

Vintage event comes of age

Five years old and inspired by a photo taken 125 years ago, polo's answer to the Goodwood Revival has become a Sandhurst showpiece, says **Yolanda Carslaw**

The magnificent backdrop of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst provided a glorious setting last month for one of polo's most imaginative, international and enjoyable fixtures, the HBL Heritage Polo Cup, sponsored by Habib Bank UK.

This year's staging marked not only the event's fifth birthday, but celebrated 125 years since a collection of stylish polo-playing officer cadets were immortalised in a photograph on the steps of Old College, an image that provided inspiration for polo's showpiece vintage event.

Six six- to eight-goal teams, mostly fielding three amateurs and a professional, assembled at the Camberley training academy for the weekend on 7-8 August, a celebration of polo, history and fashion organised by Sandhurst's energetic Swiss-born polo manager Barbara Zingg.

For the teams, as in previous years, Zingg commissioned British shirtmakers TM Lewin to tailor shirts modelled on those worn by the 1885 players in "that" photo. Matching silk ties were neatly tucked in and a few dug out traditional baggy breeches.

The home side, EFG International British Army Officers, wearing white luxury twill shirts and regimental belts, fielded Capt Matt Eyre-Brook, a serving officer with the 9th/12th Lancers who learnt polo at Sandhurst 10 years ago; OCdt Doug White, the best of the current crop of polo-playing officer cadets (see page 98); EFG Bank's best player Robert Mehm, an American who learnt polo in Boston and lives in Switzerland, and Army Association polo coach Gaston Devrient.

The "newcomer" this year was Luxembourg, to *Polo Times's* knowledge the first team representing the fledgling polo nation (one club, 20 players and rising, 120 social members) to travel to the UK for an

"international". "It's special to be here," said Bert Poekes (0). "Guillaume, [the hereditary] Grand Duke of Luxembourg, studied at Sandhurst quite recently, so it means something to us."

HBL Pakistan was the only nation to field four players of one nationality; 141 Dubai Falcons included rising patron Saeed bin Draï and his cousin Omid Jamaei; EIM Helvetia featured three Swiss and an Argentine, while the USA Destinations of Polo Virginia side took on Englishman Adrian Wade as its hired gun.

Swiss player Gilles Leraïlle, playing for the cup for the third time, said: "We love it here, and it's special because it's a revival. We play in the US, Argentina and

The canny Barbara Zingg has trademarked Heritage Polo in the UK

around Europe, but the location and atmosphere here are different: it has a lot of style."

In Saturday's three four-chukka games on the Round Ground in front of New College Dubai beat the US 8-4½, the British beat Luxembourg by a goal and Pakistan beat Switzerland by half-a-goal, putting Dubai and the British through on goal difference.

Pony power this year, for the first time, was organised by each team's pro rather than a collection of hire ponies, and officer cadets manned the scoreboard, clock and goalposts.

In gorgeous sunshine the following day, with umpires resplendent in toppers and tails and a brown vintage-style marquee providing some shade at the sidelines, Luxembourg and the US drew for joint fifth and EIM Helvetia narrowly beat HBL Pakistan into third place. The cosmopolitan crowd was entertained by the Band of the Bugles and

Rifles, a parade of hounds by the RMAS Staff College Drag Hunt, the Shetland Pony Club and two sword men of the King's Royal Horse Artillery. Before the final they witnessed the real eyecatcher: two ladies' teams playing in splendid vintage-style tunics and waistcoats (for more, turn to page 86).

In the final, Doug White was the star, scoring the home side's first two goals and displaying quickness and sense on the field that must have made his teacher – Zingg – thoroughly proud. Though Eyre-Brook took one tumble and narrowly missed coming off a second time during the first half, to the consternation of commentator Lt Col Simon Ledger, the foursome settled into their stride easily against Dubai. At half-time they led 3½-1, and they held onto their lead to win 6½-5.

As Heritage tradition dictates, teams were photographed afterwards posed on the same steps as in the photo of 125 years ago: and talking of tradition, in case anyone wants to nab this brilliant idea, beware: the canny Zingg has trademarked Heritage Polo in the UK and hopes to cast the net wider one day. ☒

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Heritage Polo Cup, 7-8 August; Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, Surrey

Result: EFG International British Army Officers beat 141 Dubai Falcons 6½-5

Handicap level: 6-8 goal

Number of team entries: six

Chukka scores (EFG International British Army Officers): 2½-1; 3½-1; 5½-4; 6½-5

Teams

EFG International British Army Officers Team (7): OCdt Doug White 0; Robert Mehm 1; Capt Matt Eyre-Brook 1; Gaston Devrient 5

141 Dubai Falcons (8): Omid Rajaei -1; Saeed bin Draï 1; Charlie Muldoon 5; Nicolas Petracchi 3

EIM Helvetia (8): Gilles Leraïlle -1; Francisco Lalor 3; Justo Saavedra 5; Markus Graff 1

HBL Pakistan (7): Azan Noon 1; Ahmed Tiwana 2; Hamid Ali 3; Col Talha Saeed 1

USA Destination of Polo Virginia (7): Tripp Donnelly 0; Doug Barnes 2; Alan Adler 0; Adrian Wade 5

Luxembourg (7): Yves Wagner -1; Bert Poekes 0; Martin Riglos 4; Oliver Taylor 4

Ladies' teams

Liberty Freedom United Kingdom (-2): Maj Lucy Anderson -2; Alice Gipps 0; Charlotte Christodoulou 0; Aurora Eastwood 0

Vanilla Rose Four Nations (-2): Irene Graff 0; Mahzna Malik -1; Allison Robbins -1; Cariane Hoffie 0



Action on the Round Ground in front of New College



Clockwise from top: OCdt Doug White, Sandhurst's strongest player; Dubai's Saeed bin Draï with the ball; the EFG British Army Officers (Gaston Devrient, Robert Mehm, Capt Matt Eyre-Brook, OCdt Doug White); runners-up 141 Dubai Falcons

RMAS

Cadets meet action men

ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY Sandhurst hosted three "Leadership and Excellence" polo matches on the afternoon before Cartier International Day, 24 July, showcasing polo of three very different levels of experience and handicap.

Sandhurst's current crop of officer cadets fought it out in the first game for the Al Attiyah Trophy, playing against the higher-handicapped RMAS Alumni invited back by polo manager Barbara Zingg. The returning soldiers triumphed comfortably, 8-4½, though they commented on the advantage the current cadets will now have that polo is so extensively on offer to them during their training. This did not used to be the case.

A two-goal match followed for the Excellence Cup. Norton Rose LLP were the victors, beating Lloyd's of London 3-2 thanks largely to terrific teamwork between Claire Brougham and Daniel Ottamendi.

Finally, the real highlight of the afternoon was a 12-goal exhibition match. The Images of Polo team, despite being captained by Glen Gilmore (the seven-goal captain of the Australian international team), were unable to breakdown the structured play of the

Minotauro Polo Team. Pepe Riglos, who also won the most valuable player award, managed to captain the Minotauro Team to a 5½-4 victory.

A Red Arrows display team flyover completed an enjoyable afternoon for the spectators, who went home having seen some of the British polo season's top players in action and had a glimpse of the future talent to come in the shape of the cadets at various stages of their training and their individual polo journeys.

Teams

Alumni (0): Lt Col Howard Flood (Green Guards) -1; Capt Cristian James (Green Guards) -1; Capt Alistair Walker (Scots GD) 1; Maj Guy Marot (Royal Engineers) 1

RMAS La Martina Polo Team (-1): OCdt Watson -1; OCdt Harris -2; OCdt Purbrick 2; OCdt White 0

Norton Rose LLP (2): Martin Davison -1; Fiona Reilly -1; Claire Brougham 0; Daniel Ottamendi 4

Lloyd's of London (2): Edward Barker -1; Chris Fagan -1; Ivan Rubinich 4; Ton McCallum 0

Images of Polo (12): James Scott Hopkins 0; Kelvin Johnson 4; Glen Gilmore 7; Rhys Cole 0

Tidworth and Guards

Lord Nelson would be proud

JULY WAS AN excellent month for the Royal Navy's polo players. They enjoyed an unbeaten run in three of their biggest fixtures of the summer to complete a clean sweep of the three principal polo tournaments played between the services.

Early in the month they defeated the Army 4½-2 at Tidworth for the Rundle Cup on 10 July before moving to Guards Polo Club for a final the following day to beat a strong three-goal Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment side to scoop the Inter Regimental Tournament.

The side then knew the rare chance of a triple was on in their final fixture of the trilogy at Tidworth



Action from the Royal Navy's unbeaten run

on 24 July, as the Royal Navy lined up to face their adversaries from the Royal Air Force for the Duke of York Cup. A victory would mean the first Navy Triple Crown since 1996. However, with the pressure on, the Navy made a poor start and were forced to come from behind, eventually triumphing 6-3½.

"The Navy victories are a testament to the training, discipline and great rapport between the players," said a delighted Cdr Arnie Lustman. Sit Hiro Suzuki won most valuable player for his outstanding performances throughout the campaign.