

SOUTH BRENT RIDING CLUB AT THE BRC TEAM ENDURANCE FINAL 2010

Hosted by Endurance GB at the ROBIN HOOD CHALLENGE

On the week end of 4th and 5th Sept three intrepid members of South Brent Riding Club, Penny Hind, Mary Brown and Julie Brand, took their horses all the way to Southwell Race Course, near Newark, Notts. Sadly the fourth member of the team, myself Jeannie Frape, was only able to act as groom and crew as my pony had injured herself just before the competition. Even the logistics of getting the horses the 265 miles (each way) had been fraught with anxiety as having originally made the decision to transport ourselves it was then discovered that Penny's much envied little lorry was actually not able to carry the weight of two fit horses, two (fit!) riders and all the tack and fodder necessary for the week end. Julie's truck and trailer, however provided no such obstacle so to a certain extent the withdrawal of my pony at least eased the transport problem as then Penny's horse Shadow could travel on his own and she could take Mary as company whilst Julie took her own Raeleen and Mary's Ted with myself along to help with the two horses. We chose to leave early on the Saturday morning but at 6.30pm on Friday Penny's lorry got a gremlin in the fuel pump, luckily she was given some very advanced engineering advice... to hit it with a hammer should it not start over the next couple of days! Twelve hours later we were faced with another "technical hitch" when Ted was found to have lost a front shoe overnight along with a substantial amount of hoof. Nonetheless we loaded both horses and phoned Mary to alert her to the situation and she then was able to organise for the Blacksmith to be available for Ted on arrival. Julie commented that we needed "a blacksmith and a wizard" and she must have also waived her magic wand because sure enough, that was what we got, a real wizard of a blacksmith who calmly assessed the situation and reshod Ted with consummate skill. The actual journey up to Southwell went absolutely as planned, the traffic was minimal and the weather clear, we all stopped near Worcester to give the horses some sugarbeet water and a breath of fresh air and the drivers a break. The last part of the journey was along the A46 and this was the only non motorway road. The landscape had really flattened out by this time and Julie and I were much amused by an area named Six Hills, we were unable to distinguish even one of these! Apart from being flat the countryside was also rather uninspiring and we did remark that the riding looked a lot more fun in the West Country.

John Hudson, who along with his wife Jane, had the challenging task of organising this inaugural event for BRC very kindly phoned us during the journey to warn us that the venue was extremely busy and that parking spaces were at a premium and that we should aim initially for the Day Parking area, with a view to moving into the Overnight area later as riders who had been competing in the EGB rides and races on Saturday would be leaving. When we arrived we found that Penny and Mary had been able to do this already and had even pitched their tent, we took Mary's horse immediately to the blacksmith and she met us there. The venue, Southwell Race Course, was a lovely setting, very compact with scrupulously clean stables with deep paper bedding, sand and rubber surfaced walkways, a beautifully flat paddock for running the horses out for the vetting and plenty of open grass area for parking and corralling. It is an all weather track with a sand mix surface and there is uninterrupted view the whole way down the finishing straight. We arrived just too late to see a West Country rider, a friend of Julie's, come in with a racing finish but we did hear how exciting it was, so, in anticipation of this, a team talk was held to decide tactics regarding riding the finish with an exuberant flourish but still hoping to come in with a decently low heart rate!

We had qualified our team at Boccanoc in Cornwall, a fabulous ride, and this had been the very first ever endurance ride for Penny and Mary, though Mary's horse had competed with his last owner. Both Penny and Mary had been surprised at how little time the 30 minutes between vetting and the start had seemed and also, more importantly the 30 mins between finishing and the final vetting, with this in mind we meticulously planned every move on Sunday morning and I think it was quite helpful that, as I had no horse to do, I could fill in wherever an extra hand was needed. To add another dimension to the BRC Team Final, organisers John and Jane Hudson had decided that there should be a Turn Out prize awarded and so horses were shone to the utmost and team outfits were chosen. Peggy Douglas from Erme Valley RDA very kindly gave us emerald green polo shirts to wear, navy jodis were begged or borrowed all round and the horses sported emerald green browbands. The piece de resistance was a quarter mark with the letters SB in freehand with accompanying stars, the stencil for this was made by my

partner, Rinsey, and Julie and I held this to each side of each horses' quarters and I sprayed them with glittering gold spray paint! No sooner had we done the first horse than there were cries of "WOW" and this really did grab every one's attention. Sadly we did not win the prize but we did come third out of the 11 teams competing.

The initial vetting for our team was at 10.05 am, we were the second team to be vetted and so would be second team out at the start. Nerves started to click in here, but happily all three horses behaved well and were passed sound with heart rates well within the parameters. Mary's Ted was really the main stay of the team as far as this was concerned, he had previously finished with a Grade 1 whereas it was recognised that Penny's Shadow and Julie's ex-race horse Raeleen might very well end up with heart rates rather higher than desired. This was where my pony would have been a help as she has had a reliably low heart rate each time it has been taken this year. I am going to have to add here that I did shed a tear as they went off from the start without me!

On Saturday evening there had been a briefing by John H. and he had gone over as many points as possible with all the teams regarding the ride route, the markers, the marshalling, crew points etc. The markers for this ride were arrows on the ground, not as easy to follow as orange tape by any manner of means, especially for less experienced endurance riders. These markers and a slightly ambiguously marked map exasperatingly caused a problem for the S.B riders just after Check Point 1 where a turn onto a busy road was misinterpreted and only Julie's use of a compass, learnt from her experience at BHS Trec, put them back on track but time was lost here. I met them at a crewing point just a little short of halfway round the ride, not having a complete map of the area and with my copy of the ride map being rather faded I was afraid that it had taken me so long to get there that I was going to miss them but other crews assured me that they had not come through yet and some riders also mentioned that the "riders in green" had been seen going in the wrong direction. When they did come through they were of course rather upset and to add to that Julie felt that Raeleen was not showing her usual enthusiasm. It also became quite obvious that teams that had started well behind us had overtaken and were travelling far faster than we had ever planned to go in the first place! However, only a little daunted, they carried on, Raeleen rallying en route and relishing any chance of a canter. I returned to the venue to prepare for their return with water, buckets, sponges, sugarbeet water et al. Once having claimed a space there was just enough time left to grab a sandwich and drink and then head for the finishing post to watch for the team to come in. It seemed an age! The finishing straight of the race course was a brilliant place for spectators and riders could be seen coming in from a great distance away, hardly anyone could resist having a bit of a blast down the last few furlongs and at last our riders appeared and, despite any criticism they may have had regarding other parts of the ride (grass verges of busy roads, railway crossings, hard tracks) they cantered three abreast down the race course with broad grins on their faces!

The time taken to do the ride gave them a finishing speed of 10.51 kms per hour, a little slower than the qualifying round but the actual score would depend on the heart rates of the horses at the final vetting. It was all hands on deck to wash and cool horses and prepare them for this. Luckily we also had an extra hand in Carol, a friend of mine from Lincolnshire who had driven over to cheer the team on, she was able to help hold Raeleen for Julie and I concentrated on helping Penny to get Shadow as cool and calm as possible, Mary's Ted, once again a star, had a good steady low heart rate according to my amateur stethoscope reading, Raeleen's was falling to the low 50's and we just didn't dare try Shadow!

All three horses passed the trot up and as expected Ted's heart rate was ideally low at 44, Raeleen's 52 and Shadow's 56. The great issue here was that all were home safe and sound and they were turned out into their individual corrals to have a roll and a munch of grass. For us it was tidy up time, everything that had been hastily deposited in order to use any possible moment to cool the horses was packed up and taken back to stables, lorry and trailer. At this point Penny could not find her lorry keys.....she had dashed back during the cooling process, so the washing area was combed, the route to the lorry investigated but, no keys. Imagine her heart felt relief when she found them hiding down the leg of her jodis as she had missed the pocket in haste to get on with the next task! (A little later her camera did a similar disappearing trick, only to be found that evening velcroed onto one of Raeleen's magnet boots.)

After all this excitement Carol produced some very exotic sandwiches, the kettle was put on and some post ride scrutiny took place. Julie felt that Raeleen's lapses of energy were most probably due to the

fact that she is kept at grass 24/7 and of course over the last 48 hours she had only had a short time out on Saturday afternoon/evening as all horses had to be in their stables for the night. The Prize Giving was Scheduled for 4.30p.m. and although we scrupulously clock watched with this in mind, this must have been the most prompt of all prize givings ever known in the history of horse events! At 4.31 pm we were late! However although we missed the results for the Best Turned Out we were just in time to hear that South Brent Riding Club team had been awarded 6th place in the Final! All our jaws dropped, our eyes widened with surprise but rosettes were accepted with more big smiles. The winning team had come in at a stupendous pace of 14.88 kms per hour, the outside limit being 15 kms per hr and had all gained Grade 1 finishes. On our team Mary and Ted achieved a Grade 1, Julie and Raeleen a Grade 3 and Penny and Shadow a Completion. We did discuss and wonder amongst our selves just how our collective score could have achieved 6th place but decided that for that evening at least we would enjoy the moment, after all..... our was not to reason why.....we had competent administrators in John and Jane!

John and Jane were in fact hood winked by their computer which had added the score of a rider in another team to our score! This they discovered on their return home, when the phone call came I admitted immediately that we had been truly perplexed by the result so it did not come as any huge surprise that actually we had finished in 10th place!. However, this must not take anything away from the team riders who had worked very hard with their horses all summer, keeping them fit and well and making every effort with every aspect of the team event.

We also want to give a huge "ThankYou" to John and Jane for their interest and encouragement pre, during and post ride, they created a smashing atmosphere for the competitors and we all look forward to meeting them again next year.