

# 'Winging it', but teamwork pays off



THIS spring I had a chance conversation with one of our farm partners, during which he described the inaugural Vet Charity Challenge.

This event had been the brainchild of staff at BCF Technology who wanted to create a unique event that would provide fun for members of the veterinary profession and raise much-needed funds for worthy animal-related charities. BCF hoped to raise £20,000 for SPANA, the Pet Blood Bank and Hounds for Heroes and, to do this, each team that entered had to raise £400.

On further questioning it was revealed the challenge was to be a team event for three or four people and would include running, mountain biking and kayaking, together with some mental challenges.

To experienced competi-

## VICKY ROWLANDS

BVM&S, CertEP, MRCVS

### Practice Notes



tors this multi-discipline event was known as an adventure race – to us novices it sounded like an extreme event. The farm partner was keen to enter a farm vet team and was trying to persuade my husband to join in. My ears pricked up and, having a competitive nature, I decided we should also enter an equine team.

#### The equine team

After some gentle coercion, we had our team of four and training began – our enthusiasm for training, though, was greater on paper than in reality. The experience of our team varied from Julia – an experienced runner, cyclist and winner of two adventure races – to Roger, who had to borrow a bike as he hadn't owned one for many years. Unfortunately, with the summer soon disappearing, Roger had to decide whether to do a couple of short cycle rides to acclimatise his body to saddle sores, or just go for it on the day and pay the consequences later. Our good intentions for kayak training also went awry and "winging it" became the new catchphrase around the practice.

The challenge was held at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester. Student accommodation was available, which certainly brought

back many hazy memories of university. For those teams that arrived the night before the challenge, there was a good, if a little nervous, atmosphere in the college bar. The team consensus quickly dictated that beers would be better preparation than an early night.

The following day started with a competitor briefing, which was extremely useful as none of us really knew what the day would entail other than a lot of exercise. The best message we heard during the briefing was that the fittest team would not necessarily be the best team – good news for our under-trained bodies. Teamwork, strategy and fitness would all be required to finish with a good result. Around the room, we saw some very professional-looking teams, which only made our nerves worse.

#### The challenge

The day was split into a three-hour morning session and a three-hour afternoon session

and any teams finishing outside this time limit would incur penalty points. The morning session comprised a 50-minute puzzle session with the remainder of the time spent running (or walking) to different checkpoints to collect points.

The afternoon session was divided into kayaking and mountain biking and again visiting set checkpoints to increase scores further. We were given the run map during the morning briefing and the bike and kayak maps during the lunch break. This allowed time for strategic route planning and gave an idea of the enormity of the work ahead.

The competition began with one member from each team sprinting to collect a puzzle sheet, then returning to his or her team. The first teams to complete a puzzle on this sheet were then given their preferred choice of time to complete the mental puzzles section. With my running

and the rest of the team's mental agility, we managed to book the first time slot to do the puzzles, leaving the rest of the morning to complete the run.

During the 50-minute time slot, we had to complete as many of the six mental challenges as possible. The challenges ranged from mental agility and

communication skills, through to posting a team member through a spider's web. Our smallest nurse Sophie helped with this final challenge – we'd previously posted her through a dog flap at a practice party, so a spider's web offered little challenge.

The run phase was held on the grounds of a fantastic estate and through a small local village. We had been dreading the run as the competition info suggested teams would cover between 10km and 20km, which was a lot further than any of us had trained for. Although it was hard work, it was easier than expected, with stopping at checkpoints allowing some recovery time. The scenery also made the run seem a little easier than the boring training runs we'd previously completed round the streets at home.



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of the monument was sometimes harder than it sounded. Having a great map reader and an excellent team leader (not myself) helped – unfortunately though, I managed to twist my ankle at the fourth checkpoint, so the rest of our run was slightly slower than it should have been.

It seemed that every team managed to return within the allocated three-hour window. Those that had done their challenges later in the morning ran out of time and didn't score so many points on the puzzle section. Julia's tactic of completing the puzzles first paid off as you could gain points with very little exertion. Everyone seemed to enjoy the morning session and, during the enforced one-hour lunch break, most people took the chance to stock up on chocolates, biscuits, and sweets.

**Afternoon session**

Sadly, I couldn't compete any further and had to wave our depleted team of three off on the afternoon session. As the competition was for teams of three or four, the others could still carry on. Once the team had left the transition area, one of our support party and I were then able to drive down to Lake 32 at the Cotswold Water Park to watch the kayaking. This was definitely the best place to eat ice cream and spend a sunny afternoon watching everyone else work hard.

Teams arrived in various states of disarray. Some looked like they were still working on farm, rather than farm vets on a day off – there were obviously some very muddy areas on the bike route.

The kayaks each held two people and were tied together



by a short section of rope to stop teams drifting apart. It certainly prevented cheating, but did provide spectators with some hilarity when a sailing boat tried to go between two of the kayaks.

This phase seemed to be the hardest for most teams – some competitors finished with extreme cramps and most looked quite relieved to be getting back on their bikes. After watching the last boat off the water (our farm team), we headed back to cheer everyone through the finish. There were plenty of tired-looking faces, but everyone appeared to sport a large smile of achievement. The jelly beans and water provided by BCF provided a popular and much-needed boost for the finishers.

**Entertainment**

The evening included prize giving, followed by a buffet supper and a ceilidh. Congratulations must go to the competition winners The Complete Animal team from Hyde Park Veterinary Centre. We were proud our team was second and the farm team third out of 32 teams – a fair achievement for Willows Veterinary Group.

The supper and the ceilidh

provided great entertainment for those staying on the Saturday night, although dancing on tired legs was probably pretty hard work.

In reflection, would we return another year? The answer is a resounding yes (just as soon as I'm off these crutches). It was a great chal-

lenge among fantastic scenery, everyone was friendly, the beers went down very well after a day of exercise, and it certainly provided ample team-building opportunities.

**Acknowledgements**

Thank you to BCF Technology for organising the event and

VICKY ROWLANDS graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 2003. After starting work in a mixed practice in Fife, she then specialised in equine work and now works at Ashbrook Equine Hospital. Vicky gained her certificate in equine practice in 2009 and has special interests in orthopaedics and performance-related problems.



jointly funding it with Kruuse and Vets2.net. Thanks also to the Royal Agricultural College for providing a great venue.

We at Ashbrook Equine Hospital would also like to thank Boehringer Ingelheim for sponsoring our T-shirts. ■

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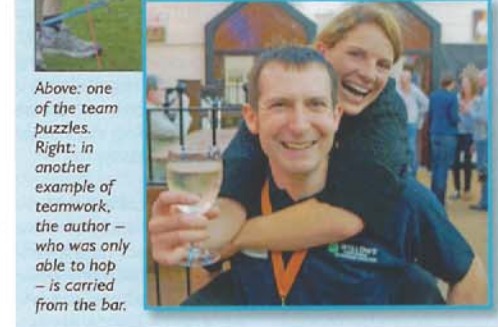
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Above: one of the team puzzles. Right: in another example of teamwork, the author – who was only able to hop – is carried from the bar.

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