number of gates!) and I risk a drop noseband ,fulmer snaffle, running martingale and breast plate due to the hills. . Half way round we have a change of numnah and gloves and lose the martingale and noseband. We are up on open mountain and I am glad of the contents of my heavy pockets and saddle bag (sweets, compass hoof pick, bandage ,whistle, mints, drink,) but my crew cant spot me. No penalties again and I am so admiring the maybe more casual looking people who do really look after their animals.

1988 with a number of longer rides under my belt I spend some time in Australia at a major distance ride -where no one uses a bit at all, just knotted rope bridles, folded blankets and long stock saddles are the order of the day. Jeans and big hats and yes-barbies. I buy a blue plastic bridle. Don't quite dare no bit at all and get an English hackamore.

Back home the blue gets me some very funny looks and the jeans rub. The mare who heaves my arms out in a snaffle makes no effort to argue at all in the hackamore and so there is no more brake failure. She loves it and floats along in her huge extended trot and neck reins as if born to it. I actually try riding her in a headcollar and even in company it's also fine for everything except collection- but rules decree a bit. We are finally at one and start and stop easily on EHPS rides..We win a 40 ER at over 13mph. (On BHS rides with different tack rules we must use a conventional bit so it's back to tying her head down at the start and undressing her on the way round. Eventually they will harmonise rules but not yet.).

At the Golden Horseshoe(BHS) we will have to run alongside and possibly wade rivers. Back to the rubber top boots. This year it's so hot my legs sweat and the foam linings soak it up. The hot sun then bakes the sides of the boots, heats the trapped water and my lower legs are agony. The crew think I'm fussing about cramp but when they finally get them off me I have been scalded from the knees down. Mare had her stuff changed and nothing rubbed her but we didn't think of me.

Soon I race in luminous yellow long socks with ankle length paddock boots and a matching yellow skull cover. The safe but thick rawhide leathers tend to pinch the calves of those who don't keep their heels down and toes forward for 50 miles. Heavy leather chaps are favoured by many but I can't afford them and get thicker socks. Corduroy johds (revolutionary navy) have replaced the cream stretch breeches too. Comfy except the metal catch on the fly reliably rubs my navel raw at about 40 miles. I learn to put a corn plaster on before starting.

On a trip to California I buy a bum bag which replaces the saddle bag and doesn't bang on the horses sides. They call them fanny packs and I must remember not to say that in the UK. It's big enough for the usual stuff plus an Equiboot just in case. In the States I also buy an electronic pulse monitor for humans and stitch part of it onto a girth. It works quite well but we are not allowed electronics so it can only be used in training at home. I'm reading all about fartlek and interval training for people and trying to apply it to horses. It's working. I learn some shiatsu and use it on self and horse. Cranking her tail looks like winding her up to go faster. Let the opposition believe it.

We look at diet and electrolytes and how to avoid painful lactic acid in the muscles of both horse and rider after a race. I have suffered myself and my beloved mare is not going to it I can help it.

Somebody invents a neoprene gel numnah. Huge improvement on the very hot but rub free sheepskin in terms of no concussion and washable -but the saddle does slip badly when the horse sweats. String girths don't slip but can pinch and must be tight if the saddles going to roll. Leather Vice Versa So Cottage craft padded cotton girths and numnahs is the compromise. Blue, several of both per ride it is.

My little sons Fireman Sam lunch bag stores ice for the day in case of sole bruises. Shimmer never has any but we lend it to others quite often.

Fine (in place of thick string) gloves with gummy pimples for Christmas! Yo! I might have good hands again (if I ever needed a contact again!)

Cages for the stirrups. I can now ride in daps safely - but I never do. Machine washable one way wicking sweat rug. We can at least arrive smart and dry.

Stop watch which can be worn on the wrist and which runs for 12 hours (previously available only round the neck or on the wrist for divers and eventers - who tend to finish rather faster than that!)

1990 Purpose designed saddle for the next horse fits her and me perfectly, hackamore from the start and everything including me light and bright as possible. We are winning from the outset. Technology is being applied to great effect and no one turns a hair at colourful regalia. We notch up the miles, fitter and faster.

But my competition days are ended by serious (non horse related) accident and well before the Millenium I hang up my special blue race reins for the last time.

2012 and we are talking to our now adult sons partner preparing to race Ironman (2.4 miles ocean swim, 112 miles hill bike, 26 mile run all consecutive in one day and you think Endurance riders are mad) . She views 50 something overweight unfit mother in law and muddy old horses doubtfully when I say we used exactly the kit she does but son confirms my lunacy. Out comes her state of the art pulse monitor, interval training record, lycra and neoprene kit, ice packs and gel cycle saddle. She has pimped running gloves and high viz recognize me colours. Sometimes her bike has brake failure but in a race doesn't worry about it. She sees a physio for massage or even an ice water bath after a race to counteract lactic acid and I teach her some horse shiatsu. She likes mints and carries them along in what she also doesn't call a fanny pack.

Times change, but not that much.

Fiona Wilton

The following article from Katherine Thornton, who now lives in the Midlands.

I can remember the early days of the Offa's Dyke Group so well - I went to the inaugural meeting. It started for me when I went to a 10 mile pleasure ride held at Llanarth, near Raglan. I rode my overweight and traffic shy fell pony, we got round but only just. Jane Donovan (now Friend) was there with her lovely horse Ibriz; they skipped round the course twice as a training ride. This seemed an unbelievable feat to me, how on earth could any horse do 20 miles when we were just about exhausted having done 10? Ibriz was the very picture of an endurance horse, lean and fit with his mane in a long arab braid, he looked wonderful. And indeed he was wonderful; he and Jane went on to win individual silver at the World Equestrian Games in Stockholm in 1990. At that ride we were given leaflets inviting us to attend a meeting to be held at The North village hall, to decide if there was enough interest to start an endurance riding group. I went to that meeting, there was plenty of interest and the Offa's Dyke Group of the Endurance Horse & Pony Society began.

One of the first events I attended was a training session given by Lesley Dunn - held at her stables, we were able to see some of the horses and find out how we might train and prepare for an event. It was fascinating and I was hooked. Although any equine can have a go, I wanted to be able to compete in CTRs (competitive training rides). I sold my pony and bought a horse, Charlie, a 12 year old chestnut thoroughbred. He was such a good horse - forward going, with a tremendous walk and best of all absolutely traffic proof so we could go anywhere. I took him to a pleasure ride organised by Fiona Wilton and it was just great to sail round it and know that we could have easily gone on. 25 miles for a CTR began to look like a possibility.



Photo at LDR seminar held at my house April 1990. Lesley Dunn (on pony) had won the ELDRIC trophy- which was a rather odd looking saddle. She brought it to the seminar to show us. Also pictured are my family and Jane Donovan.

My first CTR (Competitive Trail Ride) was at Trellech, organised by Lesley Dunn. The pre-ride vetting was stomach churning nerve wracking, but we got through it and were off. Thank goodness for such a well organised ride - good information and a map sent in advance, a well-marked route, friendly and helpful ride officials. My husband Colin crewed for us, we both had a lot to learn, but we managed to get a Grade 3 and there was no looking back.

Tony Pavord and Jim Kerr were often the experienced endurance vets at those rides. I particularly remember there was no sneaking anything past Jim, he would quite rightly spin any horse he had any doubts about and if your horse was anything less than 100% you were

out. It meant that if you passed, you could truly hold your head up high and congratulate yourself with the old endurance motto, to finish is to win.

Photo left was taken at Tintern ride, September 1990. The old plastic bibs and Charlie in his hackamore bridle, plus my 'shot out of a cannon' skull cap!



Another very influential person in those days was Marcy Drummond (who later married Tony Pavord). I had a copy of her book 'Long Distance Riding' for Christmas in 1987 (I have it still) and it was my bible.

I joined the Offa's Dyke committee and began to get involved in organising rides myself with the unfailing help and support of Colin. We organised the Black Mountains training rides, with the help of Peter Friend and the army to keep all the check points in communication with base. That led to a training weekend in the Black Mountains, with sessions on map reading and timing and a training ride with mock vettings. I think Marcy did a slide show after dinner in the evening. We went on to run the Forest of Dean ride for a few years.

My time with Offa's Dyke came to an end in 2000, when we moved up to the midlands with Colin's job. But I still hear what you are all up to from Karen Jones and often think back about such happy times.

Photo shows Karen Jones and Ginny, me with Pharoh. Red Dragon October 2000



Congratulations Offa's Dyke on your 25th birthday and best wishes to all the current committee and members.

Kath Thornton.

Ride and Die- to finish is to win

Fiona Wilton

Not sure exactly when arranging a Ride and Tie race seemed like a good idea. But sometime in the early days of Offa's Dyke we wanted to do something fun.

Ride and Tie is a race. It involves teams of 8 legs and a headcollar. This is how it goes.

Rider one (2 legs) rides off on horse (4 legs) to agreed tie spot. Horse is tied up using headcollar and rider one runs off towards next tie spot. Meanwhile rider 2 (2 legs) runs from start to tie spot. Unties horse, mounts unaided, rides past rider 1 who is running along merrily, dismounts, ties horse to tie spot 2 and runs on and so on. Sort of leapfrog horse. Or endurance with running. Or cross country with riding. Good Fun!

Winner is first team of 8 legs past the vet and past the finish. (Note -no mention of humans being fit to continue). Typical competition is 20 miles of this.

You will have gathered that horses need to agree to be tied up and left unsupervised. Many of the Offa's Dyke faithful neddies are not felt to be keen on this notion, plus there is a dearth of suitable tie spots on Trellech Common, so we agree instead that there could be more legs (CREW) involved.

CREW are to be allowed to receive excited animal but not tie it up. They should hold it still (!!) and safely away from others but must not progress along the route or assist riders to mount. CREW will be needed in several places on the route but as many Offa's Dyke member competitors don't have too many CREW available the route becomes several short laps rather than one bigger loop.

Plus we are not that fit so we reduce it to well under 5 miles. Plus we know we are a bit slow so will give all finishers a large gin. Er no, a rosette.

So far so good.

Some people's husbands and lovers (mine) immediately offer to be CREW on the basis that it's better than the other options which are a) riding the bloody thing or b) running.

Others (Bill Avery Brown) have previous experience of holding an excited neddy with darned big feet in a public place and feel that even as a non rider riding it is a safer option.

Entry levels are good.

Teams are formed. I am with Margherita Coekin. She is nearly 30 years older than me and awaits a hip operation. I was not bad at X country at school but that was nevertheless two decades and pre baby ago. We are hotties and out to win. Gulp.

My fast excitable easy -to- win-on Shimmer is rejected (wont agree to wait nicely while others pass)

Margherita's Nabil is selected. He is a bit lower than Shimmer and so easier to mount in a hurry. He is also an Arab and in Arabic his name means Noble. (According to Wikipedia individuals with this name tend to be quiet, cooperative, considerate, sympathetic to others, adaptable, balanced. We may be hopeful. (Unfortunately Wikipedia had yet to be invented and no one had explained this to him. He's young and impressionable and believes we are sensible. He will learn.)

We start our serious training with a gentle hack out. The route is very familiar to us as just uphill from her yard. One part of it aka "sandy track" is a handy gallop training place and we always pull up to halt at the end so runaways don't expect to carry on down the road to home. Excellent route!

We organise our matching (ish) team tops and headcollar. Excellent. We will look the part. Nabil is well and has brakes and well schooled dressage manners. We can both hop on and off (and he braces when we lack spring). Excellent. He does rather bounce to indicate he isn't keen very on being left behind when others pass plus he is used to a really well balanced rider as he is only young but hey, he's a sweetie. And the CREW is armed with treats. We have faith.

We try running in jodhpurs and long boots. Hopeless, especially in mud. I try riding in running shorts and daps. Hopeless. The leathers pinch badly and before the age of the caged iron. It's not that safe. We decide to share a hat and leave it with the horse but we have different sized heads and when the hat slips I can't see where we are going that well - but hey it's fine, I know the area. We try riding without a saddle. I am hopeless about mounting fast enough and at one energetic attempt fling myself clean over the other side. Not great. We try fitting a sheepskin numnah over the saddle. Ooh lovely it's an armchair and doesn't pinch but you can't tighten the girth....Eventually tracky bottoms and paddock boots with a GP saddle (amazing to our dressage steed) it is. Tres glam and athletic looking. Our combined age is over 90 but we are lookin' GOOD.

Start. The other 6 legs set off at a good canter and I run at a good speed. Yes really. I have been cycling without a seat on my bike and it has worked.. Im out of breath but there waits the Noble one at the tie spot. And our horse (note unaccustomed compliment to CREW). On I get and race off. Well not really. My two legs were amazingly in unaccustomed but good strong running mode and unaccountably now seem to have become jelly when asked to hold onto a saddle. I hang on by the mane and flap along. I can't see too much. We pass Margherita who is going ok if a bit unsteady. Her legs seemed to have enjoyed riding and are less keen on running. I usually ride Nabil politely and in a dressage arena and he is giving me odd ear signals but bless him puts up with the serious lack of "seat". And hands, and contact. And voice since I can hardly breathe. He motors on at a smooth canter despite me and richly deserves his name.

Regain breath due to resting round horse's neck. At tie point leave saddle. On hitting ground legs buckle. CREW smirks. Horse is amazed. Get UP woman! Try to run on. Legs are now in riding mode and do not wish to run. Force myself along. Am overtaken by the other 6 legs who are about to meet sandy track. Nabil heads for home and in 5th gear as usual. Mercifully stops at usual place and is amazingly coaxed back into the official route by gasping rider. Despite, or because of, this top speed detour we have made up some time! This continues for what seems like days (I have forgotten the actual distance and number of circuits but can assure you it was at least 150 miles).

We get a rosette each and are mighty pleased!

Later our Noble steed gets a feed and gives us both an "old fashioned" look.

We are not that good on our pins for a day or so but we are both grinning ear to ear. Maybe it's rictus.

In endurance they say "to Finish is to win". In cross country its more "to win is to be finished" but either way it was very good fun indeed (and fabulous when it was over)

We haven't had one of these challenges in Offa's Dyke for over 20 years and most members are all pretty much recovered by now. When is it to be?

Fiona Wilton

Thanks once again to Piers Geddes for this contribution in his own inimitable style!

The famous jazz drummer Buddy Rich once opened an album with a track called, 'I can't get started'. There's not much to add, is there? Don't know about you, but in Geddesworld it's been a succession of marshy fields, lost shoes, abscesses and foot infections. And that's just the rider. Not funny! And cancelled rides of course. It seemed impossible that the new year should begin by so accurately mimicking the old one. Cruel too. But you pay in advance, said someone, in which case we've all got a brilliant time coming up. I hope yours comes sooner rather than later.

Suddenly – STOP PRESS – an uncanceled ride, and a horse in sound enough condition to try it. Every day in the week before its revised date – Tresham's, after that got ditched – I watched the snow line creep up the Bloreng, upon whose bleak and tempting slopes the Govilon Ride was to be run. It would be so easy to cancel it . . . would the organiser's nerve break? No, somehow it didn't, and we hopeful ones were rewarded by a magnificently testing route which could only be taken slowly, absolutely ideal if weather and foot trouble had restricted one's outings. Flynn, after an exciting start – his saddle slipped and he whirled round like a circus horse on rocket fuel – took over three hours to cover sixteen miles.



Day-member mum and daughter have a lovely day at Govilon (photo Carolyn Edwards)

But what a ride! What do people want from such things? Gates were open, bridleways trimmed, marking clear, and suddenly we'd climbed and

climbed and were trotting along the tramroad, the views high above Abergavenny as good as ever, to reach the still waters of the Punchbowl. Long routers like ourselves now dropped down almost to the canal at whose level we'd started, to climb once more back up where the snow till lay and the light held a pearly whiteness. Lovely, all this. Ahead lay the slopes of the Coity, like sugar-dusted chocolate cake. Down below, fields offered a final canter and we were done. A great day. Thank you a hundred times, Nicola, for a brilliant ride.

I must just mention the day before. Barbara Rees's lanto has repaired enough to be ridden again, as quietly as he permits, but that's his present limit. So why not try two riders, one horse? A fun ride at Ross provided the opportunity, and it worked surprisingly well. Pleasure and effort are shared, you each get a go, and the horse has a decent workout. The multi-tasking Welsh Cob is ideal, though of course any horse is equal to it; if hard times get any harder it could become a popular system, as it's very economical. I am sure Cadwaladr enjoyed it too; it almost turns a ride into a family outing. Weird but true. I keep thinking there's scope for this in endurance as well.

Anyhow, with any luck we're somehow under way. If you aren't, you will be, and may I humbly wish you a great season.

Thanks to Gill Talbot for sending me the following interesting article from her archive of old Offa's Dyke newsletters. Part 2 to follow in July

Beating the Metabolic Pull

Part 1 - Hydration

Reprinted from Endurance News, June 2000

Susan Garlinghouse, MS

My belief has always been that if a rider understands some of the *why* in nutrition and physiology, then it is much easier to understand the *how* in making well-informed decisions during and between rides. This article is the first in a three-part series explaining a little about the way things work in an exercising horse, along with suggestions on how to apply this knowledge for better metabolic integrity and performance.

Whether your goal is to race at FEI levels, top ten or just get back into base camp before the barbecue is all gone, the common denominator is that first you have to finish with a horse that is fit to continue. You do not need an advanced degree to recognize the metabolically fit horse---he has good gut sounds, is eating, drinking, is well hydrated, bright and alert. Most of us have also seen the other end of the scale---the deflated horse with an IV running into his neck, that the treatment vet is hovering over, that is on his way to a clinic. The difference between the fit to continue horse and the treated horse depends largely on three primary metabolic factors---hydration, gut motility and energy balance. The first two are so closely related as to be almost the same issue and are by far the most critical factors in maintaining metabolic integrity.

The third factor, energy balance, has become a hot topic and can certainly make the difference between a win and a middle of the pack finish. However, the amount of rocket fuel on board is not going to help if your horse is dehydrated, colicking and already in trouble. If you remember anything from these articles, remember the order of priorities---hydration and motility first, and *then* energy balance.

Assuming your horse is conditioned for the job at hand, and you have paid attention to maintaining hydration and motility during every stage of the ride, you will find your horse has better performance, recoveries and stamina, long before you start considering, "how do I increase his energy?"

This first article covers hydration, which is much more involved than just letting the horse drink at every water stop, and remembering to carry a sponge. What exactly does water do in the body, anyway? For the endurance horse, one of the most critical roles is the removal of excess heat during exercise. During a fifty-mile ride in ambient temperatures, the average horse will produce enough heat to melt a 150-pound block of ice, *and then bring that water to a boil*. If that heat is not removed, the internal body temperature will quickly rise high enough to literally cook the entire body. Evaporative cooling via sweat production and respiration accounts for the majority of heat dissipation during exercise. Horses that are dehydrated progressively lose their ability to produce sweat, a condition called *anhidrosis*, resulting in loss of cooling and a concurrent rise in body temperatures. As the body dehydrates and blood loses plasma volume and fluidity, the cardiovascular system becomes less efficient at transporting oxygen and other resources throughout the body. The heart rate increases to compensate, so that a horse that canters easily at 130 beats per minute when fully hydrated may have a heart rate of 20-30 beats higher when dehydrated, simply due to the extra work of pumping less fluid blood. Not only does this result in slower recoveries, but it also has a significant effect on the efficiency of muscle function. To maintain the same intensity of work, the horse will rely more and more heavily on anaerobic metabolism, contributing to faster fatigue and greater incidence of metabolic disease, such as colic or tying-up. As effort increases and efficiency decreases, the body responds as though to an emergency (which, in fact, it is), and begins to shunt blood flow away from less-vital organs, such as the gastrointestinal tract, in order to maintain maximum circulation to heart, lungs, muscles and central nervous system. As blood flow decreases to the digestive tract, gut motility slows and may stop entirely, leading to colic until blood flow and motility are restored.

Progressive dehydration also affects the normal functioning of the "thirst center" in the central nervous system. Thus, dehydrated horses badly in need of fluids may entirely lose interest in drinking voluntarily. If you know your horse has been working and sweating hard throughout the day, and yet is not drinking, *do not assume he doesn't need water*. In fact, he may be approaching a metabolic crisis if not resolved quickly. Don't make the mistake of thinking, "he knows best what he needs"---use your head to make the right decisions on his behalf.

During a hot and strenuous ride, horses can lose from 1.5 - 4 gallons of water *per hour* in the form of sweat. Over the course of a 50-mile ride, this can often add up to ten (or more) gallons of fluid lost solely through sweat production. Research conducted by Gary Carlson at UC Davis indicates that the average Tevis horse experiences a net loss of almost five gallons of fluid between the start and finish (equivalent to approximately 4% of body weight in a 900 - 1000 pound horse). Losses of over 12 gallons have been measured, representing 10% of the body weight. Keep in mind these numbers represent the fluids that remain unreplenished in the equine body, *after* the horse has presumably had ample

opportunity to drink throughout the day. These results indicate that even under ideal circumstances, horses may not be able to drink enough water to replenish the fluids lost through sweat production, resulting in progressive dehydration.

It has been estimated that dehydration losses of as little as 3-4% (that is, 3-4% of body weight has been lost in the form of fluid) have an adverse effect on performance, even though outward clinical signs may not be readily apparent. Horses experiencing an 8% dehydration have a capillary refill time of 2-3 seconds, poor skin tenting, dry mucous membranes, dry feces (and, therefore, are at greater risk of colic) and generally a high, hanging heart rate. A horse at 10% dehydration is in serious trouble, requiring extreme veterinary intervention, and at 12%, the horse is close to imminent death. Skin tenting alone is a relatively inaccurate method of determining extent of dehydration, and often lags behind changes in true hydration status. Therefore, along with the ride veterinarian, you must consider *all* metabolic factors in evaluating your horse, including mucous membranes, gut motility, heart rate, capillary refill time, attitude and way of going.

What is the difference between a clinically normal horse with 4% dehydration and one in metabolic distress at 8% dehydration? *Less than five gallons of fluid in the body can make the difference between completion and a metabolic crisis.* So--- your horse is already drinking at every puddle and bucket, you have finally mastered that flying sponge trick, your crew is waiting with plenty of cool water for washing, and you dutifully clip his winter hair every year. What else can you do to improve his hydration status?

One of the easiest ways to prepare for good hydration on Saturday is to maximize forage intake the week before. Forages take several days to reach the hindgut, so that Thursday's hay is in the cecum and large colon on Saturday. For reference, the foregut consists of (in order) the stomach and small intestine, while the hindgut consists of the cecum, colon and rectum. Fiber both encourages water intake and absorbs and holds water as it moves through the digestive tract. Although 90% of the water will have already been absorbed prior to reaching the hindgut, several gallons are still present and available as the hay moves through the system on Saturday. This provides a significant extra reservoir of fluid and electrolytes to draw upon during exercise-induced dehydration. Recent research has indicated that feeding one of the soluble "super-fibers", such as soaked beet pulp, along with hay, further increases this fluid reservoir. This extra water alone may make all the difference between Completion and Trouble. Make sure that the horse has hay available during the trailer ride to base camp, as well as immediately upon arriving and unloading. Adequate fiber intake the night before, as well as a dose of electrolytes, will trigger thirst responses and drinking throughout the night to ensure the horse starts fully hydrated.

The timing of meals fed before and during a ride also has an effect on hydration. Many horses are still provided with a large "breakfast" before the start, little or nothing until the lunch stop when another large meal is provided, and then little or nothing again until the finish. Studies have demonstrated that such feeding practices (more than 4-5 pounds of any type of feed, spaced more than 2-3 hours apart) results in a large fluid shift from the plasma volume (the fluid portion of blood) into the digestive tract. These fluids are used to provide saliva and other gastric juices needed to process the large meal. In a 1000-pound horse, these fluid shifts may equal 4-5 gallons of fluid, resulting in a 15-24% decrease in total plasma volume. Don't worry about the exact numbers, just think which is easier for the heart to circulate---thin, fluid blood, or thick "sludge"? While this fluid moves back into the plasma volume within a few hours, the net result is a transient dehydration that can significantly affect performance until the condition corrects itself. In a backyard horse standing around doing nothing, the effect is relatively unimportant---to an endurance horse that covers many miles in those few hours, the effect can make a significant difference.

To avoid this fluid shift, simply avoid feeding large meals only at vet checks---help your horse be a "nibbler" instead of a "feast-eater" during endurance rides. The same amount of food, fed in small, frequent meals every hour or two---instead of intermittent feasts---avoids these fluid shifts entirely, and yet still provides the same total nutrition. Make an effort to provide small amounts of food in between vet checks---a baggie of hay or grain in a cante bag, or a few minutes of grazing along the trail. If you know you will be doing some footwork in the next few miles out of a vet check, carry along a thin flake of hay and hand it out as you jog along. Practicing eating along the trail at home will make it easier for your horse to do so during a ride---and there are few tricks your horse will learn faster than that you want him to eat along the trail! Although opportunity differs for every rider depending on the goals for the day, the point is to examine your riding plan and make an effort to provide small, frequent meals whenever possible, avoiding the intermittent feast. Those few extra minutes spent along the trail will be worth the effort in metabolic health and performance.

The rule of "small and frequent" also applies to anything provided in an oral syringe. While fluid shifts are not as large or dramatic, *any* concentrated source of salt or sugar draws fluid inward until the diluted solution is reabsorbed into the bloodstream a relatively short time later. To minimize the effect, any oral syringing should be broken up into smaller doses---better eight 2-ounce doses than two eight-ounce doses! Make every effort to only syringe after the horse has already had a drink (preferably immediately afterwards), as the less dilution required from plasma volume, the better. Not only will plasma volume be spared, but also absorption of the electrolytes into the system will be more efficient and thus more available during exercise. Pre-loading electrolytes several hours before the start and throughout the day not only avoids progressive electrolyte depletion, but also triggers a complex endocrine response in the kidneys and central nervous system to encourage early drinking. Once absorbed, the body does not store excess electrolytes, so pre-loading should be limited to the night before and several hours before the start. Pre-loading for days and days before a ride does no harm, but is simply a waste, as the kidneys have long since flushed the excess out in the urine as soon as current needs have been met. While salt does trigger a thirst response, and can be used to encourage drinking during a ride, the response is not an immediate one. Use this as an early strategy to maintain a metabolic edge throughout the day---if you wait until the horse is already dehydrated and in a crisis state, the best you can hope for is damage control. Recognize the difference between a horse that is not drinking because he doesn't like what is being offered, and one in a metabolic emergency. In many instances, all the horse may need is a few extra minutes to recover, eat some green grass, hay or mash, and then will drink normally. If the horse is not drinking when you know he should be, is uninterested in food, recovering poorly, acts dull or colicky, or is otherwise exhibiting signs of exhausted horse syndrome, do not attempt to magically fix the situation with a large oral dose of electrolytes alone. At this point, it's entirely possible to make the situation worse instead of better. Realize that the horse is in a crisis and seek veterinary help immediately---although correcting the electrolyte imbalance is an immediate priority, administration with fluids via intravenous or nasogastric tube into the stomach, rather than oral syringing, may be required to prevent further deterioration of the situation.

Although not as prevalent as in past years, it is still common to see endurance horses being fed rations which are well in excess of protein requirements, especially in the West, where good alfalfa is cheap and plentiful. While many horses have and do compete successfully on high-alfalfa rations, this too has an effect on hydration status and should

be a consideration in your metabolic strategy plan. Horses that compete well on high-alfalfa rations are most likely doing well in *spite* of the high dietary protein, not *because* of it---undoubtedly a testament to the many other management, conditioning and riding factors that a smart owner puts into a successful ride. For every horse that wins a ride while consuming a high-alfalfa ration, there are undoubtedly many others that could have finished, placed higher, or earned better vet scores by simply decreasing the dietary protein consumed. This conclusion is supported by Dr. Sarah Ralston's work at Rutgers University, which suggests the incidence of metabolic pulls increase as dietary protein levels significantly exceed requirements.

Mature performance horses only require 8-10% crude protein in their diet, and these needs do not significantly increase with the demands of endurance conditioning. Good-quality grass hay or pasture easily provides these protein requirements regardless of the level of performance. If you are in doubt about the quality of forage, a few pounds of a 12-14% grain mix from a reputable company ensures adequate protein without supplying excess. Supplying "extra" in the form of alfalfa or high-protein supplements, such as Calf-Manna, to "support muscle development", is neither required nor beneficial.

A high protein ration's effect on hydration is based upon its inherent nitrogen content. Once protein requirements have been met, the body utilizes excess protein for energy production. The amino acid molecule is snipped apart and the carbon backbone sent into energy-producing pathways, while the remaining nitrogen atom is discarded. Nitrogen is first degraded to ammonia and then to urea, which is subsequently filtered out by the kidneys and excreted in the urine. Both ammonia and urea are toxic substances, therefore urine production to remove them from circulation takes priority over water conserving responses during exercise. The net effect is that horses consuming high-protein rations have increased urine production and higher water requirements simply to clear the body of an avoidable waste product. In horses living in box stalls (not uncommon in highly developed urban areas), the increased ammonia and urine production can lead to greater incidence of upper respiratory irritation, as well as poorer hoof wall and sole quality. During a ride, when water intake may already not be enough to keep up with loss, the additional loss of water through increased urination is an added contribution to potential dehydration.

While excess protein does contribute to energy production, the pathway is a relatively inefficient one, as protein metabolism produces 3-6 times more waste heat than does the utilization of an equivalent amount of carbohydrates or fat. In cold climates, this heat production from excess protein can be used to help maintain body temperature, especially during the off-season. However, during hot weather and prolonged exercise, this excess heat must be removed from the body via the same cooling mechanisms as heat from exercising muscles---sweat production and respiration. During intense exercise in hot or humid conditions, the net effect is a greater heat load to dissipate, increased fluid and electrolyte losses, and yet another contributing factor to potential dehydration. Does this mean you should not feed alfalfa at all during endurance rides? Not necessarily. Alfalfa contains high levels of both calcium and potassium, and small amounts throughout a ride can help offset electrolyte deficits. However, a few pounds at vet checks are sufficient, especially if you are otherwise providing electrolyte supplementation, and more alfalfa is not necessarily better! If your horse is being picky at a stop, and refuses anything but alfalfa at vet checks, better to let him eat more alfalfa than he really needs than to not eat anything at all. Ideally, however, provide limited amounts of alfalfa, while offering other lower protein feeds such as grass hay, beet pulp or grain-based mash. At home (if alfalfa is fed at all), limit intake to 25% of the forage ration, and never more than 50%. Again, while

many horses continue to compete successfully on high-alfalfa rations, its effects on hydration status should be a consideration in your management plan.

To summarize the main strategies included in this article:

1. Maximize forage intake for several days before the ride, including the use of "super fibers", such as beet pulp.
2. Pre-load with electrolytes the night before and several hours prior to the start.
3. Provide small, frequent meals every hour or two along the trail by carrying along a few pounds of feed, or by intermittent grazing.
4. Anything provided in a syringe should be provided in small doses at frequent intervals, preferably after a drink.
5. Provide a ration adequate, but not excessive, in dietary protein by limiting alfalfa and other high protein feeds.

The next article will address strategies to maintain gut motility.

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I enjoyed reading the article about Bonnie's first ride in the last newsletter. It brought back happy(??) memories. I remember that ride well, Slosh bottles were a major problem and continued for several rides. I remember at the Windsor Ride where they had static crews and I fell off. Several years later at the same ride I remarked on that experience to the person at the crew point then and she replied 'Yes she remembered it too, as she had been the person who handed me the slosh on that occasion'. It obviously made a big impression on her.

Margaret McKiddie

Congratulation to Liz and Marcus on the birth of Samuel!



Many of you will remember Liz Taylor (now Warner) who was a member of our group from a very young age & went on as a young rider to compete at the very highest FEI level. We announced last year her marriage to Marcus and move to a Tennant farm in Devon.

We are very pleased to let you know that they are now the very proud parents. Liz

says 'Our little boy, Samuel Henry Warner, was born on Tuesday 19th March at 10am, a week early but a surprisingly big 7lb1oz. Neither of us can stop smiling. Xxx'

Liz is obviously settling well into combining being a mother and farmer. She commented on Facebook April 17th 'Hmmm...some people take their babies swimming, or to 'baby classes' at the children's centre...do we think Sam is the first 4 week old baby to sit through an evening of 'wormer resistance in sheep' talk by our vets?! I will be testing him on its content tomorrow. He was fascinated, although I did have to leave for 10 mins when he got the Hic-ups...!!!

Did you know.....??

.....encouraging your horse to have a pee will help to lower his heart rate. A horse with a full bladder gets stressed and his heart rate could increase. Get into the habit of whistling every time your horse relieves himself at home. This will teach him to pee on command. In the Vet Gate, find him a nice grassy patch (they don't like leg splashes) and get whistling!

Vika's ride: April update

In the February newsletter Hilary Engel explained how her daughter, Vika, is going to set out on her fifteenth birthday in late May on a six-day, 100-mile across Wales. She will be raising money for the Laurie Engel Fund, set up by her family in memory of her brother, Laurie, who died of cancer at the age of 13. The fund is now helping to refurbish Birmingham Children's Hospital's cancer department.

Over the past two months we have worked out an itinerary for Vika's ride, and all of the accommodation is booked. On day one, May 25, we plan to drive from Herefordshire to the coast, and that afternoon at low tide Vika will ride down the beach from Ynyslas to Borth, then inland to Tal y Bont, to stay at the White Horse Inn.

On day two, her fifteenth birthday, she will ride from Tal y Bont, skirting Plynlimon, along bridleways and lanes, over moors and through forests, to a tiny place called Esgair Fochnant, south-east of Machynlleth, where we have been offered a complimentary caravan.

Day three takes us in a south-easterly direction to Llangurig, to the Bluebell Inn. All of the route for these first three days has been carefully marked on our maps by Dr Sarah Myhill, to whom we are extremely grateful. Sarah is a busy medical doctor, but also a Pony Club DC and a well-known trail rider, who every year takes a group of riders of all ages across the hills from her home near Knighton to the coast at Borth. Although we still haven't met her, Sarah has assured us that our plan is entirely 'doable': last year the youngest rider in her group was 8 and the oldest 83! She hopes to be able to meet Vika on the ride, coming out from Llangurig to escort her back there.

Day four is May 28, which should have been Vika's brother's 21st birthday. From Llangurig the route heads south-east again to Pen y Bont, to the Severn Arms. We are being helped on this stage of the journey by Medina Brock and Karen Roberts of Brandy House Farm, Felindre. Their company, Your Horse Adventures, arranges riding holidays in the hills of central Wales. They have given us valuable guidance about the kit that Vika and her pony will need on the ride; and Karen is kindly going to ride with Vika on a couple of days during the Easter holidays to reconnoitre this leg of the journey and mark the route on our maps. The next stage takes Vika from Pen y Bont to Bryngwyn. With this leg we have had help from Cath Bufton and Karen Cadman from the Underhill Riding Centre. Although, again, we haven't met them yet, they have offered help of various sorts; and during the Easter holidays Karen will be escorting Vika on a test-ride of this part of the journey, before marking up the route. She hopes that she and perhaps friends may be able to join Vika on the actual ride in May.

Becky Miles at the Bryngwyn riding stables has offered to accommodate the horses overnight. With the help of Becky and several landowners we have worked out a route from Bryngwyn into Hay (Thursday May 30) via Whitney toll bridge, using bridleways, moorland and woodland trails to avoid all but the last mile of road.

Some members of the Golden Valley Hunt branch of the Pony Club have already said that they would like to accompany Vika on the last day; and Revel Guest, the film producer, who is President of the branch – and chair of the Hay Festival – has offered to greet the riders when they arrive in Hay.

We've been assembling Vika's trail-riding kit: so she has her luminous waistcoat, her Ariat boots, her sheepskin seat-saver, her Italian navy waterproof trousers, her bum bag... And after attending the Offa's Dyke Group's meeting for novice endurance riders the other week I'm just taking a deep breath before investing in a Garmin Forerunner sportswatch that will measure the distance she covers. We are beginning to publicise the ride now, in order to invite sponsorship (see www.justgiving.com/bchlaurieengelfund). There will be articles in some regional newspapers in the next few weeks, as well as radio interviews.

Latest Update from Hilary: As you may have heard, we have gradually come to accept that Sparkle is not well: he was officially diagnosed with COPD last week, and so Vika is not riding him at all at the moment. We have shut him out in the field, and we are hoping that his condition will stabilise as the weather improves.

Meanwhile we needed to go and reconnoiter the route of the fundraising ride; and one of our trailriding friends, Karen Roberts, very kindly lent Vika a horse, while escorting her all the way from Llangurig to Bryngwyn. Vika and I have also since then checked out the route of the first day's ride, from Ynyslas to Tal y Bont.

Karen Roberts has now very kindly said that she is willing to take time off work to ride with Vika the whole length of the fundraising ride next month - which is great news, as we can now be confident that it will actually happen, safely.

We have also been offered a horse to buy, who belongs at the minute to Dr Sarah Myhill (the doyenne of trans-Wales riders!). He is a thoroughbred, an ex racehorse, who since giving up racing a year or so ago has done the ride across Wales as well as a season's hunting. We went to meet him on Saturday and of course Vika loved riding him. We are getting him vetted this week and hope, if all goes well, to bring him home next week.

A friend of ours who works at Bryngwyn stables and hunts with the Golden Valley has also offered to take time off to accompany Vika on the fundraising ride; and so we now have a workable team, with two adults. (Others have said they will join in on day 5 and day 6.)

If any EGB members would like to join in the ride at any point, then they would of course be welcome. I hope that some members may also wish to join in on the last day, riding into Hay, or escorting the riders.

Our plan for the ride, as you can see, has had to change almost daily to adapt to changing circumstances; but we are still determined that it will go ahead, and hope it will achieve its objective.

Hilary Engel hilary.engel@gmail.com

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All of our rides and events can only go ahead if we have lots of volunteers to help on the day. This can be anything from Vet Writing or Timekeeping to Car Parking and manning a road crossing or gate. If you can manage even half a day that would be a great help to the group.

Last year (despite running so few rides) we had over 60 volunteers throughout the season – Special thanks go to the 14 people who actually helped at more than 1 ride:

Alan Morgan, Annie Dawson, Barbara Rees, Belinda Josephi, Belinda Stewart, Caroline MacBrayne, Carolyn & Robin Edwards, Gina Harris, Heather Evans, Helen Mayo, Jane Smith, Pauline Atkinson and Rebecca Green (hope I haven't missed anyone!)

In recognition of our marvelous volunteers, Offa's Dyke has an annual raffle. Every time you help in 2013 your name will go into the 'hat' and 5 lucky winners will receive a £10 Countrywide voucher.

If you can offer to help at any of our rides or events, please contact the ride organiser, or alternatively use the 'contact' button on the website & we'll pass on the offer.

To help at any of our rides, please contact the ride organiser, or use the website contact button. Even ½ day would be a great help to us.

Adverts are free to Offa's Dyke members & associate members.

Other adverts cost £5 per half page.

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 by post. Please send 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

Dates for your diary

Wyre Forest	Fun Ride	Sat 27 th April	Heart of England Group
Bibury	Fun Ride	Sun 5 th May	Cotswold Group
Training Day Treworgan Farm		Sun 26 May	
Schooling/Massage lessons		Sat 8 June	
Blaenavon	Fun Ride	Sun 16 June	
Cranham	National	Sun 28 July	
Black Mountains Fun Ride		Sun 11 August	
Bwlch Raid	Fun Ride	Sun 22 September	
Plump Hill	Fun Ride	TBA	
Annual awards meeting		Saturday 7 December	

More information on the website 'rides & events' page

Web site: www.offasdykeegb.co.uk