

HOLCOMBE HUNT – HANNAH KNOWLES

I'd never been out hunting. I'd always thought they were a death wish looking at my friend's pictures online of leaping ditches and careering over hedges! I also thought they'd be a clique, heads held high on their fancy steeds. I could have not been more wrong.

As fog clung to the hills around Manchester on Saturday morning, we were on our way to a meet with the Holcombe Hunt. We were one of the first to arrive and my friend introduced me to the other early birds. Already, to my surprise everyone was so welcoming as we chatted away all hoping the rain would move on. Before I knew it, I was donning my tweed, buckling up my hat and being thrown on to my trusty little tank for the day, Ted, a resilient - but spritely - Dales pony.

Around me the excitement of what was to come dispersed throughout the other horses, feet stamping impatiently, but Ted stood firm, "an old hand and probably conserving his energy" I nervously thought. But then came the port: "That will take the edge off," I believed, gladly sipping it down.

We all gathered around the Master of the hunt as he spoke out, but I could barely catch a thing. Luckily, I had my friend to stick by while already the others at the back seemed to take note of the newcomers', providing words of encouragement.

Out we rode with the clatter of hooves on the road, turning off into a field. Then, quite suddenly, before I had time to think, we were off at a gallop. Those three hours flew by, but what a way to see the countryside as we dashed up and down banks, hounds loping ahead.

Ted gave me all the confidence I needed; sure footed and never faltering. The only danger came from the chunks of churned up mud flying from my friend's horse with his dinner plate feet towards my head!

By the end I'd had the workout of my life. Mud plastered my beaming face as I washed off dear Ted. To top it off there was even pizza as everyone gathered in the barn and I couldn't feel more at home.

I will certainly be back if I get another opportunity and cannot thank the Holcombe Hunt enough for such a wonderful experience with the warmest of welcomes.