



Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England - now!

Yes, aren't we lucky? April is here and we are extremely pleased to notice that the grass is sprouting in the fields. The horses are also delighted at its arrival and have been turning their backs on the hay reels. It doesn't seem to matter how much effort, scientific research or creativity is put into developing feeds for horses – grass wins every time. We can expect to see the horses gain a few pounds in the coming weeks, their coats will start to shine (as they shed their winter ones) and they may well have a spring in their step! Although this is all good news, we need to be vigilant as the increase in calories can cause obesity if the work ratio is not maintained and fructans in grass can also cause 'laminitis' in some ponies. This is a very uncomfortable disease and is usually seen in Native Breeds, such as the Welsh Mountain pony. Unfortunately for Brandy, Little Rosie and Thistle, this means they will not be making the trip over the bridge to enjoy our new 14 acre paddock. Unfortunately for our yard staff, they will be travelling over the bridge daily to (try to?) catch our working horses, once we have completed fencing the area and installed some automatic water troughs.

Our Easter Show was well attended despite the weather – we had a small snow storm during the 3ft class but everyone bravely struggled on. We are very grateful to all our sponsors for their generous support and also to our judges – Colin Schilling and Sue Wells, for their expert advice. Some competitors even had some free advice from Colin (the saddler)! Some staff members took place in the show, and I took Savannah into the first jumping competition, she behaved beautifully before the bell went, trotting around in a perfect outline! Unfortunately for me, the bell – to her – signals 'stick your head in the air and run for it!'. I don't want to say how many faults we got, because I've forgotten, but it gave Roy an excellent opportunity to commend me on my riding skills. The finale of the show was the Chase-Me-Charlie, which is basically a high jump competition. There were four competitors, all with nerves of steel; but the final winner – at 4ft 2 ½" was our very own Fella! He sauntered down to the fence and popped it like it was a 2 foot cross-pole. We are holding another OPEN event on Sunday 20th April – more details attached. Bring your own horse along or hire one of Willow Farm's.

Tickets are now on sale in the shop for both The Richard Maxwell and Kelly Marks demonstrations, we are also planning a demo in August by an organisation called Horses Inside Out, which sounds horrific, but is actually very educational. The bones and muscles of the horse are painted onto the outside of a grey horse and all the lectures are delivered around this. Real bones and other gory items will be available for inspection on the day. I will provide more details of this event once we have a confirmed date, but if you would like to register your interest please feel free to e-mail me. Ticket prices will be discounted for early bookings.

I have finally finished wading through the 1 reply I got about the Social Committee, thanks to Sarah Ford who is going to be constructing our quiz for us, more on this next month. Meanwhile, if you don't want me to drag you kicking and screaming onto the social team, keep a low profile!

We have many activities planned over the Easter holidays (which seem to be going on for about eight weeks!?) including the ever present Fast Hack. The last hack of this kind was very well attended, and Roy did really well with Duncan – now that Duncan has had his teeth done and been upgraded to a brand new saddle! Duncan and Charlie both had their teeth rasped by the vet – because they are a little reluctant to allow the dentist to do them! They show this reluctance by lifting the helper off the ground and swinging them around the stable – it just isn't worth the risk. Once sedated, both horses were much more affable and the procedure was well worth while as they were both suffering from some sharp edges. Logan – one of our colts – was also castrated during March, anyone who wants to know more about this procedure is quite frankly a little odd and can look it up themselves. He is doing fine though and has settled down well to being a gelding.

Colette's shows are still proving to be very popular and are really well attended – for more information see the attached schedule or our web page (www.ridewithwillow.co.uk). Anyone visiting the shop last Thursday night would have been surprised to find it a) open and b) occupied by several women squirming about in various positions on their 'fitness balls'. All part of the continuing Riders Fitness program that is being show-cased at Willow Farm. The previous week we were all re-assessed at the half way point. We had all improved – although I'm still **short** which is quite disappointing. By the way is it sad to be pleased with a 1% drop in body fat? If it is – then that's not me, it's someone else! *Liz*

In the Saddlery The special this month in the shop is 10% off all winter turn-out rugs. We are also offering many new sizes and colours of Shires jodhpurs at only £19.99 (hurry before the yard staff buy them all) and neoprene leg wellington boots for £22.99. Don't forget if you are a loyalty customer you get 5% off NORMAL prices in the shop. Our regular weekend riders will know all about Sylvia's home made cakes in the café – if you haven't tried one yet you are missing out! *Sharon*

Thank you to all those of you who have added your reviews to the Touchlocal site (which is a link on our web site). At the moment we have no references to Samantha, Jasmine or Megan – if they teach you could you please find time to write about them?

If you would like to send us a testimonial directly then please email us at willowfarmkent@yahoo.com