

Hartpury 2012 Report

In October 2011 Lothian's Riding Club hosted the Area 1 Team Jumping Qualifiers at SNEC. Lothian's had two teams forward – the Smurfs and Smurfettes. Both teams put in great performances, with the Smurfettes finishing 4th and Smurfs winning the qualifier on a zero score! There was much celebration, only dampened by the realisation that Team Smurf was headed for Hartpury to jump in the National Championships!

Our Dressage team also won their qualifier, which was fantastic news! Sadly due to horse injury the team couldn't make it to Hartpury, which was a big blow for the whole club. Despite this disappointment, the dressage members put all their energy into supporting the jumping team, which was incredible and we can't tell you how much we appreciate this support!

Preparations began in earnest (well, after Christmas to allow for the weather and mince pies) with regular Team Practice nights at Tower Farm and our Fundraising drive. The practice nights are great for building confidence and addressing problems. Duncan's courses set us up really well for the Championship course we encountered down south. They are also a great opportunity to meet other team and club members and in a friendly, relaxed and supportive atmosphere.

The Fundraising Raffle draw was held the week before Hartpury and was a huge success. We raised enough funds to pay for the stabling, entry fees, accommodation and diesel to get us the 660 miles there and back. The success from the raffle and overwhelming support from the club members gave Team Smurf a massive boost – exactly what was needed as nerves started to seriously kick in with only a week to go!

The big day came, everyone was up very early double checking we had everything: passports, membership cards, hats, tacks, feed, rugs, hay, buckets...feel like we're missing something... oh yeah, horses! Julia and Jim took Midas with Zeb, Laura and Phil in their lorry. Jan and Ian went in Duncan and Debbie's lorry with Chilli and Ruby. We drove down in convoy and made good time. It was still a very long journey, taking nearly 10 hours.

We were welcomed by the Riding Club Officials at Hartpury for Passport and vaccinations check, and given the best stables right at the front of the main yard. The horses settled quickly, and the non-riding boys (Jim, Phil & Ian) went to sort out the accommodation we booked in the student halls. They seemed to take quite a long time (about the same length of time it might take to drink a pint) but they returned eventually. We split into groups and walked the horses off, showing them their surroundings and the warm-up arena for the following day. Then horses were tucked up in their plush stables to get some rest, and we went off to get some dinner.

The course was open to walk so we went round as a team and Duncan pointed out any potential problems and went over distances. It was great having the support of the rest of the team there and we all felt comfortable with the course by the end of the walk. So it was off to bed for an early night after our long day (via the Legends Bar, which the boys seemed to know exactly where to find on the huge campus!)

Next morning Laura was first on at 8.30am. She would have been shaking in her boots had she been able to stop shaking enough to actually put them on! Full credit to Laura, despite her nerves she got on Zeb and worked him in just like the practice nights at Tower Farm and had him listening and going well. Duncan did the practice jumps and the Smurf Support Team took over the gallery ready for Laura's first round, cameras and videos galore! In she came, the bell went, and she was off to a good start. Zeb's huge jump nearly unseated Laura at one point, but she kept her cool, rode on and went clear! The Smurfs went wild! What a start.

Julia was up next. She was cool (probably having scoffed the box of Kalms left in the lorry for her!) Midas was pretty relaxed in the busy collecting ring given it was mayhem. The Smurfs

invaded the gallery once more, looking like paparazzi, and Julia's round began. Midas took it all in and was jumping very well until he stopped at the bogey fence and we were gutted, but Julia rode well and it really hit home what a big ask it is for a genuine novice horse how daunting the Championships really are.

Jan was next with Chilli. Duncan helped with the practice fences. Jan went for pony-club style riding in the ring – at one point Duncan was worried she might actually take off from all the flapping – but it was another Smurf clear!

Duncan was last to go. Ruby was very tense, and a horse crashing into her in the collecting ring did not help. Duncan stayed calm and worked hard to get Ruby, who like Midas was not keen to go over the bogey fence, they made it round in style.

There was a huge sigh of relief, first rounds done, and we all got some lunch. There was a course change so we walked the new course as a team and discussed where problems may lie.

Laura was first on, and it was obvious from the four snoozing horses back at the stables that the long journey and excitement from the first rounds was taking its toll. Duncan did the practice fences and the warm-ups for all of us were geared towards tired horses. Laura jumped a super round again with Zeb. Julia and Midas settled into a better rhythm and made it over the bogey fence this time. Jan and Chilli had an unlucky pole which was down to tiredness. Duncan and Ruby jumped better than the first round; again it was obvious that Ruby was very tense and buzzy from the atmosphere.

The Team did very well to get round, the horses were all made much of and photographed by expert travelling Photographer-Smurf Phil. We may not have won the coveted green rugs and red ribbons this time, but we did have a fantastic time and both horses and riders learned so much!

We went back to Legends Bar to celebrate, eat an obscene amount of pizza, admire Debbie's Bumblebee, be grossed out by Jim's nose, and decide Julia and Duncan are infinitely better at show jumping than pool! Duncan and Debbie retired to the lorry and the rest of us fell into bed back at the halls (after a bit more bubbly in the common room of course!)

Next day we were awakened by the soothing tones of the fire alarm. Laura and Phil had 'steamed up' their shower room and opened the door. Whatever. All I know is there was a lot of humming of a certain Kings of Leon tune afterwards... Julia and Jan cleared up the empty bottles of bubbly left in the common room from the night before, unfortunately after the warden had clocked them from switching off the fire alarm! Ian and Jim cleared the rooms and loaded the stuff back into the lorries.

The horses were packed up and stables mucked out, and after a coffee and bacon roll we were Scotland bound. We almost made it to the end of the drive before Duncan's exhaust fell off, but not quite. Luckily Jim 'MultiSmurf' Dow had his multi-tool ready and fixed it using only a latex glove and wire coat hanger, and we were on our way again. We made it home without further incident and went our separate ways.

It was a super experience for riders, horses and partners alike. One that would most likely be out of reach of the average amateur rider, and certainly as an individual you wouldn't get anywhere near the amount of help and support our club offers. Teams are invaluable not only for the club, but for the members who put themselves forward and take part. So go on – take a chance and sign up to be part of Team Smurf! You will get endless help, support, training and friendly advice. The sense of team spirit is fantastic and you will make life-long friends and share life-long memories too (you may regret some of the memories!!!)