

From Robert Blane Chairman of Pony Club Endurance, Report on the Pony Club Endurance Championships.

On the A11 from Newmarket to Norwich you drive past the small town of Thetford and on the road side could be seen the first of many direction markers for 'Euston Park Endurance'. This is the best of starts, I thought as I made my way down to help run the Pony Club Endurance Championships on



the 19th of August, as there is nothing worse, after a long journey, in not actually being able to locate the venue you are aiming for. Following the direction markers I entered the gates of Euston Park and there started what could only be described as the most perfect weekend for the Pony Club members who attended

The organisation had started over Christmas when Nick Brooks-Ward of HPower and I, had a number of long email conversations regarding the possibility of the Pony Club running their Endurance Championships at Euston Park . Much was discussed and finally agreed with by Pony Club Headquarters, the final conclusion being that the championships would run in conjunction with the H.H.Shiekh Mohamed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Endurance Festival at Euston Park on the weekend of the 16th to the 19th of August. This alone was really exciting but when Nick also offered free entries, free stabling, a travel allowance ,rosettes and vouchers in kind as well as free use of all the facilities I couldn't believe our luck.

Sue Meadows of HPower, Emma Moffat and Rosemary Atfield soon became my allies in creating a championships that no one would forget. Members around the country continued with their qualifying rides and entries from as far afield as Lancaster, North Yorkshire and



Cornwall, started to roll in, leading to a total of 51 members ,representing 18 branches coming to this wonderful centre for Endurance. Some arrived on the Friday, but most turned up on the Saturday just in time to see the racing finish of the 160km International 3* class.



What an effect this had on the Pony Club members. Seeing truly fit horses finishing a gruelling marathon in perfect condition.

Euston was breathtaking. Flags, tents, restaurants, marquees, international competitors speaking strange languages, stables to die for, music in the loos !!!, and everyone was so welcoming. My two favourite comments of the weekend. Firstly from a young girl at her first Endurance Championships 'I feel like a twelve year old riding at the Olympics. I am completely overawed !! ' and the second from a hardened

Pony Club mum 'This is far too much fun. I don't want to go home'

Early Sunday morning saw the start of the Pony Club competitions with the Open competitors working over 56 km, the Intermediates over 40 , the novices over 32 and the grassroots over 20km. All participants had their horses shoes checked before the start of the ride and a small competition was judged for the best shod horse. This was won by Tigger (Erin Castleton-White) of the South Norfolk branch. Thanks to Deborah Custance Baker for aiding here. All riders/ponies went through the Pre-ride checks of trot up, heart rate, correct handling of the horse, the safety and fitting of the tack as well as the wearing of such essential items such as medical arm bands, hat tags, map holders, water containers



and a small first aid kit. Faye Greensit (Bedale and West of Yore), best Junior, and Honor Farley, all the way from East Cornwall, best Senior, took the 'Trot up and Turn out trophies. Many thanks to Claire and Charlotte Valori, Julia Cambell and Robina Aughton for judging this class

And then we were all ready. Some really well marked routes took them out into the Suffolk countryside, over mostly sandy going, where a sharp eye had to be kept out for flints. Numerous river crossings brought a fresh challenge and the fitness of the ponies was shown by the fact that all bar one completed the course with a minimum of problems and within the allotted time, most competitors finishing between 11 and 14 km per hour.

The result of the competition depended not only on the speeds achieved but on the soundness and recovery rate of the horse when finishing. In the Open there was a good win for Ella Pomroy of the Eastern Harriers who achieved first place a mere half point in front of Suzie Todd from the Whaddon Chase. Georgia Benton from the Bisley and Sandown Chase, had a convincing win in the Intermediate class and finished with an amazingly low heart rate of 36 bpm. The Curre Hunt branch dominated the Senior novice, taking the first 4 places with a clear win for Hannah Crocombe. Likewise in the Junior Novice the Yorkshire Vikings (a mixture of the Bedale and Hurworth branches) also took the first four places with a very unexpected but welcome victory for Elizabeth Molyneux on her pony (new to her this year) Kingswell Shearwater.

The Grassroots competition staged for our truly first time members was packed with ponies of all shapes and sizes, right down to an eleven hand Shetland and proved to be really popular with a convincing win for Olivia Rosin of the Waddon Chase.

What a memorable weekend. The Pony Club kids looked outstanding in their colours and outfits and were a real credit to their branches. To Nick Brooks-Ward and HPower there is only one thing to say and that is

THANKYOU

