

Bennington Carriages

- Show jumper turned driver

We caught up with Lyn Chorlton who, due to injury, could no longer ride. When a friend suggested she try driving, Lyn booked onto a Try Driving day at Bennington and she now competes with her own pony in driving trials.

Based in Lincolnshire, Lyn Chorlton has always been a keen horsewoman, describing herself as a 'dedicated amateur' in the show jumping ring, where she often contended county shows.

"When I got badly injured and could no longer ride, I started exploring other sports I could take part in," says Lyn. "After a friend suggested driving, I went along to a Bennington open day and consequently booked onto a Try Driving day in May 2018.

"The day was brilliant and Sue Mart was so helpful and informative. We started the day with a health and safety briefing then Sue talked us through harnessing the pony. We put to and went off for a drive around the quiet lanes then into the field where we were able to try a few cones and obstacles.

"I found it very different to riding, mostly because it was odd not having to use my legs - they kept twitching because they wanted a job to do! I also had trouble keeping the pony straight at first and that took me a long time to master, especially in walk. But really, driving is the same concept as riding in the sense that you need to have the pony working forward into the contact. For driving you rely much more on your voice aids, and the whip (used to gently touch the pony, never to smack) replaces your leg aids. I was amazed how tuned in the pony was to the voice aids!

"Sue told me that if I could see both blinkers then the pony was straight and I found that very



Lyn and Fearne competing at Osberton with Julie backstepping

helpful. When I got it right, I loved the feeling of connection and oneness I had with the pony and the fact he could almost read my mind. I booked myself onto another day and began the search for a pony and carriage of my own.

"I wasn't totally sure my body would be up to driving due to the injuries, so I didn't want to spend a fortune. After months of searching, I finally found Fearne, a 14hh Welsh cob who had been used to drive to the pub.

"Fearne is a great character and picks things up very quickly. I have to do most of the work on my own, so it was important I had a pony that was easy to look after with a good attitude, and Fearne is exactly that. She has been broken to harness very well by people

with good hands, so she's lovely in the mouth. Her previous owners are super people and I still keep in touch with them, which is nice.

"With Sue's help, we got Fearne kitted out in a correctly fitted harness and started off with a two-wheel carriage, later upgrading to a Bennington Spirit which is what I drive today. It was important I got this right, not only so we can perform at our best, but mainly because of Fearne's comfort, so I advise anyone to seek professional help when it comes to fitting equipment to your pony.

"I took Fearne over to Bennington for lessons with Sue and we did a few training days. These were run as competitions in a laid back format where Sue gave us all feedback and we could have

another go at something to improve, even though your first attempt counts as your score.

"In 2019 I managed to get out to a few competitions with Fearne - Poachers, Thoresby and Osberton - and when normality resumes, I intend to do many more. My long term aim is to qualify for the nationals and I would love to compete at Sandringham as I went there to watch and was blown away by it.

"Fearne isn't a big mover and she doesn't particularly excel in the dressage - she just goes through the movements and doesn't really show off in this phase. However, she loves the cones and adores the obstacles - when I harness her up for the obstacle phase she gets so excited.

"For anyone thinking of having a go at driving, I would highly recommend a Try Driving day with Sue at Bennington. Sue has a very clear way of explaining things and she is so positive about everything. If you don't understand something she will word it differently until you do. Plus everything is run in such a safe and organised way and you know you will drive a pony that knows its job so well and that the carriage will be properly balanced. Zac, one of Sue's ponies, is a medal

winning pony, so you can't ask for more than that!

"In my short time driving, I have picked up plenty of valuable tips from Sue and others and to anyone else starting out, I would advise you to never stop asking questions and take advice from people you trust. Have regular lessons with a good trainer so you start out the right way.

"When it comes to finding your own pony, choose a sensible experienced one to start with as it will make your job much easier. Set yourself bite-sized goals, and most importantly, remember to enjoy it!

"If driving is your hobby it should be fun so never lose sight of that.

If something isn't right - the pony, the harness or the carriage - then change it and make it right.

"When I compete, I like to visualise the courses and run them in my head so I know where I need to turn or slow the pace, for instance. I feel this really helps me to perform at my best. I have also done some scurry trials with Fearne which has improved the canter, as well as testing my accuracy. The driving crowd are so welcoming and friendly and will always offer you help and support.

"I still experience pain from my injury which can make it hard for me to keep a good posture and keep the weight down in my feet, so I was put in touch with a lady called Barbara Thompson from a company called Angel Med.

"Barbara designed the Horse Rider Gilet which helps to support your core muscles and keeps you more upright, something I was really struggling with when driving. My

gilet was specifically designed to help with my injuries and it has helped me so much. Barbara is currently working with Sue to develop a Bennington gilet designed especially for drivers and in the driver's specific colours, so watch this space.

"Barbara offered to back-step for me one day and she did such a great job that she's now one of my regular backsteppers on Team Fearne, as well as Caroline, Julie and Clare. I hadn't realised how much the driver depends on having a good backstepper - it can be the difference between winning and losing sometimes.

"I am really enjoying my driving journey and I cannot thank Sue enough for all she has done for me. If you're thinking of having a go, just do it and see how you get on. It may take a couple of sessions to decide if you like it, but most people who attend a Try Driving day go again. Give it a go and see for yourself!"



Competing at Osberton in 2019



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