

Art Hotel dominates early season chases – autumn 2012

The Art Hotel's Chasers and Racers squads have made a flying start to the autumn team chase season, winning the headline class at all three of the fixtures to survive the September weather and scoring a memorable double in the intermediate and the Material Change open qualifier at the Atherstone.

Sponsored by Heythrop hunt enthusiast Roel Rol who owns the Art Hotels in Rotterdam and Eindhoven, Holland, the team are a diverse bunch, with members ranging from a GP to a student.

Captain Sarah Myhill has a new horse in Mr Pointment, a former steeplechaser who won the Becher Chase and was ante-post favourite for the Grand National. "At the Warwickshire he was a little phased by having to turn and jump, and unseated me, but he is getting the hang of it now," she commented after their winning intermediate round at the Atherstone. Art Hotel Racers were led by the flying dun, Dunnock, a great crowd pleaser.

At the Warwickshire a new and deceptively straightforward water complex caused all sorts of trouble, including adding to the woes of reigning national champions Relentless, trying out new horses. A lack of horsepower then scuppered their plans at the Belvoir and Atherstone events.

At the Belvoir, ROR Lycetts A Class Act bounced back to form with second place in the intermediate. Sharon Robbins is double handed this season with her former event horse Carry on Joseph and Gypsy George, recently out of training.

"I'm having so much fun with Joseph and Joe Stevenson is doing an excellent job with Gypsy George, we have a great line up with Charlotte Alexander, and of course our brilliant lead Andrew Shipley and Pepper," she said.

Uncharacteristically, Andrew bit the dust at the Atherstone when Pepper put in a huge jump over one of the smallest fences on the course, but Sharon quickly caught the horse and they were reunited.

Cunning Stunts are also in great form, with the squad of Ben Furnival, Darren Watts, Sue Tideswell and Phoebe Buckley all on horses that are capable of leading, and all that relish the big hedges.

"This could be our year," said Darren, "these horses are flying."

Aside from the established squads there are plenty of horses and riders worth watching this season.

Mark Smith's bitless teams put in a great performance at the Warwickshire, with Bollocks to Bits taking second place in the novice speed, using pink Dr Cook's bitless bridles and with outfits to match.

Welsh Wizards hail from Welshpool and after a good run in the Warwickshire intermediate, took the plunge in the Atherstone open. The course at Bedworth near Nuneaton is infamous for its huge hedges and ditches, but the foursome and their event horses made little of it to take third place.

“We have had the horses since they were youngsters, so there is a lot of trust, which is important,” said Charlotte Jones, whose lead horse Spider is just 15.1hh. “It looked scary when we walked the course, but it rode brilliantly.”