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A COMPETITOR'S YEAR

Rosalie Shepherd describes the ups and downs of her debut on the British Eventing circuit

Last year Ainur and I kick-started our eventing career. Our relationship started a few years before, me, an inexperienced rider fresh from the riding school, and Ainur, a red chestnut mare itching to do! With the careful guidance of Barbara Leach, our trainer, and with Gill's patience and experience, we were ready to tackle our first BE80 last spring.

Our first ever British Eventing ODE was Howick. I can still remember my first fleeting feelings of excitement tingled with apprehension at the sight of the BE signs at Howick's entrance. But we had done our homework; Ainur came out of the box and ready to compete as if she had done this every weekend. With a modest dressage of 38.5, then a double clear, I was more than pleased with our debut into the eventing world. Ainur then went onto to compete at one other BE80, before we thought it time to take it up a level and progress to BE90.



Over the course of the summer, we competed at four BE90 events. Looking back it is easy to see the subtle *Howick ODE* improvements Ainur made as the number of events under our belt increased, so much so that the number of points accumulated had halved from 129.10 (!!!) at our first BE90 to 67.20, our last of 2011. We finished the season with a double clear at Moreton Morrell, with only time penalties against us - the feeling of ecstatic joy I felt as we crossed the finishing line of the cross country phase is indescribable.



Our progression up to BE90 wasn't all about double clears though. As the 129 points suggest, we had much to learn and improve. Dressage, dependent on Ainur's level of excitement on that morning, is something I just cross my fingers for. Show jumping has never been too much of an issue with us - Ainur's aptitude for jumping sees us through. It was the challenges of cross-country that had to be tackled. Our first hurdle was water; Ainur would NOT go into it, but with clever tricks thought up by Gill and a lot of patience, Ainur now happily jumps in - the bigger the splash and the wetter I become, the better! Our other issue was ditches, but after a gruelling

afternoon at our much loved local XC course - Hilltop - where every ditch was jumped from every possible combination, confidence was soon gained.

Ainur is a horse who needs to be taken slow, at her pace, not mine. Her gradual introduction to eventing and our careful, steady training I believe have helped us get the most from each event. The dressage is always an area for improvement (Ainur is always keen to get on to the fun bits!), but Ainur's enthusiasm for jumping and clever mind gives her a scary edge - eventing her has now become more like an addiction. I cannot wait to compete her again in 2012.



Picture by Photo-Synergy



Congratulations to Team Teke member David Webb on winning the Palomino Championship at the Three Counties Show!