

## SSA AREA 19 SIDE SADDLE CAMP : A VERY PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE By Gillian Greenwood

Just over 10 years ago, I read in my area newsletter that there was going to be a 3day side saddle camp at Bishop Burton College. How exciting ! How Interesting, Ooh Yes I am going to book a place .....and then the negativity in my head took over, we had moved from down South to “Up North” and therefore changed SSA area, I didn’t know anyone, they didn’t know me, I had been out of competitive side saddle riding for a few years ( Cheri my beloved side saddle performance horse had retired from competition and I had only just started riding her son Storm, side saddle at home ) and I felt really, really, novicey in my riding, and in fact left canter which I had always found easy, was now feeling impossible to do, I wasn’t “young” anymore, 2 Caesarean sections, life, etc. etc. etc. and the negativity won and I did not book a place. However, the idea of perhaps joining camp the next year was still there.

Next year came and so did camp, thank goodness. I kicked my negativity out the way as best I could (I still was struggling with left canter and the rubbish thoughts) but was determined to go. OK so Storm is 17hh part bred Cleveland Bay and still very green in experience despite being 9 or 10 years old at this stage.

What a weekend it was!! Perhaps not quite the weekend I had planned, but an amazing weekend, never forgotten, good long-term friends made, the camaraderie, support and encouragement, was second to none. Tears, laughter, frustration, disappointment, exhaustion and on reflection a huge sense of achievement and the start of a whole new era for me in side saddle riding. And we all still talk and laugh about it at camps and shows over a glass of Prosecco or two once the days riding is over. Because

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Storm had never been to a sleep over or pyjama party before. It took about an hour to get him back into the Bishop Burton stable, each time we took him out. Shod 2 days beforehand, he managed to pull a front shoe off within 20 minutes of having got into the stable (no on call farrier available). Proceeded to box walk 24/7 when in the stable, not drink and not too keen on eating either, he lost at least 2 suit sizes in the 3days.

Then there was the issue of mounting, I am only 5’4” and not blessed with Moulin Rouge legs!! Every time we got him close enough for me to get my foot in the stirrup, he moved away from the concrete mounting block. I think it was an hour to an hour and a half to get on board each time I was due for a lesson. We did manage our lessons, but officially never got out of walk (forget left canter or trot). Storm had never been on an all weather surface before let alone an indoor school ... interesting!!

Alex, my eldest son, who was about 10, had begged to come with me that weekend, I am so glad that I allowed him to come (not sure he was !!) he was ace, helping me and everyone in so many ways. He participated in the seminars and teach ins and learnt so much from Janet Senior who had organised the camp. But there is a much loved photo of him asleep in a wheelbarrow one afternoon in the stable yard.

Time came for the end of camp presentations, before the end of Camp Summer Show. Beforehand, Janet came up and spoke to me quietly, and very sensibly said, I don’t think you should do the show this afternoon, you are both exhausted. I was desperately disappointed but it was absolutely the right decision, and I think I was coming to that conclusion but didn’t want to be seen to be giving up.

Camp presentations, made on horseback to all who had attended camp, rosettes and special prizes given out. Be warned ladies of a certain age ..... Water proof mascara is essential, as are large hankies. As Janet gave me my camp rosette, the tears started, Janet said “well done this weekend, Do NOT give up !! this is the first of many rosettes you will achieve with Storm.” I didn’t really believe Janet ( how wrong was I? )

but this first rosette of Storms has pride of place on my wall and always will . Next to it, is the rosette awarded to Alex for all his hard work and support to the ladies that weekend, now I am completely red in the face and in floods of tears.

Watching the show on the Sunday afternoon, was a great opportunity to learn more and cheer on the camp ladies in their classes. Time to pack up (worst part of camp !!!!!!!) and load up Storm, another long-winded process and travel home.

This was the first side saddle camp of many I have attended, until Covid put a halt on everything. They have been my favourite times, seeing “old” friends, meeting new friends. Still laughter, tears, hard work and fun. Storm now stands to the mounting block like a rock, both for me to mount AND dismount. I think we have now nailed left canter!! And have competed in many competitions and Janet was quite right, Storm has a wall full of side saddle rosettes.

The camp horses over the years, do seem to recognise each other and as camp has been at the same venue for about 6 years, they do know which is their ‘own’ stable. A number of these horses and their riders have become stalwarts of the Area 19 display team, and all of them ‘love a party’ as do their riders. Something that has moved me most over the years, is that so many of us that are passionate about side saddle and ride side saddle, yet none of us can really say why we are so passionate about it, however it truly seems that all of us have a poignant back story that somehow is very intertwined with why we started side saddle riding ... following many a camp fire long night chat.

So when we are back up and running again and you are thinking of attending camp, please do.

Come prepared for all sorts of weather, we have been drenched, frozen, and sunburnt. Extra sleeping bags are essential, whatever the time of year, to keep warm. I have never been as cold as in a single skinned Teepee tent in June, and those in horse boxes were no warmer. Do bring your astride saddle as well as your side saddle, due to weather, to try new things or revisit old skills, or if either you or your horse aren’t quite as side saddle fit as you thought you were.

There is the formal teaching on your horse, seminars, fun competitions (handy horse, champagne Charlie, costume, hobby horse) and sometimes the chance of a lesson on a mechanical horse.

It is what you as camp attendees make it, the camaraderie that is built, the lessons learnt, these extend well beyond camp, invaluable life lessons around a ‘camp fire’, preparation for staying away at shows, such as The Side Saddle Nationals or Aintree.

But whatever you do, do not forget your sense of humour or a spare loo roll (both absolute essentials).

I will leave you with 2 final stories. One very hot June, we were glowing red and our horses sweating profusely and the side saddle instructor from South Africa was wrapped up in 2 jumpers and a full Puffa jacket saying how cold it was.

I am sure the lady who this applies to will not mind me writing it. At one camp, as I was desperately trying to squeeze into my wedding habit for Costume Champagne Charlie, buttons flying and getting more and more stressed and upset and said lady who was equally having an issue with her costume, said “ .....it” , guffawed and removed her upper prosthetic appendages and her costume fitted beautifully.....We both still laugh over this.

Alex continued to attend Camps with me, reversing the trailer into position, putting up tents, setting up handy horse courses (and judging them) and generally helping wherever needed (and often forgotten, he also learnt to ride side saddle at camp, as of course did Dan). Then Dan, my younger son took over the mantle, even this year (at very nearly 18), coming to the Nationals with me, and just being there, helping any ladies that needed help and knowing just how to straighten that apron for us all. And most important, enjoying meeting up with SSA Camp friends over a 'camp fire'.