

Horsham & District Riding Club

CIC** European Championships

LOCATION:	Nagykanizsa, Hungary	DATE:	July 2009
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Report by Shelly Dixon

The announcement was made in May as to the 6 team members and 2 individuals to go to Hungary, Arkle and I were named as reserve. Obviously disappointed I planned on what events to enter and as I was getting married in August the year would be very busy and would help to keep my mind off what might have been.

Completely unexpectedly I received a phone call asking me to attend a training as Jonathan, one of the team members had suffered a crashing fall and would be unable to ride for 6 weeks but hoped to be fit and well in time to go to Hungary. The training was very intense with both horses and riders pushed to produce our very best and talks were given on what to expect competing at this level and how to look after the horses in the very hot conditions that we would experience. Sponsors provided us with both show jumping and cross country boots, brow bands and saddle cloths, clothing and most treasured the hat silk with the Union Jack and the badge to sew onto jackets both of which I was given as you only get them if you are selected to represent your country and reserve is not enough! But I was fitted with a jacket – ‘just in case.’

Jonathan was now back in the saddle so I went ahead and competed at Longleat CIC** and determined to give it our very best finished in 10th place.

On the Wednesday while at work I picked up the phone to be told that Jonathan’s horse had gone lame and that I was going to Hungary in the team!! Disbelief, excitement and then panic set in, the final training was on the Friday with horses leaving in the early hours of Saturday and I had nothing ready. I was given 2 A4 pages of what I had to get, labeled, packed and ready by Friday and that was just for Arkle who I had not ridden since the weekend to give him a rest after Longleat. My hat silk and Union Jack arrived in the post, air tickets had to be arranged and I was to share a hotel room with 2 other team members.

The Friday was spent with a final run through of the team test and jumping practice, then it was all hands on deck to pack our equipment, haylage and feed into the freight lorry which was travelling in convoy with the horses, grooms and vet. It was strange seeing Arkle off at 5a.m. on Saturday morning and not being with him, but Charlotte who was his groom for the duration was lovely and promised to keep in contact during the 52 hour journey with a stop off in Frankfurt as to his well being, as we riders were not flying until the Monday for the competition start on the Thursday.

Wednesday evening was the opening ceremony with us parading in our British clothing waving Union Jacks and our families, friends and supporters who had all flown out to support us cheering and clapping, it was a wonderful atmosphere. On Thursday the competition started in earnest with the team dressage, 6 members in the dressage arena performing the test together with commands given by our trainer Richard Waygood and the next day saw us all do our individuals. We were thrilled to be top of the leader board at this stage beating both ‘dressage masters’ Belgium and Germany for the first time.

The cross country on the Saturday was a tough test especially in the holding ground and humid temperatures of 34C. All the horses coped well some more tired than others but with the very hard work of the grooms cooling and walking them through the mist sprays provided the recovered quickly and all passed the trot up next day to compete in the show jumping which was a big track and few jumped clear. One fence down too many saw us drop from Gold to Bronze medal position with only 1.25 penalties separating all the three medal positions, it was a very close and nail biting finish.

To receive our medals on the rostrum and see the Union Jack being raised was a very emotional moment something I think we will all remember for a very long time. Competing in this competition I have experienced emotions I have never had before with both highs and lows, made many friends and received invaluable training but most of all I enjoyed every minute of it!

Shelly Dixon