

ROYAL ARTILLERY - KELLY MURRAY

On arriving at the Queen's Building with the Royal Artillery (RA) we had a morning filled with info on the interesting history of hunting including instruction on how to blow the horn – they made it look so simple. After a lovely morning tea we were packed off to meet the hounds and learn all about them, we also witnessed the drawing of the lucky ones to join us that afternoon. The hounds were just fantastic, each a packet of boundless energy and enthusiasm.

We returned to the RA to be paired up with our horses - this is of course the highlight of the day. The wonderful horse aroma somehow reminds me of home; it is a comfortable aroma a bit like a favourite pub. Looking around at everyone so smartly dressed in ratcatcher and happy faces, it all looked so beautiful, so timeless, and so much part of our proud heritage.

Brief introductions to our steeds kind of felt like going on a blind date - I hope we hit it off! I had a beautiful grey called Eddie with kind eyes. To the mechanics making sure our girths were tight and stirrups correct it was down to join the rest of the hunt for some port (well a few glasses to calm the nerves) and introductions. Everyone we spoke to was friendly and reassuring and we commented later how it made us feel so comfortable and welcome.

Then we were off. Under a huge sky, that liberating feeling you get on a horse in open country, pure joy. Eddie was a beautiful horse responsive and forgiving - our first date going well.

Salisbury Plain is 94,000 acres of chalk plateau sparsely populated, I feel very lucky to be here, an endless stream of beautiful scenery as we gallop together towards a distant horizon and the sounds of the hounds and the horn. All my senses are engaged, at times it seems surreal. When we cross roads people stop to take photos wave and say hello.

There was a "small" moment when I lost it, not sure what happened, I had to stop and gather myself. Everyone rallied around, re-assured me and stayed with me until I calmed down and pulled myself together, great support from everyone.

I am hooked, Eddie and I will be on a second date for the opening meet – very excited!