

## Yvonne Goss



*The winner of the inaugural Golden Button Challenge explains her love of hunt rides, and hopes a new crop of team chasers will come through to bolster the sport*

**F**THE Ledbury hunt organised the Golden Button Challenge along the lines of the original point-to-points, so we raced from village to village. It was great fun, but getting the lorry from the start to the finish took some organisation.

There were 40 entries, including an awful lot of fit young jockeys on fast horses, so I didn't expect to win, but I think I must have been giving them some weight.

Actually, I was rather surprised there wasn't a minimum weight.

I won two golden buttons as prizes — one for winning and another for being the first lady finisher. I may put them on the back of my hunt coat, but I'm rather nervous about losing them. Looking back, I should have been more generous and given one to the second lady home, Sarah Myhill, a fellow team chaser.

It was great to see that six of the first nine were team chasers. I think the reason we do well is that we're used to not taking a pull and we jump anything — unlike point-to-pointers, who deal with more prepared fences and galloping in a circle. That said, I think hunt races are an excellent schooling ground for youngsters wanting to point. You really have to attack the fences and not be afraid of going at them full pelt.

I love hunt races. I've done the Melton ride four times and won twice. It's the speed and galloping over beautiful countryside I enjoy. I've also point-to-pointed, which is very nice, but you're just going around in circles. I prefer the natural obstacles and the daring of cutting corners and taking out strides you find in team chasing and hunt rides.

I guess I'm an adrenalin junkie. It helps that I trust my horse, Perry, 100%. He's 15 and has the beginnings of arthritis, but he's very keen and loves what he does. I'm literally just

a passenger who chats away as we go along, as Perry does everything by voice.

He doesn't like a strong bit or to be interfered with, and he sees strides pretty well by himself. I tend to go long into my fences rather than taking a pull or a half-halt.

Perry not only understands the tone of my voice, but certain words. If he rattles a fence, he knows "tut tut" means he needs to be more

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careful. I had a fall at the Wiltshire team chase last year. I knew I was going to hit the deck so yelled "wait" as I landed. Amazingly, he did. As soon as I was back on board, I gave him an "OK" and we flew off again.

Team chasing is my main passion. I'm delighted it's growing so much in popularity. There are waiting lists for many cubhunter and intermediate classes. It's a shame that open classes can struggle for entries, as team chasing does a great job in attracting spectators and most of them come to see the open — normally standing by the water for a good view of the dunkings.

**▶ Some open team chase courses have been lowered, which is not good news**

Some opens have been lowered, which is not good news. I'm not very tall, but these days there aren't many hedges I can't see over. As it happens, the enormous hedges and ditches usually jump extremely well.

Hopefully, the problem is just temporary. Team chasing is a relatively new sport and the first crop of riders is now starting to bow out. The younger generation hasn't quite reached its prime, but — fingers crossed — open classes will be bursting with entries when this happens.

Although I understand the appeal of going home with a prize if you enter a smaller class, it would be nice to think more people were prepared to enter opens just to "get round" so they could improve their riding and confidence.

Perhaps the best thing about the main three sports I'm involved with — team chasing, hunt rides and pointing — is that they're amateur, which makes for great camaraderie.

Everyone's in it together, even when you're competing against each other. The social life is brilliant. There's nothing better than getting together afterwards and talking about what fun you've had. H&H

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