

Saturday and Sunday was the TREC Ireland National Championships. We had four competitors on the Donegal team, Orla O'Reilly, Lisa Moore, Christopher Pyper and Grace Carr, with Lisa and I and Christopher and Grace also competing as pairs. The adventure kicked off on Friday when we drove to the venue just outside Kells in Co. Meath. We set up camp sites and corals and brought the horse for vetting. Saturday was the orienteering phase. We had ten minutes in the map room to trace out our maps, plan our speeds, figure out the off road terrain and form our plan of attack.

The Level one route was 12 KM with quiet roads, farm land, bridge crossings, gates, lanes and bogs to be negotiated. Riders head out not knowing where the check points are but aiming to ride at the correct speed the whole way so to be on time no matter where the check points have been hidden (and they do hide them). We left home at a speed of 7km per hour with a quick test of map skills taking us off road to a ticket point (30 points would be lost for missing the ticket). Back onto bog roads and through some woods until we came to the next checkpoint. There is a five minute break at each check point at which you have five minutes to remeasure the map, work out the kilometre markers from your new start point, set the target times to ride towards. With a slightly quicker speed of 8km/hour and trickier terrain, off we set across the headlands of lush silage fields, over a bridge crossing, more headlands and then through a gate to take us down a canter lane and back onto roads for 4 KM. Through stunning farmland from the next check point where horses had a lunch break and riders reapplied sun cream to themselves and flyspray to the horses before tucking into their own lunch. Another speed change, maps remarked, targets noted and stopwatch reset and off we went again, leaving the farm and going back to the roads, to find the fourth check point. From there we started the saunter home over rolling grassland with a nice speed of 6.5km. However after hitting a dead end, wrestling with two gates and getting held up behind tractors taking turf from the bog we were 4 minutes behind schedule facing into the final few kilometres. We caught up the time though and finished that section on target. Hitting check point number two a minute ahead of schedule resulted in our only penalty of the phase and left Lisa and I overall winners of the orienteering. Grace and Christopher were in fifth place after a navigational hiccup lost some precious minutes for them, but they were still well on target for a good result.

Saturday evening we had a guided course walk of the PTV (obstacle) course (1.6 KM for the level one riders) before heading to the evening social. Fed and watered (or wine and beered as the case may be) we retired a few hours later than planned and Sunday morning came all too fast. After vetting, riders headed off to warm up for the control of paces phase which some refer to as the dressage element of the competition. Riders had to canter a 150m corridor with the slowest canter picking up scores of up to 30 and the fastest walk scoring the same. A break to trot results in a zero score for the element so it's a test of schooling and aids. The atmosphere was too buzzy for Grace's Nipper and he broke in each section. Lisa and Christopher both scored 30 with maximum walk marks but too much speed in canter. Molly settled well and managed a score of 54 out of a possible 60.

Off then to the PTV, as the four of us were competing at level one I'll just give a run down of that course. Fence one was a ladder type jump, on then to a brush fence, then a long stretch down the gallops before turning left handed to the slalom, number four was a ridden incline up followed swiftly by an s-bend and then incline down. Another long canter to the next obstacle - mounted immobility, on then to a ridden corridor with just a few meters to get back to walk before a ridden rein back. Next up was a led log, led gate, an in-hand corridor and mounting. We cantered on up the field towards a raised footbridge which rode much smoother than it looked a final kick on towards the last two obstacles; a led step up and led drop down and then through the finish within the time limit of 15 minutes to escape penalty points.

We got packed up for and ready for home then sat having some post mortems before the presentation of prizes. Given that our goal was to get to the Nationals we didn't do too

bad. Winners of the overall team prize we also scooped a good clatter of rosettes; Level one pairs national championship Lisa and Orla, fourth place Grace and Christopher, Level one leading rider Lisa Moore,

Winner of the first ever Grangeclare Cup for highest placed individual rider in level 1 was Lisa Moore. At level one riders are judged as a pair, so overall National Champions: Level 1 Pairs Orla O'Reilly and Lisa Moore, fourth place Grace Carr and Christopher Pyper. More prizes in the under age category with Lisa winning the leading rider under 16 and Grace Carr, the youngest rider competing taking second in this division. There was also prizes for the highest score in each of the three phases across the grades with Lisa taking first on the PTV with 154 out of a possible 160, Orla taking 3rd in the Control of paces and our pair having the highest score on the orienteering across the grades with 478 points out of a possible 480.