

The traveller

Daisy Sadler on catching the horse and travel bug aged 50, and winning the 2018 *H&H* Inspiration of the Year Award aged 73

There were no horses in my life until I was 50. My husband Josh owned a garage; we had old Porsches and took part in amateur classic car races. When the recession hit in the 1990s, we had to give up the cars.

A horse was a comparatively cheap alternative pastime. I bought a Shire called Sydney with cart and harness. He was six, inexperienced and sparky — totally unsuitable for a beginner. We converted the garage into a stable. I soon learned he needed companions and found a field to turn him out with some pals.

At a heavy horse club meeting, I sat next to the great Ron Creasey, one of the last farm horsemen. He was old by then, but he gave me lessons. Without Ron, I would not have done any of my travelling. He encouraged me to take Sydney out on the roads and taught me how to take a horse out of harness on the roadside. After six months I started taking Sydney out on my own.

I was invited to attend the Battersea Harness Parade in London. I planned the route of my first long trip, including stopovers, in advance. This is something I have never done since because things happen — a horse may be off colour and need a day or two off. I spent my first night away at a fellow heavy horse

enthusiast's stables, sleeping on the wagon under a tarpaulin. Then I spent the night before the parade at the Young & Co's Brewery stables in Wandsworth, which was quite an experience.

It was hard work for Sydney to pull the cart on his own, so I bought another Shire. We also bought the top section of a gypsy wagon, which sits on Sydney's original cart base. It now has solar panels, a woodburner, USB ports, Wi-Fi, LED lights, head- and rear-lights, brake lights and indicators. Under the wagon is a cupboard for the horse feed and a water tank made by my husband.

I started doing kids' parties, weddings, fetes and pub crawls. It was supposed to be 10 pubs, but nobody got beyond seven. We also went on holidays with horse and cart, travelling around the Cotswolds. I like to have a purpose, and to see horses work and be useful.

I completed another long journey from my home in Oxfordshire to the Lake District in 2015, and a five-month 1,000-mile round trip to The Kelpies heavy horse monument near

Edinburgh in 2018 in aid of The Brain Tumour Charity. I've now exceeded my target of £25,000. I still can't believe my name was called out at the *H&H* awards. I was lost for words.

My companions were my two Belgian draught horses, Olive and Arthur, and my dog, Tad. The Brabants have better conformation for pulling a cart. Shires are tall and gangly, while these are about 16hh and stockier.

I never leave the horses when I'm travelling. I set up camp at the roadside; it is always stressful finding a wide and quiet verge. The horses are fed four times per day, and spend the nights grazing in a makeshift paddock using electric fencing. We travel from 10-10.30am to 3pm to avoid rush

hour, covering around 10 miles per day.

The scariest moment — and the only time I've had to shout for help — was when I was setting up camp. I had one horse half in harness and the other half out, when they were both upset by something. I was trying to hold on to them, but I'm only 5ft 11in and was 73 then — it could have been a disaster. I'll never forget this big hand reaching over, taking hold of Olive's headcollar. It turned out the hand belonged to an ex-jockey.

Everyone was so lovely along the way, offering help, grazing, stables, carrots and water for the horses, turning up with bags of groceries and home-made cake. My farrier had given me four sets of shoes with tungsten tips for the journey and not a single farrier charged me a penny to fit them en route.

I met so many people — happy and sad.

Those who had lost parents, children and babies to cancer. They wanted to talk and donate — the horses were the stars of the show. *H&H* • As told to Leslie Bliss

NEXT WEEK

Pinhooker Jamie Railton

'I like to have a purpose, and to see horses work and be useful'



Picture by Gerry Murray