

ROYAL WINDSOR HORSE SHOW RAFA REPORT – 2022

The annual Services Team Jumping Competition took place in the main arena at the prestigious Royal Windsor Horse Show on Sat 14 May 22. This marks the highlight of military equestrian competition for many military riders, and it is considered a real honour to be selected to compete. The standard of riding from all teams is always high, and this year there was the added prestige of parading in front of HM The Queen in front of a capacity crowd for her Platinum Jubilee. The atmosphere in the main ring was sure to be electric.

Because several RAF Equitation Team Members are currently deployed, and ongoing horse availability issues (due to injuries), RAF Equitation were only able to field one team of 3 horse and rider combinations this year; normally we would have been able to field at least 2 teams. Nevertheless, those selected had demonstrated strong form at the team selection event and hopes were high that they could surpass last year's result, where team RAF finished second overall out of 30 teams.

This year's RAF Team comprised of: Sqn Ldr Sam Martin (Air Cmd) riding his own Cruise; Cpl Nikki Thackray (JSSU Digby) riding her horse Ghaicorrie; SAC Rebecca Champion (RAF Marham) riding her own horse Mr Miller. For Nikki it would be her first-time riding at Windsor while for Sam it would be his tenth appearance, and his eighth time riding Cruise, at Windsor Show. Sam and Cruise have gained a reputation for jumping clear rounds over the years and 2022 was no exception as they flew round the course in a fast time whilst leaving all the fences up to end up in joint first place. Nikki and Ghaicorrie followed immediately after Sam and started well, unfortunately Ghaicorrie got quite excited, made a small mistake, which led Nikki to make an error of course. This can happen to any horse and rider- nothing can prepare you for being in the arena at Royal Windsor apart from... being in the arena at Windsor! But the time faults they incurred proved costly and Team RAF dropped down the leader board. Our last combination, Rebecca Champion and Mr Miller again started the course jumping beautifully and were desperately unlucky to have a slight loss of focus at the second-from-last fence. Despite this it was widely acknowledged by those who watched that hers was 'one of the classiest rounds of the day'.

The RAF finished 13th out of 22 teams and all the riders represented the RAF brilliantly, parading their immaculately turned-out horses in front of HM The Queen, and gaining valuable competition experience which will surely see them come back in 2023 with more confidence and hopefully an even stronger performance.

Rider Quotes:

Sqn Ldr Sam Martin: *I'm so proud to have been able to represent the RAF and ride in uniform at Royal Windsor Horse show in this Platinum Jubilee year. While the result didn't go our way today, Team RAF should be pleased with the way we rode; moreover, the support from all the RAF grooms and helpers on the ground was outstanding and demonstrated a great team ethos. There is a lot to build on here to enable us to come back stronger in 2023.*

Cpl Nikki Thackray: *It's safe to say my spirits were rather low after my round but the other RAF Team guys were so supportive. On reflection I've achieved my aim of riding at Windsor and experienced the incredible atmosphere, and I couldn't have done that without all the*

Equitation Association's help. Now I am more determined than ever to come back next year and hopefully be more competitive, but if we don't, I still had a blast!

SAC Rebecca Champion: *Windsor had a much larger feel to it this year in comparison to last when we were just coming out of COVID lock down. The atmosphere was brilliant, however this also led to the arena being a lot more spooky for Miller. He felt like he was on springs but coming down to the second to last fence Miller was looking at everything other than the fence which unfortunately led to a stop. Nikki and Sam, along with the rest of the team, were very supportive and made the whole day very enjoyable. I don't think I will ever get used to parading with all the other services in the afternoon in front of the large crowd and HM The Queen – it's a very surreal thing to do! I hope in the future I get the honour again of representing the RAF at such a prestigious event.*