

Monty: a multi-talented Miniature Shetland

He may be small but as *Emily Ham* discovers, Monty's talents are larger than life and his personality is even bigger.

Helawi Mountbatten (AKA Monty) is your typical Thelwell pony. He does not ever give an inch more than you ask him, and if you annoy him (which isn't too difficult to do – just try brushing his legs or putting his travelling boots on) he is an expert at swiping your shin with a front hoof! But there is no doubt, Monty is a true driving gem.

He was purchased as a 3-month-old along with fellow miniature Shetland Rommel (Helawi Masquerade), after his owner Tigg Bays-Griffiths broke her back in a riding accident, and decided to downsize and set her heart on driving a pair.

Unfortunately, the ponies had other ideas with Rommel only growing to 29 ½ inches, so eventually Monty at 34 inches and proving a very sensible driving pony became the tandem wheeler. With Tigg they competed in Indoor Driving Trials, before she gained her BDS Tandem bars in 2013. She chose the London Harness Horse Parade on a very cold Easter Monday as one of her qualifying events to demonstrate driving competently and safely in public. But it was much hotter that summer, when the ponies with driver and groom aboard completed the 6-mile drive in Dorset with temperatures reaching 31 degrees.

Tigg then very kindly offered a young Alice Rutherford the chance to drive Monty. They were soon competing very successfully in show driving classes and enjoyed attending the British Young Drivers Easter Camp in 2014, where he won the award for the pony the instructors most wanted to take home. By 2015 he was back at the Tandem meet again, but this time in the Welsh hills in the pouring rain, where once again the 6-mile drive proved no issue and Alice too, gained her Tandem bars – at 14 she is possibly the youngest person to achieve this with what are believed to be the smallest tandem.

Monty who is a regular feature at Bennington Carriage's Open Days where he is very happy for be test driven, he is now also being driven by Sue Mart's young nephew Charlie Palfrey.

And whilst Monty has proved to be a very sensible and reliable driving pony, and quite speedy after a little negotiation, he can turn his hoof to other activities too. He and Rommel are part of Tigg's Posies on Ponies performance team and as such, have attended children's birthday parties, residential care homes and opened village fetes.

He has made regular appearances at the National Pet Show at the NEC, where he helps to promote miniature shetlands – showing people that they are not just ornaments but can be used to do a proper job. With a little persuasion, he can do some pretty impressive dressage on long reins, and was part of the Shetland team that won the Performance to Music Championship at Equifest in 2015. I am sure Norman Thelwell would have had great fun with that subject!

Left: Charlie and Monty. Inset: Harnessing up Monty. Bottom left: Monty giving a lesson with Sue Mart at Bennington. Bottom right: Monty with Sue's nephew Charlie

