



AN ARTICLE BY ROS DENBY

CREWING

Whatever way you look at it – 160kms in one day on one horse is a serious achievement.

When I had the opportunity to crew for Helen McFarland and her horse J St Jaques at Lindum, I jumped at it. I have always had a huge admiration for the few riders who manage to compete at this level and the reality checked out. Who knows, I thought, I might learn something but what I didn't bargain for was to be seriously hooked on the idea – but more of that over the next few years....This article is about Helen, Jaques and her husband David, without whom (I'm sure Helen would be the first to agree) these achievements couldn't be accomplished.

Endurance is a contradictory sport – on one hand it is solitary in many ways and on the other it is a team sport like no other. This was brought home to me by how professional and organised both David and Helen had to be. They live in Belfast and are members of the Cumbria Group, as we have the fortune to be their nearest. They came over for Ludlow and Lindum bringing two horses – Kamaal (probably spelt incorrectly) for Ludlow and Jaques for the ride at Lindum. The organisation level was like a military operation with everything thought about from the ham sandwiches for the day (which were very

welcome I can tell you!) down to the 87 numnahs that were needed throughout the ride. The point is that when the day starts (at 3am) there is no time to be worrying about anything else except for getting to the start line on time (4.30 am) and then the crew setting off at a million miles per hour making sure that we met them at every crew point possible with sashes, sugar beet water and bottles of Coke - for Helen not Jaques!

David's map reading ability is superb and I now know the Lincolnshire Wolds pretty well having visited a vast area of it in one day – leaping out of the undergrowth with plastic bottles around the very pretty lanes. I know that towards the latter end of the day that both Helen and Jaques were very happy to keep meeting us and it seemed to be a big motivator for them both to know that support was there after so many hours of trotting along and just working towards the goal of 160km. It took from 4.30am to 7.45pm to achieve it and with 2.5 hours of vet holds that means a total riding time of 13 hours!!... well roughly anyway. You have to be fit to do that – you have to be fit just to crew that!!

Totally prepared in every way – horse and rider just worked with determination towards their goal and I do mean the horse too. What an absolute little star!! He was

tired towards the end, no doubt, but he is fit and he knew he had a job to do and he just went on and on and on ... you get the picture. He vetted within minutes of coming in with his pulse rate dropping fast to well below 64 for every vetting. He was sound throughout and having been encouraged to eat with a huge choice of everything he could possibly want in his corral during the holds, his gut sounds and metabolics were also spot on. Electrolytes were a key part of this management and Helen was in charge of supplements which were tailor made over seasons of experience and customised to his needs.

They came first – and out of a class of six there were two finishers. No galloping finish this time but they were well ahead right from the start and just maintained it throughout the day. What an achievement and I know that, even though this was not their first 160km in a day and it certainly won't be their last, both Helen, David and Jaques were proud of what they had done and rightly so. Quiet determination won the day and the race. A horse at the peak of its fitness, a superb attitude and a lot of team work.

I can recommend crewing at this level – have a go if you get the chance and you never know it might be you one day coming in over the line exhausted but happy. Don't blame me if you catch the bug too!!