

ANNIE

Believe it or not, Annie is only 16.3hh Her large size, more noticeable when she is compared to the ponies kept at the stables is always remarked upon – both on the yard and when she is out on a hack. Contrary to popular opinion, she is not a Shire horse but a Clydesdale Cross. Shires are hairier from the knees down whereas Clydesdales have what are described as ‘cats whiskers’ at the elbow.

Annie has also impressed the South Yorkshire police force - to the extent that they would have liked to have trained her for a life on the beat. Annie had been competing at the 1993 Special Olympics at Sheffield, where she gained six gold medals with various riders. The South Yorkshire police force were helping at the event. At the end of one of the days, Dawn rode Rhondda out on a gentle hack to help him unwind accompanied by a sergeant riding Annie. Whilst riding, the sergeant explained that his force was looking for a new horse and that Annie might fit the bill (excuse the pun, but it’s getting late!) He outlined the kind of tasks Annie would have to undertake to prove herself. It sounded tough and Dawn felt it wasn’t the right kind of life for gentle Annie.

Annie is now 13 years old. She has been at the stables for 9 years. When she first arrived in October 1991 as a four year old, she was a dark, almost iron grey colour. Within eighteen months she had become a beautiful dapple grey. As the years have gone by Annie’s colour has become even lighter and become an almost white grey. Six months after she arrived at the stables, Annie unexpectedly foaled “George” who is dark brown with long white socks and stockings and a white blaze. He grew to be 17hh – even bigger than his mum, so goodness knows how big his dad was! When George was born, his legs were so long and weak he couldn’t stand up to have a drink of milk. He had to lie down whilst Dawn (who can add ‘midwife’ to her list of skills) milked Annie – allowing the milk to run down her arm so that George could suck it from her elbow!

If you get to ride Annie, don’t be put off by her size even if she is hard to mount (is there anyone who doesn’t need to use the mounting block or steps?) She really is a gentle giant. Out on a hack you will get a panoramic view of the countryside and probably get to lead the way, as she commands a position of authority and leadership (well she needs room to stretch out her long legs anyway!) Expect to turn a few heads...but remember - people are looking at Annie and not you or the way you ride!