

## **A CASPIAN TRIUMPH AT HOYS 2017!**

At the Society's AGM of 2016, our Vice President Mrs Elizabeth Mansfield-Parnell offered to ask the owner of the Horse of the Year Show if he would be interested in inviting the Caspian Horse Society to stage a display at the 2017 Show. It was hard to imagine meeting such a demanding task, but the idea took hold. Liz Mansfield and film maker Farokh Khorooshi gave a persuasive presentation to HOYS soon afterwards, based on the beautiful Anniversary Calendar photographs taken by Colin Barker. HOYS was impressed, so our President, Jane Holderness-Roddam, kindly agreed to select and train a team of pure and part-bred Caspians, working with Farokh to design a display based on Jane's estimation of their capabilities. In addition to the displays, which would be staged once a day during the first three days and twice a day on the Saturday and Sunday, the deal required us to design and staff two exhibition stands, one of them with a Caspian on display in a nearby stable. No pressure then!! The HOYS Show Committee was formed.

It was decided to stage a series of 'vignettes' demonstrating the Caspian's impressive range of skills. Initial selection took place at Solihull Riding Centre on a cold and rainy day in November last year, when the potential for a display team required considerable imagination. A preliminary group of 12 horses and riders was asked to improve their riding and schooling skills during the winter. The following May, Addington Equestrian Centre was chosen as the place to take another look at the partnerships, timings and reactions to loud recorded crowd noise. There was no reaction. A third rehearsal was held at Farokh's home on 24<sup>th</sup> July while senior personnel from HOYS checked that it met their high standards. Fortunately they loved it!

During the summer Jane, Liz Mansfield, Janet Dedicoat and Farokh toured the country to see horses and riders in training, give advice and suggest ways to adapt their schooling as needed. More horses and riders were added and all the 'players' learned their music and timing by heart. As they would have to come from everywhere, getting them together for rehearsals would have been expensive, so these visits were essential.

The administration required to send 50 people, including very young children and 18 horses to such a huge international show for a week was considerable. Accommodation for people and horses, parking, security passes and catering were major concerns and a duty rota was created for volunteers manning the stands. Sponsors had to be found. A Programme for our display was designed - hundreds would be given out from the stands to ensure plenty of 'bums on seats'!

The day before the show opened was rehearsal day for all acts. We had no less than four lengthy rehearsals in the international arena, culminating in a full dress rehearsal that evening. Tolerance of the lights and noise was impressive.

In the collecting tent, waiting for our turn in the arena, we were reassured by the Display Co-Ordinator Betty Peacock, who was in charge of the finely-timed entry of each 'act' and the raising of the great curtains! Jane also kept a thoughtful eye on all performers, sorting out any hitches that seemed likely to arise. Her calm presence encouraged the team to do their best.

**Our first public performance on Wednesday of "The STORY OF THE CASPIAN HORSE" opened with a short film of the historic origins of the Caspian, the "Horse of Kings", its apparent extinction and**

**rediscovery by Louise Firouz and its re-emergence in 1965 “...out of history and into our lives!”, with voiceover by the popular TV actor, Martin Clunes.**

On those words, the stallion Henden Troy emerged into a spotlight, his rider Jess Lee dressed in a stunningly colourful costume especially made for us in Gilan Province, Northern Iran, where Louise Firouz found her first Caspians. Troy was closely followed by two bay mares, Edcombe Cassima and E. Lyla, driven by Rebecca Mann on long-reins, in training for driving as a pair. A group of young children was led by the newly broken ridden stallion Bytham Justin Time with his 6 year old rider Millie Bowler demonstrating Pony Club Dressage, and 6 year old Annie Mason riding sidesaddle on the lovely part-Welsh mare Bytham Abigail. (The historic sidesaddle had been kindly lent for the show by the Museum of the Horse at Tuxford, Nottinghamshire.) 5 year old Arijana Goff rode Runnymede Meteor (Riding Schools) and 8 year old Zara Clark rode the recently broken gelding Costessa Feysul off the lead-rein (Show Riding). Representing Riding for the Disabled was 4 year old Anna Horsfall, riding the part-Welsh mare, Bytham Lucy Locket.

Two ‘polo’ ponies, Bytham Churchill and Bytham Swallow, their riders Chloe Wheeler-Chapman and Jessica Rivers swinging polo mallets (and aiming for tennis balls!) to demonstrate the obvious suitability of Caspians for Children’s Polo. The stallion Runnymede Felfel, now 26 years old and sire of several in the display, was followed by his son Justin Time and Henden Troy to show Caspian stallions for breeding. Two geldings, Darkhorse Inshallah and Edcombe Aladdin, ridden by Lizzie Sales and Maya Clements, showed that Caspians take part in Endurance events with success.

Representing Caspians in Mounted Games, the fabulous Arabian x ¼ Caspian geldings Darkhorse Danzig and Darkhorse El Azar, ridden by Lauren Firth and Charley Thornton, demonstrated some of the skills for which they are members of a Yorkshire Mounted Games team, competing at national and International level.

Finally the ‘Ginger Ninja’, chestnut star of Horse Driving Trials Kineton Khoja, showed us why Team Khoja has done so well at this sport. His driver, 19 year old Amelia Waddicor, was Evolution Pony Driver of the year in 2016 and 2017, with the help of her agile backstepper, Morag Patrick. Khoja wove in and out of the ten pillars in the huge arena at speed and even trotted exactly in time with the music. Like all the Caspians, he remained cool and calm despite the huge noise and bright lights. The Caspian *sang froid* was particularly noticeable amongst the three Caspians who took part in the Grand Finale, when a pop concert atmosphere with deafening noise and colourful strobe lighting terrified the other horses in the arena.

Immediately before one of our displays, the Caspian x Arabian geldings, Darkhorse ‘Fred and Barney’, driven by Gareth Roberts, completed a sparkling round to win their heat easily in the Osborne Refrigerators Double Harness Scurry, eventually finishing a fast 3rd in the Finals. Another plus for the Caspians! Many congratulations to Gareth.

Our two exhibition stands in the Retail Village were staffed by CHS members and friends, who adhered to a carefully compiled duty rota. Volunteers from far and wide helped to man the stands and look after the exhibit horses. Bytham Swallow usually took the morning shift before becoming a ‘polo pony’, while Edcombe Amethyst took the afternoon and early evening shifts. Both were much loved and Swallow, in particular, enjoyed the hundreds of pats, hugs and strokes he received from adoring children. Caspians made many new friends and admirers at HOYS, who we hope will become new members and active owners. We couldn’t possibly have managed without the riders,

parents and grooms who came to help, nor the many volunteers who staffed the stands. The names of all those involved will appear in the CHS Autumn magazine, published in December.

Our generous sponsors included Mr & Mrs Balyuzi, who sponsored our initial training sessions and 'Weatherbeeta Rugs' through Olwen Law, who provided each horse with a beautiful navy and red embroidered rug, while Jo Mason kindly donated red head collars and matching ropes, so we looked very smart wherever we went.

Jane persuaded Harry Hall to supply specially embroidered memento sweatshirts for all riders and leaders to wear around HOYS. Wainwrights of Dorchester supplied printed sweatshirts for the display helpers and overprinted CHS Sweatshirts for all stand helpers. Like the rugs, the back of each shirt announced '**CASPIANS AT HOYS 2017**'. Liz Webster sponsored the ten arena columns in memory of her late mother Mrs 'Jaffa' Jenvey, co-partner in the Hopstone Caspian Stud, where Caspians started in the UK. Liz Mansfield Parnell found sponsor Mrs Sarah Basile for the special costume from Gilan and gave special CHS rosettes to all riders. To ice the cake, HOYS presented everybody with a coveted HOYS 2017 rosette with which to further impress their friends!

**By the end of that strenuous week at HOYS we had given seven fabulous displays and manned two stands for five days, attracted much favourable comment on Facebook, inspired several magazine articles and wowed the large international crowds that attend this prestigious show. We were live streamed for three nights on the British Equestrian Sport TV channel and one of our children was interviewed for TV about her daily blogs from HOYS on Facebook. What more could we have done to showcase the Caspian?!**

**Thank you HOYS, for giving us this wonderful opportunity and a week that we will never forget! Well done *everybody* concerned – especially our incredible Caspian Horses. We should all take a bow!**