



# African adventures

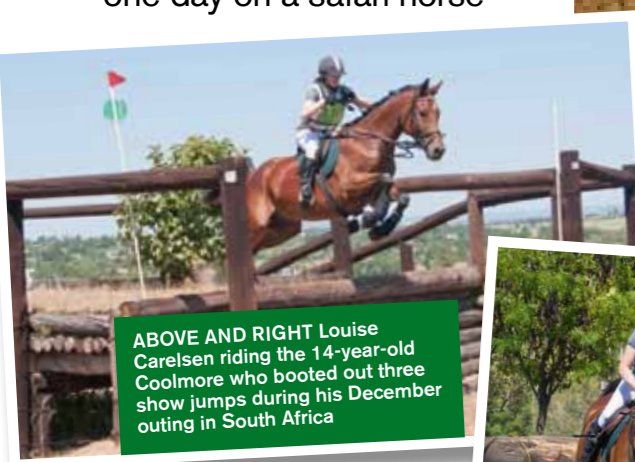
In the first of an occasional diary series, Limpopo Horse Safaris's owner LOUISE CARELSEN kicks off our Eventers Abroad special. A part-time event rider based in Botswana, she reveals how competing African style can include a six-day round trip to contest a novice one-day on a safari horse



ABOVE AND BELOW Limpopo Horse Safari's guide horses have to be safe with big game and versatile as they also double up as event horses when required

MEET... LOUISE CARELSEN

AMERICAN-born Louise Carelsen moved to the UK at the age of 10. She started riding, contested Pony Club competitions and took a horse up to novice level in eventing. She left the UK at 18 bound for the National Riding School at Saumur in France, after which she went to South Africa to school horses for safari business Equus. She met her husband, Cor, moved back to the UK for two years but eventually gravitated back to Africa. She took on a role at Limpopo Horse Safaris 10 years ago and has worked her way up from back-up rider to owner. "I spend a lot of time training the guides to ride and the horses to behave," says Louise.



ABOVE AND RIGHT Louise Carelsen riding the 14-year-old Coolmore who booted out three show jumps during his December outing in South Africa



**C**AN you please remind me why I love this sport? I have just notched up my first clear and in time cross-country round at novice level at Inanda Country Base in Johannesburg, my 'local' two-day event, when I find out that I've missed a compulsory flag. Damn.

Eventing is a tough sport at the best of times and it's not made any easier by the fact that I live on Mashatu Game Reserve in south east Botswana and my closest event is a cross-border trip to South Africa a good seven-hour drive away.

With 35 horses at home who need looking after, it is hard to get away for several days to contest an event. This isn't your average trip to Aston-le-Walls that may take you an hour or so each way and can easily be accomplished in a day.

In my case I set aside one whole day to travel to Inanda Country Base, one day for the horses to acclimatise, one day to do the dressage, one day for the cross-country and then the show jumping and one day to travel back home again. And all this without even mentioning the paperwork involved, by which I mean a permit from Pretoria in

South Africa to import the horses to South Africa, which then needs to be completed by the Botswana state vet who lives a three-hour drive from me in Selebi Phikwe. Then the state vet from South Africa has to meet us at the border as we bring the horses through to check that all is in order. So, by the time

we get to the event, it feels as though we are about to compete at the Olympics.

Oh, and I haven't told you about the build up. Our show jumping prep has involved getting the horses used to jumping odd things like old dog kennels and disused fridges and, when we do try and cross-country school, invariably the elephants are in force and we have to re-schedule.

**First time lucky for Mpho**  
My horse, Coolmore, a 16.3hh Thoroughbred cross, is now 14 and although he has plenty of talent we simply don't get the necessary mileage to advance through the grades very quickly which means that we are still at lowly novice level. Mpho, one of the back-up guides at Limpopo Horse Safaris, the company of which I am director, has been travelling to events with me for years but he has just

contested his first novice class at Inanda Country Base on Twist, a 16.2hh Shire x Thoroughbred who is used for safari work.

Tsaone, another back-up guide, also comes to Inanda Country Base's Christmas event to have a go at his first intro despite the fact that he has only been riding for a year. His mount, the 12-year-old Lancelot, a 16.2hh Shire x Thoroughbred, is an all-time star on safaris and is used both by guests and guides.

Foxy Snob, a five-year-old, 15.3hh Thoroughbred cross who has been on numerous safaris during the year, contests the intro class with me.

I come away from Inanda Country Base with mixed feelings. Foxy does a good job in the dressage arena and then jumps double clear across country. Only time faults spoil our scoresheet.

Tsaone and Lancelot jump clear over both types of fences but they suffer an unlucky fall on the flat on the cross-country. They hit the deck near the third obstacle where the jump judge is tucked away in the bushes. Lancelot suddenly noticed the judge on his approach and does a huge spook sideways.



Guide Mpho contests his first event on the part Shire Twist

Twist earns his best ever dressage mark largely due to some excellent lessons from Peter Storr and Beverley Brightman who have both been on safari with us recently. The flatwork has always been Twist's weakest phase and it is sods law that this time when he does a good test he has an unlucky cross-country run out which leaves him unplaced.

Then, in a move that has me kicking myself, Coolmore's reasonable dressage test is followed by a super cross-country round within the time, which is quite tight at 480m per min. It is at this point that I find myself eliminated. Why oh why did I come all this way only to miss out a flag? I'm sure there are many times when most of us wonder if it's all worth it. The early starts, the expensive entry fees, the long distances to get to events and time spent away from families, especially young kids. However, every once in a while your horse puts up a great round, or you receive a fantastic comment from the dressage judge, or you can see an improvement in you and your horse and so the cycle begins again. Been there, done that, got the T-shirt?

At Inanda Country Base there is maybe a little consolation in the fact that 10 other poor souls have done exactly the same thing as me and missed out a flag and so, after an appeal, or maybe just the pity of the event organiser, the eliminations are reversed. To be honest, I've no idea how all that happened but I find myself in with a chance of netting a third placing. However, I blow it when, watched in open-mouthed

horror by Limpopo Safari's local agent, who has set up a stand at the show jumping arena to promote our safaris, I plough my way through the show jumps clearly still in cross-country mode. Ooops. Those three poles down prompt another hellish moment of 'why do I do this?' Well, there is always another day, or should I say another year as the next event I will be heading to is in March or April, again at Country Base, although I'm also aiming to do the FEI Prix St George dressage test in Gaborone. That is a mere 11-hour drive from home on dirt roads, dodging donkeys and cows and potholes along the way.

**Get set for a deluge**  
If you are imagining that eventing in South Africa is like eventing in the UK then think again. In your mind's eye can you see yourself being towed on site on muddy earth, parking your lorry with its large living between Mary King and William Fox-Pitt, meeting the sponsor when you collect your rosette, having a hot dog in the sponsor's tent? Well it's not quite like that. There aren't that many entries in the bigger classes for starters, with 10 on average. We event in the summer so it is either raining like crazy or super hot (about 35°C) or a mixture of both. The fences bear a lot of resemblance to a UK hunter trial track but not so much to a BE event, with lots of timber used but not many portables and definitely no frangible pins. After the action



Trainers Peter Storr and Beverley Brightman coach Louise and her guides ABOVE Mpho and Tsaone at Inanda Country Base ready for the show jumping



the horses, each with its own groom, are kept in tiny electric fenced enclosures.

And the courses are smaller than in the UK, intro being 70cm, pre-novice 80cm, and so on. However, the time is tight through the grades at 440-500m per min and, starting at pre-novice, horses have to jump corners, doubles, into water, out of water and negotiate tricky skinnys.

Eventing in this diverse and amazing continent is always a challenge and we love it. The sad thing is that we don't get to compete often — maybe a couple of times a year — and we line up in a start box without ever having schooled over a proper course, although we might have tried some bush schooling.

And so with the Inanda Country Base's event behind me, I return to work. A couple of years ago the Limpopo River had risen in flood and I had to swim the horses back over to reach home, dodging crocodiles along the way. We didn't have to do that this time but you also wouldn't have to do that on the way back from Aston-le-Walls, would you?

Now that it's the hot and rainy season in Botswana all the horses get to rest. We expect to be busy again in February with safaris and if the river is not in flood maybe we will do another event in March or April. Watch this space. ☺