

## **Search 4 a Star – HOYS, October 2011 - (it could be you!)**

It all started with going on the Search 4 a Star web site, downloading the schedule and entry form, choosing a qualifier and sending off an entry. Sonia Marfleet and her Billwood Tom Putt (Thomas) and myself and my San Suave Prince (Tommy Tomato) both decided to enter the working hunter class. There are also classes for cobs, riding horse/hack, show hunters, riding club horses and also ponies.

Our qualifier was being held at Wellington Equestrian Centre on July 17<sup>th</sup>, and ours was the first class at 8am!! After a very early start we arrived with Jen our shared groom. We walked the course, washed off last minute poo stains, tacked up and went and worked the horses in.

There were 7 in our class, and of these 4 managed to jump clear, including Sonia and myself. After returning to the ring, the judges pulled us in and rode and marked conformation. Then the final line up and Sonia was first. Sadly Tommy, who had initially, been pulled in first had not given the judge, David Bartram, a very good ride (he was very lazy!) so we had been dropped to 4<sup>th</sup>. Usually only the first 2 qualify but luckily for me the judges all agreed that all 4 of us could qualify so passports checked and we were off to HOYS!

We were offered a training day prior to the big day which was held at Bury Farm in the September and Sonia and I decided that this was a must! The 2 judges there were David Bartram and Richard Ramsey and they could not have been more helpful. They were very constructive and encouraging and gave us loads of advice and information for our big day and we learnt alot about what to expect when we arrived in Birmingham.

We then went home and proceeded to practice all we could (Tommy was ridden by as many 'judges' I could find and thanks go to Tony Whipps, Ken Spencer and Kath Botting for all their help!) We practiced plaiting, bathing, bought new ties! All had to be perfect for the huge occasion that HOYS is! Finally the day came and off we set (in 2 lorries as Thomas and Tommy don't get on) we also needed accommodation for 4 of us, Sonia's groom (I mean boyfriend) and the lovely Jen who was helping me.

Driving in to the NEC is awesome!! I've never seen so many lorries crammed into a carpark, and so many famous names!

Having been signed in, parked up and found the boys' stables, we settled them in and went off to have supper, do some shopping and also have a look at where we would be competing the next day. Our class had been given an exercise time of 9.15 that night to ride in the arena which we both took advantage of, both boys behaved well. Back then to settle them for the night and to get a good nights rest!

We had an early start as our exercise time was 6.50 and this time it was in the international arena!! That was just amazing, to ride through those black curtains into that famous arena was great! After that it was breakfast for all and time to wash, plait, shine, and finally prepare for our big moment!

You have to allow 15 minutes to get to the arena as it is quite a way from the stables and they are very punctual, they NEVER run late!

When we arrived at the Caldene arena we had time to work in and have a jump, and soak up the atmosphere which was electric, but also very friendly.

We had become familiar with our fellow competitors so were able to encourage each other which was great.

Then it was time to walk the course which Sonia and I did together (she said the 'F' word ALOT!). It wasn't very big, only 3' but there was lots to look at and it felt like you were going to jump into the eating area!

The lovely thing about Search4aStar is the commentary the judges give .It makes for a slightly more relaxed feel to the competition and includes the audience.

The first 3 horses went in, the first was sadly eliminated, a good jumping mare who just could not cope with the atmosphere, the next had a pole ant the 3<sup>rd</sup> was clear, then it was Sonia and Thomas. The judges commentary was that they were not looking for a showjumping round but a good hunting pace and its fair to say that Thomas jumped a cracking clear at a great hunting pace!!! Two more jumped then it was mine and Tommy's turn. We cantered in, said good afternoon to the judges and began our round. Fences one and two he flew, the judges comments were very complimentary, they loved his looks "lovely quality hunter, the sort known as a classic Leicestershire hunter," was what Marjory Ramsey said! Then over the Stonehenge double, turn right to a wall with a rail over..... but naughty Tommy decided it was FAR too spooky and ducked out at the last moment, very nearly depositing me on the ground!! "Oh we are very disappointed that he has done that!" from the judge and I agreed! We then jumped it but by this time Tommy had a real touch of the naughties and napped away from the next fence! We finished the round and left the arena frustrated but still on a high!

Of the 8 finalists 7 of us went back into the arena for the judges to ride and do conformation. It was great cantering around, although I knew we had blown our chances of a place as they don't take kindly to stops, I wanted to make the most of the moment!

We were all pulled into line, Claire Oliver rode them all, and we all stood them up one at a time for the conformation. Again, there was judges commentary, Thomas was described as the sort of horse you could pull out to do anything with and have a lot of fun on which is just so true! It was lovely to hear Robert Oliver describe Tommy as the type of horse he and Claire were always searching for, but also reminded the audience how important the jumping phase is! They gave him really high marks for his conformation so that was good to take away with me.

Then it was time for the final judging, and Sonia was called in 4<sup>th</sup>!! Her face was a picture, very well deserved; they did a fab job there!!

We all received a commemorative rosette and I came home with some lovely photos and brilliant memories, a once in a lifetime chance to ride at the greatest show there is!!

So go on, have a go next year, you never know you could get there too!!!!

Ros Head