



The Essex Rider Team Challenge held at Towerlands took place on Sunday the 21st February. Originally scheduled for December the show was cancelled twice due to the snow. Unfortunately the weather was really against us and even on Sunday we all had to endure the heavy rain, which flooded the car park as well as all the walkways. Despite this 18 teams from across the area braved the weather to compete.

The show was run under a different format to what usual team events are. The team was made up of our novice pony Helen Chambers on Just Bianca, our novice horse Sam Hughes on Merlin, our open horse Melissa Eagles on Twilight and our open pony Becky Ivell on Whisper. The Tendring team was also made up of our helpers, Julie, Holly and Siobhan. With special thanks to Jackie, Nicky, Claire and Jane who took it in turns to be stewards for the day.

The course was built by BSJA course builder Geoff Quinlan. The track was set for each round starting with the novices with distances being altered for the horses and ponies. The course was then raised for the open horses and ponies.

The first course consisted of a flowing round that allowed the combinations to establish a flowing rhythm and encouraged riders to move their horses forward down the distances. The only fence that seemed to catch some teams out was the wide sweeping turn to the last that encouraged riders cut the corner and then knock the delicate plank.

Tendring was drawn 5th to go, on walking the course all the team seemed happy with it. The team had a look at the position of one related distance that had to be ridden at a slight angle to the first in order to make the line smooth. Apart from this observation the team felt confident with what they were doing.

Helen was first to go for the team, Becky and Sam helped her to warm her up. Helen rode quietly and stylishly even with B getting very over excited and being quite strong into her fences. They made the course look very easy and did a lovely clear to start the team off in the best possible way.

Sam was next to go with course having being altered to make the strides correct for horses. Sam rode rhythmical round encouraging Merlin to lengthen his stride and get down his distances. They again produced a brilliant clear round making us one of a few teams to have got both there first team members clear.

The course was then raised for the open horses. Melissa rode quietly on a very keen Twilight who found the experience very exciting. They again went clear leaving our team on a zero score with Becky still to go.

Becky was our last team member to go and with our team on a zero score already Becky could afford to have had faults. However Becky was not looking like having a pole with Whisper who effortlessly cleared the last to give us all our team members clear in the first round.

The course was then altered with ten teams on a zero score after the first round. The course builder decided to make the second round more technical with dog legs and turn backs that questioned both horse and rider. This was clearly going to be more difficult and our team walked the course carefully looking at the lines and strides. There was also the added issue of horses trying to jump the wrong fence. As this was in their eye line when they landed.

Helen showed experience beyond her age riding the course with precision and showing the rest of the team how it should be ridden. With only a slight rub on the double they set the standard with a brilliant clear.

With the team in high spirits, Sam was next to go she also rode an accurate round with Merlin making the technical lines look easy. This put the team in a promising position.

The course was then raised for the open horses. Melissa rode the sharp Twilight quietly round, knowing that a clear would put the team into the jump off. This proved to be easy for this combination. Leaving the team on a zero score and into the jump off, before Becky had even jumped.

Becky was last to jump for us and Whisper proved to be a bit unlucky with a rub at a fence resulting in 4 faults, but otherwise this was a very good round and the team was already on a zero score.

The course was then altered for the jump off there were 6 teams on 4 faults that would jump off first for 5th place. Then the jump off for first place which we all knew was going to be hotly contested. We were the 2nd team to go in the jump off. They decided that they would run the teams in reverse order so Becky who went last would go first and Helen that went first would jump last. The jump off did not suit our horses with long gallops and not many turns this was not going to go as well as we had hoped, with all of us having horses that are best suited to twisty courses.

Becky set off at a good speed and rode the lines the team had discussed showing that it could be done, we are not sure if Whisper ran out of energy or simply thought she'd finished while going to the last but she certainly wasn't her usual self. Whisper still jumped it but despite Becky's best effort she caught it with her hind foot. It was a fantastic time and such an unlucky pole.

This put the pressure on for the rest of the team. Melissa was next to go with Twilight setting off at a tremendous pace and jumping across to get an inside line to the related distance. Twilight doing a jump off most experienced horses would be proud of and gaining a clear round in a very good time.

Sam was next to jump with Merlin she decided to go for a clear with Merlin, doing a nice steady round, moving him on but not cutting as tight as the other team members had, leaving the team with two clears in the jump off.

Last to jump was Helen knowing that we had a bit of time to make up she tried her hardest pushing B down her distances and cutting across the fences, turning as tight as she could to shave the seconds off. She did a fantastic clear round and the team was left on a zero score in a good time.

With not just Tendring on a zero it came down to time, Tendring lost out on first prize by point 28 of a second. The team was elated at coming 2nd in such a tough competition and all the teams were called in for team presentations and to collect their prizes. Tendring were awarded trophies and rosettes for 2nd place much to the delight of the team.

A fantastic achievement for the girls, who pulled together and worked as team.

The attached photos were very kindly given to us by Flash Harry Photography and more photos of the day can be found on their website www.flashharryphotography.com.