

HURSLEY HAMBLEDON - KAT BROWN

Growing up, I remember the splashes of colour as the Hursley Hambledon hunt sailed off behind our house. They lit up the drab fields every Boxing Day until Foot and Mouth Disease put paid to it, and when I took up riding again two years ago, I was determined to one day ride out with them – even if they didn't end up in quite such a convenient location.

Not having my own horse, I caught the train up from London and hopped in a cab to the meet to collect my lovely bay, Vegas, from Laura and Hannah of Plantation Hirelings – they also served as nannies for me and another visitor, Sarah, which was incredibly comforting, as was the welcome from seasoned field members.

After a steady start we were soon cantering through the woods and faced with a decision. To jump, or not to jump? Sarah and I were game but decidedly wimpy, but Laura and Hannah were so encouraging we went pro-jump. I missed two logs as I didn't want to go over as a pair, which meant I didn't see the larger of two fence options until Vegas was sailing over it. I hadn't fallen off! I was still on! Thrice hurrah!

We popped a set of rails out of the wood, galloping up a hill to a check. Sarah and I high-fived each other ineptly while making the sort of excitable squeaks only audible to hounds. We were brought down to earth by a bog that seemed to have come over on an exchange visit from Ireland, but then it was back to zipping through the woods. Sarah and I suddenly found ourselves accelerating as our horses got joyously carried away – I have never galloped a jump and by the time we got out the other end my face was described as Munch's The Scream! But I did it, and crikey, I felt like Zara Phillips!

The hunt wound its way back to the meet for a slap-up barbecue and enough cake to ensure I'd squash darling Vegas if I got on her again too quickly!

I grinned all the way back to London – one of the Masters very kindly gave me a lift to the train station which is, frankly, A+ service – and as soon as my boots are clean, I'll be booking my next outing. What complete joy – with or without your own horse!