

## **Riding for the Disabled Association demonstration at Balmoral**

Even the dreary weather at Balmoral this year didn't diminish the spirits of the 6 keen riders who travelled from all over Northern Ireland to take part in the "Countryside Challenge". This annual event allows the riders to show off their skills in steering, stopping, starting and manoeuvring around obstacles, all of which help to improve posture and balance. It just goes to show that there is much more to sitting on a horse than meets the eye and these riders have improved weekly.

Adult rider Jill Connery stood tall on her pony Magic for the Banbridge and Moira Group, tackling the course with enthusiasm and weaving her way through each of the obstacles. She passed her Grade 2 proficiency test earlier this year and is looking forward to the dressage at Danescroft and holiday at Castlewellan in the next few weeks. Jill is the daughter of well known artist John Connery and she has been riding with the RDA for four years.

The Enniskillen group brought a very excited young rider to participate on their behalf. Eight year old Loughlin Drumm has been riding every Thursday since December and has shown dedication to learn each week. He travelled down with Cygnet, his pony for the day, and completed the course well. Loughlin was aided by local volunteers Barbara Lunney, Avril Kee and Nicola Stevenson.

Lisburn were the only group to bring two riders this year, Ellen and Christine. Ellen is ten years old and enjoyed having the opportunity to perform in front of an audience. She has been riding with the RDA for the last two years. She was joined by fellow rider Catherine who is 11 and has also been riding for two years. Both girls participate in the same class with the Lisburn Group.

June, an adult rider, was taking part this year for the Minnowburn group. She suffered a stroke in 2006 and overcame a fear of horses to begin riding with the RDA in 2007. The fact that she was able to participate at Balmoral shows how far she has come over the last couple of years. She is very grateful to all who help her every week and said that "Horse riding has saved my life".

The Carryduff group were without doubt the rowdys on the day and ten year old Katie had a very enthusiastic crowd of supporters with her. They were delighted with how well she managed to complete the "Countryside Challenge". Katie has been a member of the Riding for the Disabled group for the last two years and looks forward to riding each week.

Following this demonstration Rose Neill (BBC) and Willie John McBride (Ex British Lions Captain) judged the "Best Turned Out", meticulously assessing which group they felt had put in the most effort for both horse and rider. Rose was a keen horsewoman in the past and having taken part in many hunting events she exactly knew what she was looking for. In the end it was the Carryduff group who were victorious with their neatly turned out pony and rider.

County Chairman Julie Jordan said “Despite the drizzle both riders and volunteers had a great day. We would like to thank all of the organisers and the CO-OP for sponsoring the event once again”.

The demonstration lasted around 45mins and attracted an enthusiastic crowd to the Cattle Lawn. The work that had gone into getting these horses and riders ready and to the event was very much appreciated and the crowd were able to learn a bit more about the work that is done by the charity.