

“Gey whaarm” at the 118th Rydal Sheepdog Trials and Hound Show

When it comes to planning the show at Rydal Park near Ambleside, there is always a curve ball and this year it was the impending heatwave. However, the competing hound and dog owners were quick to respond, arriving with plentiful supplies of water, umbrellas, and gazebos. Additional water points popped up all over the field and in the show rings, to help supplement the watering hole in the centre of the field. The nearby river Rothay and the glorious trees on the fringes and in the centre of Rydal Park, sitting above the Sheepdog trials, came into their own.

The first excitement of the day was the arrival of Caz Graham from the Radio 4 Farming Today programme who was keen to capture why it is so important to keep traditional events like Rydal going. Barry Todhunter, master and huntsman of the Blencathra, John Peel’s Pack, described the traditions of showing Foxhounds at Rydal and why hound exercise on foot and trail hunting with one of the oldest packs of hounds in the country is still an important part of the culture and heritage of the Lake District Fells. Joanne Bentham, farmer, sheepdog trainer and committee member then explained the Le Fleming Sheepdog trials course, critiquing a competitor battling with the sheep. Farmer Chris Hodgson brought them down from Fairfield Horseshoe only a few days before the Trials for their annual clip and were now in the unfamiliar world of Rydal Park with sheepdogs near at hand. Our Chairman, Claire Logan-Stephens then summed up what a traditional show like Rydal means to regulars who travel from all parts of the UK to catch up with likeminded friends also why the show appeals to tourists, watching working dogs in action in one of the most stunning locations in the world and discovering that there is great conversation to be had with the very friendly and welcoming ‘locals’.

The Sheepdog Trials started promptly at 8am with a mix of Herdwick and Swaledale sheep and 60 runners, with the last run at 6pm. Whether it was the skill of the trialers or the heat of the day, but there far more penned than usual. The Le Fleming Stakes, (named after the family who have owned Rydal Hall and its estate since the 1400s and Stanley Le Fleming who started Rydal Show in 1901), was won by farmer Dennis Purdham from Holmrook with Kippi with 84 points. Dennis was also the winner of the Joe Thompson Salver for the highest placed Cumbrian and was 4 points clear of his nearest rival, Rydal regular Arthur Temple with Jan, who was also runner up in 2021. The Rydal Class was run on the same course as the Le Fleming Stakes and it was wonderful to see Mr Gorst from Garstang win with his dog Bill with 78 points.

Joanne Bentham with Bob who was second with 74 points, Joanne also won the tankard for best competitor living within 15 miles of Rydal Church.

Rydal Show field lies in the heart of the Coniston Foxhound country and, as always, the first event of the day in the foxhound ring was the Show of Coniston hounds, which this year was very efficiently judged by Barry Todhunter, master huntsman of the Blencathra. Just under forty hounds competed for ten trophies with the Anthony Chapman Memorial Trophy going to unentered bitch Dally walked by the Cummings family and the Owen Balding Memorial Trophy for reserve champion going to entered dog Magnum walked by Millie Westmoreland-Nicholson.

The open show of fell foxhounds brought forward entries from the seven packs which cover the Lake District. Judges this year were Claire Bellamy, master and huntsman of the Lauderdale Foxhounds and Archie Clifton-Brown, master and huntsman of the Stevenstone Foxhounds.

The North Lonsdale opened the honours by winning the best group of five – which was the first time they had won a cup at Rydal. The Ullswater then started their winning streak by winning both couples classes, but it was Trimmer and Trooper who pipped Delicate and Destiny to the post to win the Dora Marley salver. The judges took the very sensible step to avoid using the baking flags and keeping the trotting up and down to a minimum and as such the hounds remained happy and alert throughout the judging. Claire and Archie loved every moment of the judging despite the heat and praised both the quality and exceptional condition of all the hounds. Archie welcomed the unique way the hounds are shown by their walkers here in the fells, which often means they don't know who they are giving the prizes to. The judges are not allowed a programme detailing the breeding when judging, but they still successfully managed to spread the red ribbons across the packs. The unentered dog was won by Ullswater Traveller walked by Sharon Holmes, who does a fantastic job keeping the Ullswater Foxhounds hunt supporters club Facebook followers amused with beautiful photos and witty comments on daily activities at the Kennels. The entered dog class was won by Blencathra Samson walked by Diane Todhunter Robinson, daughter of Barry Todhunter and also a seasoned competitor at Crufts with her Dalmatian. A huge cheer went up for the winner of the unentered bitch class, Coniston Damsel, as she is walked by the Ambleside butcher Freddie Garside. He has rarely shown a hound before but said bringing up his hound pup had given him a new lease of life and he has never felt better. Finally, the best entered bitch went to Eskdale

and Ennerdale Ringlet walked by Jordan Porter, who last month married David Porter MFH and is an auctioneer for Mitchells Livestock Market. The wedding ceremony was at St Catherine Church at Boot and not only did their hounds make an appearance, the gravestones of two legendary huntsman buried there – Tommy Dobson and Willy Porter were cleaned up especially for the day.

The Robert Logan Memorial Cup for the Champion Foxhound went to Ullswater Traveller, while the Hartley Memorial trophy for the best of the opposite sex went to Ringlet. The overall best walked in the Open Fell Foxhound show went to Coniston Druid walked by Hector Westmoreland-Nicholson, who also won a print of his choice kindly given by Hounds Magazine.

By 10.30am, the Beagle Show was underway with 12 packs showing and we were delighted to welcome our judges for this year, Mr Stuart Sillars, former Master and huntsman of the Blean Beagles and Mr Clive Wenham former Master and huntsman of the Bolebroke Beagles. Our gratitude also goes to Miss Hannah Hutchings, former joint master of the Barony Basset Hounds, who stepped in at short notice to be a most efficient ring steward.

Three packs returned to the Rydal ring after absence of several years; the Ecclesfield, the Shropshire and the Warwickshire and it was a true pleasure to see them again. Our long-standing friends from the Sunnyland Beagles in Northern Ireland also made the journey, minus hounds due to regulations and red tape, but the personnel made the trip which they have done for so very many years to support Rydal Show.

Opening honours and the trophy given by the late Mrs Mary Gibson, widow of Col Leonard Gibson, went to the Palmer Marlborough with their unentered dog Blucher with the Newcastle & District taking second and our returning friends from the Shropshire and the Ecclesfield taking third and Reserve.

The Palmer continued their success with Torver a smart entered dog with lovely ease of movement who went on to prove the depth of quality in the Palmer kennel, Winston '16 having reigned supreme in the past and his legacy was upheld when Torver become Champion Beagle. The Ecclesfield and the Holme and Colne Valley were also in the ribbons in this class and the recently introduced stallion dog class for the Patrick Till bronze hare went to Newcastle and District Jester, chased by the Newcastle in second and third places and the Ecclesfield in Reserve.

There were 2 new classes this year for dog and bitch couples and thanks are due to the sponsors who translated their trophies from the now sadly defunct Lowther Hound Show. The Somerset Salver is kindly given by Mr and Mrs Eric Uphill for doghound couples, together with a pair of keepsake glasses in the Lowther tradition, and the Baily's Hunting Directory Salver is given for bitch couples. Honours went to the Palmer Marlborough Clinkard Meon Valley, to give them their full title, with their doghounds Wizard and Palmer and the Catterick were victorious in the bitch class with Coco and Clover.

The Stan Elwood Trophy is for 2 couples, but not as we know it. Stan was one of the founders of the 'home pack' the Black Combe Beagles, having been huntsman to the West Cumberland Beagles who operated from 1921-1956. His original idea was to have one unentered and one entered hound of each sex – try to get *them* level... if you can! Honours here went to the Holme and Colne Valley, with the Newcastle and the Shropshire in pursuit.

After the customary break for lunch the afternoon saw the Newcastle take the Dummer Beagles cup given by former Rydal beagle section organiser Geoffrey Craghill (we had the current master of the Dummer judging the harriers in the next ring – small world!) with their unentered bitch Diva.

It is often said that the champions at shows come from the entered bitch class, so the Shropshire Beagles were over the moon to take home the David Grayling salver and were heading for the stars when they also took the George Leake trophy for the best of the Opposite of sex to the champion with their entered bitch Teasel. How very apt – Major George Leake had returned from the war in 1945 and took the mastership of the Shropshire for over 30 seasons and even more apt that the trophy was presented by Iain Storer, recently retired master of the pack as well as being Keeper of the Studbook for the Association of Masters of Harriers and Beagles.

The Julian Chadwick cup for brood bitch was deservedly taken by the Newcastle with Divet and it was good to see Julian on the field to present his trophy. Also in the ribbons were the Palmer, one of Julian's current packs, the other being the Emlyn in South Wales, and it was a delight to see the Warwickshire take a rosette – the cheerful manner of their staff was a credit to hunting.

During showing Stuart and Clive commented on the high quality of hounds being brought before them – there had been strong competition in all classes

and getting a rosette was no mean feat at Rydal 22, in Clive's words "There are some lovely hounds out there."

We were really pleased that Lord Annaly, currently master of the Dummer Beagles and formerly a master of foxhounds took up the invitation to judge the harriers this year. The prizes were spread across the three competing packs with the Pendle Forest and Craven winning the Stallion Harrier with Danger, the entered Harrier bitch with the stunning Fortress, the best couple of Harrier dogs and the Windermere Challenge trophy for the best group. The Vale of Lune dominated the unentered Harrier classes with Daylight and Dribble and the Holcombe won best entered harrier dog with Holcot, best brood harrier bitch with Popcorn taking home the beautiful hare trophy kindly given by Sue Simmons and also winning the best couple of entered bitches. When it came to the championship, Pendle Forest and Craven Fortress took the prize for best Harrier at Rydal 22, with Holcombe Holcot taking reserve.

The show of terriers was judged by Peter Doey, a lifelong supporter of the Lunesdale and Coniston hunts. He chose Eskdale and Ennerdale Jack Russell bitch Maggie which belongs to Jack Edmondson as his Champion Terrier describing her as "as narrow as they come, this lovely sized, neat little bitch would give you great versatility." Melbreak Grip and Chris Nixon were the recipients of the Paul "Jacko" Jackson memorial trophy for the Reserve which Pete said was "a lovely made workman like dog with a great jacket"

The decision on the Supreme Championship between the foxhound, beagle, harrier and terrier champions fell to Michael Hedley, former master of the Border Foxhounds, a position he held for 46 years and who has been attending Rydal every year for as long as most can remember. In time honoured tradition Michael was asked to judge, just an hour before the Supreme Championship, but had no hesitation in taking up the challenge. The flags were covered in cold water and the line up were put through their moves. However, Michael's gaze was fixed on the eye catching Ullswater Traveller, who won the Bruce Logan Memorial Trophy for Supreme Champion while Pendle Forest and Craven Fortress received the beautiful silver hound trophy for the reserve given by Chris Ogilvy.

After the Supreme Championship, the Rydal Show Committee presented a cheque for £500 to the Great North Air Ambulance, a charity which relies entirely on donations and provides an invaluable service to the North of England where you can often be more than 2 hours away from the nearest

hospital. Soon after this, the winners of the much-anticipated Mary Logan Young Countryside Champion award, were announced. This was a new award in memory of Mary Logan, who dedicated over 50 years of her life to supporting and helping to organise Rydal Sheepdog Trials and Hound Show. A farmers' wife and loyal hunt supporter, Mary had a natural ability to connect with and encourage young people in their passions for the countryside, so this award seemed a fitting tribute. Written nominations were received prior to the show and it was decided to award joint winners, each of whom received a £200 bursary to help them pursue their passion. The inaugural winners were announced as Tom Bunting and Sam Tattersall. Tom, following his agricultural courses is pursuing a career working on a dairy farm. In his spare time, he supports the local shoot by feeding pheasants and controlling vermin, runs a small-holding, keeps the traditional craft skill of dry-stone walling going and is a young hunt supporter raising money for the Coniston Hunt. Sam who as well as training his own gun dogs and helping the gamekeeper, has also developed a passion for beagling and has totally immersed himself in the Black Combe Beagles. He helps around the kennels and with exercising the beagles, even learning to trail hunt them and implementing new ideas for fund raising including a sponsored walk from Millom to Keswick and back which raised over £7,000 for the hunt.

Another highlight which drew the crowds in the afternoon were the 3 trail hound races. 4 energetic trailers leave an aniseed trail over the surrounding fells, while visitors place their bets and then take their place on the slopes of a natural amphitheatre near the finish line to see the winning hounds come in. This year, Mitredale Dusk took the Open and the John Benson Memorial Challenge Trophy, Mitredale Favour won the restricted open and the Puppy trail went to the aptly named Rex the Rocket.

The show of shepherds' crooks and sticks was judged by that master of the craft Bob Beaty of Ravenstonedale. Mr Smithson won the Garside Silver trophy for the best shepherds stick in the show and Mr Rennie won the Fred Prickett silver trophy for the best ornamental stick.

Steve Burns as ever provided a very interesting Gun Dog Demonstration, which inspired people to enter a gun dog scurry, the winners of which were Naomi and Grace with their dog Remi.

True thanks are due to all who made this day, to the committee, landowners, farmers, sponsors, stewards and all who give of their time and resources to

create such a worthwhile experience, most especially the hunt staff who turned out in the traditional dress despite the temperatures and ensured that their hounds were comfortable in these conditions and of course to the audience who came in really impressive numbers to support this great Lakeland tradition of sheepdogs, hounds, terriers, trailhounds, gundogs, stickmakers and let's raise our hats to the young handlers – the stars of the future.

A comment from one show regular sums things up wonderfully “..... at the ringside and the atmosphere was noticeably pleasant and relaxed - lots of meetings and re-unions and knowledgeable talk and catching up. It felt as if Rydal was giving a very happy party for the people for whom it was intended. Talk from Somerset and Peterborough and memories going years back, people visibly and audibly relaxed and happy at being there in their own proper community - people feeling at home and glad to be so. I have not been aware of this quite so strongly in previous years.”

We look forward to welcoming you all back on Thursday, 17th August 2023.