

The *Brief* at Cuts



Peter and Joan Clarke out on their marathon with their pair of ponies.



Margaret Andrews.

Trish Lebus

Trish and her 23-year-old Section D were on the front cover of the last issue of *Carriage Driving* and for good reason – they won the largest class at the event this year, single horse which had close on to 20 competitors. Together with her husband Peter as groom, Trish first competed at Cuts in 2003 brought to it by an advertisement in this magazine and a love of France.

“We thought it looked great fun, although we were a bit nervous,” says Trish. “We really didn’t know what we were doing, however Christian and Antoinette de Langlades [who run the event] were very welcoming and nowadays everything is translated into English which is a great help.”

That first year, driving a pair, Trish was ‘way last’ in the presentation section. “We have learnt what they are looking for over the years,” she smiled. “It is not so different from private driving at home, but there are just little things that are different.”

In fact when Trish first came she had not done private driving in the UK which she acknowledges was a bit of a drawback. She had, however, been driving for some years having broken her daughter’s old riding pony to drive.

“I got fed up with riding my hunter and leading the pony to exercise it,” she laughs. “I met Peter Munt who taught me to drive and after a year or so I thought I would like to try some competition.”

She went to Windsor Park and competed in novice pony, before having a go with a pair.

“I did the national circuit for a few years in the late ’80s with a pair of horses,” she remarks. “We went to



Hot and exacting work for presentation judge Richard James.

the events locally but we had a busy family life which meant it was just a small part of what we did.”

Cuts represents almost the extent of Trish’s competitive driving life these days although she will still go to Windsor Park for a bit of a practice beforehand.

“I feel we are a very minor part of the driving scene and yet we can do this event and thoroughly enjoy it,” she says. “There is nothing difficult and it is only as competitive as you want to make it. There is a wonderful atmosphere here and somehow a different attitude to anything you find in the UK. It is a super event – well organised and very social. For people in the south of England it is no more than about five hours on the road. If there are drivers there with a bit of private driving or driving trial’s experience who know they have a safe pony or horse, I would encourage them to have a go at this. At least come across and see – it’s a great weekend.”

Margaret Andrews

Margaret is one who did just that – she tried to get here last year to compete but, having crossed the channel the lorry broke down in France.

“We were towed and then parked up overnight before limping home,” she said. “We were determined to get here this year.”

Just how determined can be seen when you learn that her ponies’ passports – she owns Shetlands – were stolen at the London Harness Horse Parade this year.

“It was a true nightmare, in fact until the day before coming we didn’t know if we would be able to make it,” she says. “The BDS couriered our passports, which arrived with us at nine in the morning, the vet said he could do the necessary and we got straight on the road.”

A music teacher, Margaret names her ponies Staccato Shetlands and she competed with a pair – Brandy and Lager – here. Her vehicle – a round-back phaeton made especially for them by Hartland Carriages – had only arrived three weeks previously and one of the ponies had only been in it the previous day. And Margaret did find some of the ‘difficulties’, which included stopping between drawn lines, a three-metre reinback through cones and driving with the right wheel in a tram line, a tad testing.

Fewer Brits than usual took part in the 15th Concours International L'Attelage de Tradition at Cuts, in Picardie, France this year. While it was a pity there were not more – it is a delightful event, provides a competitive opportunity that is rare to find within our shores and is an easy journey for drivers living in the south – those that were present did remarkably well.

"It was the one-handed circle that was really a disaster," she laughed. "It really went to pot one way and another."

For Margaret, however, the weekend had to do with the joy of being here.

"I had wanted to come for some time," she says. "It's just so nice to go somewhere different and the whole event is so classy. For us it is a worthwhile distance, too – the drive here is 16km long; available drives at home tend to take a couple of hours but may only be about 3km long."

She added, "We've loved it. I bought these ponies from Richard Berry who lives in Devizes. He came up to drive a team of them for me at the LHHP this year and I might try to persuade him to come with us to drive the team with us next year."

And Margaret's mother thinks she only has two ponies.

Joan and Peter Clarke

Joan and Peter Clarke competed in the same class as Margaret – the small pony pairs in which they came third out of nine. Once stalwarts of the private driving scene in the UK, they moved to France in 2004 and now aim to do about three Attelages a year.

"We used to take three turnouts to shows at home quite often," said Joan. "This is more relaxing – it's not all in one day for a start! And the events are so social – every event has a dinner, in fact here there is a dinner on both Saturday and Sunday evenings. Sometimes this is included in the entry fee which is no more than what you would pay for a County Show in the UK. It really is great fun."

The Clarkes also like the variety of competitors at the Attelages. "You see so many different carriages, which is lovely," they remarked. "You don't tend to get that in private driving at home – here the French love the history of the old carriages and it attracts a host of spectators as well."



Jenny Seymour.

The Royal wedding even made its way to Cuts.

Inevitably, of course, there are some things that raise question marks for them,

"I can't really quite get over how they judge us without seeing us on the move [during the first part of the competition] – how the horse or pony fits the carriage and so on," Peter says. "And the speeds set for the marathon drive are a bit out, we feel. It is 9km/h for small ponies which is really too slow."

The Clarkes drive a Dartmoor and a Portuguese pony the latter having come up from Portugal in a lorry load of Lusitanos. "We were looking for a quiet pony and actually went to see a cob," says Joan. "I didn't like it and the chap said, 'I've got this pony who has never been ridden but used to be driven through the city by an old boy who needed to sell it'. He said she was three rising four, but it was more like two rising three. However she has proved a good one for us."

Their vehicle used to belong to Minta Winn and is an 1898 dog cart made in the Isle of Man by Kirwin and Mullin.

Jenny Seymour

Jenny is proof that this competition also suits the more competitive natured! – She won her class here, the single pony by a good margin.

"I don't always win," she laughs "It just depends how it all goes."

For the last few years, she has divided her time between houses in Jersey and Brittany but first did a competition like this in 2000.

"I so enjoyed it," she said. "I loved the type of competition and wanted to go on doing them – they really suit me. I might have done HDT if younger but, for me, this is certainly more fun than showing"

Jenny has been driving since the early 1990s starting when her daughters gave up riding and she wanted something to do with the ponies. At Cuts this year she was driving a 15-year-old Welsh Section C called Barnaby which she had had for 10 years.

"He goes in a pair with a Section A and they really go well together," she smiled. Her varnished dog cart, built in 1890 by Carpenter of Staines, she bought at the Reading Sales.

"I don't know anything about it," she says. "But it has lovely fine ironwork and it really suits the pony."



Trish Lebus with her husband Peter