

# View from the Ejector Seat

by Marguerite Mckeown Aug 2010



Marguerite vaulting on Louis

Imagine you were standing in a windy paddock and someone asked you "Would you like to.....mumble, mumble, inaudible, inaudible.... vintage vault ....with us?" What would you think the question that was being asked was? OK some smarties with inside knowledge right now are probably thinking "What else could it be but.....?" However I bet there are more than few of you who would have been right up there with me and said " Fantastic, when?" all the time thinking that you had agreed to either a trip to a vineyard or at the very least an upmarket wine tasting. But this was not the case – or even bottle.

Vintage Vaulters is the name Chrissie Johnson uses for her collection of vaulting victims!! As in vaulting on an actual, living, breathing horse!! Even when it was explained to me,

I still was under the impression that I was there to form part of the audience but sadly I was deluded. And so it was that I ventured to Nelson and the Johnson Equestrian Centre and lo and behold an enormous Clydie cross was brought forth for us to marvel at – Louie about 17 hands and at twenty was one of Martin Gostellow's showjumpers in his former life and a better man for the job would be hard to find. He seems to be devoid of any bones in the back department and is actually so wide that your legs are stretched so far apart that it would be hard to get them together enough to fall off ... unless of course you went off backwards ... or head first forwards...or fell off getting on ... or couldn't actually get on...So after an entertaining display from some perfectly proportioned young thing and Louis – remember I am still thinking that I am the audience at this point – a barrel mounted on a frame was brought out and Sarah demonstrated how she had practised her moves on it before she moved onto good old Louie.

Very interesting so far ... but then the trainer Lyn suggested that some of us might like to try sitting on the barrel and just to help us, she had brought a sturdy mounting block of just the right height – Sarah of course had just flown across the ground and leapt on with no obvious pull from gravity. We were about 10 in number and ranged from 20 something's with 0% body fat to ...well .. lets just say omewhat older and somewhat larger. After some initial "After you, no, no I insist, after you" we all eventually managed to struggle on and sit in more or less the right position and even completed the old "around the world" exercise so popular with pony clubbers. I then witnessed the phenomenon that probably leads to football riots and massacres – no-one was game to say "Well thanks very much, that was great but I have to be going now".

We all stood like stunned mullets as the lovely Louis was brought back onto the arena with the mounting block and instead of asking for volunteers, Lyn just called the first person in the line – she clearly has done this before and knows better than give anyone the option of opting out.



Miranda looking great

One by one we watched our peers first get on, do a "box" standing still and then very bravely, clinging onto the handles for dear life, a box at the walk. "Your leg nearest the



Sue's first go at vaulting

horse is the one that keeps you on, just point your toe down and wrap your leg around him" chirrups Lyn. The inside of your leg not connected to anything remotely like a stirrup keeps you on??? There must be something we are missing here – maybe she issues us with a large piece of Velcro while we are mounting?? And there is always one show-off isn't there? The first to ride, not content with the dread and fear she had shown in we the on-lookers, proceeded to canter on her knees!!

Admittedly we had practised this on the barrel – "just pop up onto your knees – your weight will carry you there" - what planet does this woman live on?

Unfortunately we were all still in "group suicide pact" mode and what one does, we all have to do – I am sure you remember your mother saying " Just because she does it doesn't mean you have to do it, after all you aren't sheep in a flock" But we were just that! One did it so we all did it. Actually we probably could have done a psychology research into the reasons why – fear of failure, loss of face??

Whatever it was, we all one after another struggled aboard the ever willing Louis and after doing a box, proceeded first to canter and then to kneel at the canter! Admittedly Louis and Lyn made it as easy as they possibly could but none of us demurred when given our kneeling orders. And none of us fell off! Once again the show-offs did completely unnecessary things such as loosening the totally necessary death grip on the handles to lift one leg and the opposite arm in artistic poses – I did say they were posers, didn't I? - While most of us just clung on with our eyes tight shut, only reviving when we were safely (?) astride again at the walk. The idea was to become more aware of how your own body weight and movement affects the way your horse moves under you. We could clearly see how Louis responded so much more willingly to those more reckless riders and was more hesitant with those – shall we say less capable of going forward? Who knows it might improve our riding posture ... and maybe kick start a few new careers with the circus.



Vintage Vaulters at Johnson Equestrian Centre August 2010