

## **Horses for Heroes Raises over £250,000**

The Sun shone on a proud day for the equestrian world on Saturday as Horses for Heroes took place at Ascot Racecourse and Windsor Great Park and succeeded in raising over £250,000 for charity.

With money still being collected by all 600 participants who took part in the eight mile ride, organisers believe the final money raised for service charity Help for Heroes may reach £300,000.

Mark Elliot, Chief of Staff for Help for Heroes attended Saturday's event and was amazed with what he saw. "It's been absolutely brilliant, he said. "It's extremely humbling to see the effort that everyone has made to get here and be a part of this historical ride. I've spoken to people who have come from all over the Country to do their bit and each one of them has had a smile on their faces saying it's the best sponsored ride they've ever taken part in. Something very special has happened here today – it's been a special ride, a special route and a special place."

The Ascot team kicked off proceedings with a group of Riders from the racecourse departing at 7:30am in the first group, including Chief Executive Charles Barnett, Brough Scott and Lt Guy Disney who lost a leg in Helmand.

Other riders had indeed travelled across the country to take part in Horses for Heroes. Venetia Hawker left her home in Somerset on Wednesday with her horse and boxed him to Larkhill, Salisbury. She then proceeded to ride the 75 mile trip on horseback, arriving at Ascot in time for her official start on Saturday. Venetia said "I wanted to do the extra miles to make it more of a challenge. We've had a really enjoyable time and crossing the finish post at Ascot has certainly made it worth the effort!"

Sam Fizer, 15 from Cheltenham rode his retired racehorse Samuel Wilderspin in the Ride. "It was absolutely fantastic and was especially nice for my horse to finish at Ascot, he said. "He was due to run here a few times but the ground started to go against him and so he was retired. I'm so happy I finally got him here!"

Samantha Green, 17 and Madeline Heath, 24 both from Lingfield rode together on their horses Tango Charlie and Romain Rouge. "We really enjoyed it, they beamed. "It was the best feeling ever to gallop across the line at the finish." Samantha has only just started riding again after recovering from a nasty accident so she says focussing on taking part in the Ride has really helped. "And together we've raised over £5500 between us" they added.

Riders took part with great enthusiasm and some even took part in fancy dress. Within the 600 strong pack was a group dressed in the 'Wizard of Oz' theme as well as a 'George and the Dragon.' Many dressed in Help for Heroes t-shirts and rugs. Among them were BEF President Andrew Finding, Working Hunter Champion Shower Louise Bell and Ex Show Jumper Emma-Jane Brown, whose daughter made them all special personalised Horses for Heroes polo shirts! Emma said, "The whole ambience today has been sensational. The horses enjoyed it and so did we – there should be more sponsored rides like this. Oh – and thanks to Louise for lending both Andrew and I our horses for today!"

Louise added: “We’ve had a great time. The gallop down the track was unbelievable - even though our horses thought they were seasoned professionals by trying to jump a gap where a fence had been – lucky we stayed on!”

Andrew commented, “It was just so nice to be doing something so enjoyable for a great cause.”

The day truly reflected a great mix of Riders, from the novice to the professional, from the young to the old and all had stories to tell.

Susie Rogers-Hartley from Norfolk, a member of the British Para Show Jumping Association took part in the Ride on her Show Jumper, Dante Silver Dollar. Susie, who used to be in the Navy is paralysed from the waist down following a spinal accident on an assault course. She brought along her dog Lex, a canine partner trained assistance dog. Susie said “It was the most fantastic ride in such beautiful surroundings and the gallop at the end was just phenomenal.”

Private Emily Smith, 20 and Lance Corporal Sally Clarke, 23 both from Cheltenham are medics in 2 Medical Regiment. They rode their horses Scooby Doo and Grace. “It was so cool to Ride today, they said. “It’s a brilliant idea to raise money for such a good cause – and we know how much it all helps.”

Audrey Scott-Hopkins was due to ride the route on her own on Saturday, in honour of her husband Michael who is a keen rider but is currently very ill with bowel cancer. However Audrey was absolutely delighted to enroll Michael onto the Ride at the last minute when his health seemed to take a turn for the better. “Michael was at the hospital all day yesterday, she said. “But he managed to make it here today and we’re both so glad he did. It was such enormous fun but without doubt my biggest highlight is having Michael here riding with me. We have raised nearly £5000 so far which is truly unbelievable.”

Eleanor Stourton from Stockwell also had a poignant reason to take part. Earlier this year her boyfriend Captain Andrew Jelinek from The Household Cavalry Regiment was seriously injured in Afghanistan, when the armoured vehicle he was travelling in overturned during a high-speed chase with the Taliban. He had suffered a fractured spine, a broken collarbone, rib and pelvis, a dislocated hip and the ligaments in one knee had been severed. Eleanor spent a lot of time with him during his recovery in Selly Oak Hospital and met many other Soldiers who had suffered some horrific injuries. Eleanor decided to take part in the Ride to do her bit to raise some money and rode with her friend Sarah Grant. Speaking after the Ride she said “I just feel so emotional to have come here and cantered over the finish line with my friends, family and Andrew all watching. So far we’ve raised over £5300 and it’s all going to such an amazing cause to help such selfless people who have been injured serving our country.”

And finally, special mentions should go to two young riders and their dedicated parents. Lily Pearce, 11 from Old Windsor rode her pony Marmite on the Ride. However, understandably Lily was a little nervous taking part in such a large event on her own so her dad Mark followed Lily and Marmite round the course – on foot! “It

would have been fine except Lily was desperate to get back to the course in time to finish on the racetrack, said Mark. “So she trotted most of the way making me run beside her!” Luckily Mark is an experienced runner having taken part in half marathons and pentathlons before so the eight and a half mile run wasn’t too hard on him. “He kept up all the way even when we cantered down the finish line” said Lily, whose Uncle is none other than the famous ex-jockey Richard Dunwoody.

Hannah Bishop also went the full eight and a half miles on foot beside her son Toby, 7, who was the youngest rider to take part on Saturday. Toby rode his 26 year old pony Jasper, who Toby has owned for three years and learnt to ride on. Hannah said “Toby rode the whole way off the lead rein and cantered up the course to the finish. We take away some truly unforgettable memories that we will treasure; I am a very proud mum today.”

Brough Scott, Project Ambassador for Horses for Heroes, who rode former Aintree Foxhunters winner Scots Grey on the day added “I’m unbelievably thrilled with today. The concept of the ride, having the start and finish at Ascot enabling people to gallop past the largest grandstand in Europe at the end has really worked and given riders a great experience. Holding a charity event which people have actually enjoyed has really helped with fundraising and it’s quite clear how much fun everyone has had today.”

Organisers would like to thank everyone who took part in the Horses for Heroes Ride, from the riders to the volunteers, vets, medics and stewards who made it all possible. Special thanks goes to The Crown Estate for allowing the ride to take place through its beautiful grounds and to Ascot Golf Club who closed for the day in order to allow horses through its land.