

Authentic French Cuisine Prepared for you at Home

Alain Madoui, award winning chef, formerly at the Half Moon, Cuxham, has decided to take his talents to a new level, and to bring an authentic French dining experience direct to your home or office, whether it's a casual lunch for a few friends or a special dinner celebration.

Originally from the Limoges area, Alain left France forty years ago for a short break to learn English and he's still here! He has worked extensively through the United Kingdom, France and as far afield as Australia. Alain has cooked at the very best restaurants in the world including the renowned Mirabelle Restaurant, Carlton Towers and Fleurie in London, to name but a few. He also cooked in the kitchens at 10 Downing Street for Sir Edward Heath, and also for President Pompidou.

His style is a mix of classic French and nouvelle cuisine, using only the freshest, quality produce he can find, with everything cooked freshly to order. He frequently travels to France to select ingredients and fine wines.

Alain can provide both food and wine, and has a full range of Limoges fine china, crystal glassware and superb cutlery, which can be hired for your event.

On the day itself, Alain will be joined by a member of his team who will assist in the preparation, and serve the food. At the end of the meal, the kitchen will be fully cleaned and Alain and his assistant will leave. You, on the other hand, will have been able to sit back, relax and enjoy the company of your guests, and have experienced a small part of France.

So if you are considering a party, why not contact Alain to discuss the options available?



'The food is excellent, relying on fresh produce carefully sourced both locally and from further afield (many ingredients are collected on weekly trips to France)'

GOOD PUB GUIDE 2006



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A DAY OUT FOR THE BIRDS

Lesley Sunderland goes shooting with the South Oxfordshire Hunt Club on its Ladies' Clay Shoot Day

The South Oxfordshire Hunt Club members recently organised a very popular and enjoyable day: a Ladies' Clay Shoot.

I do shoot but, when I noticed the day advertised on the Vale of Aylesbury with Garth and South Berks website, I immediately sent off my £30, knowing that at the start of my shooting season it would be valuable practice, especially considering that I hadn't picked a gun up since last season. I even got the ladies' team from the charity event held yearly at Bingham's Park Farm at Water End near Berkhamsted enrolled for extra company.

The day started at roam at Manor Farm, Whitchurch, home to Guy Bond, a dedicated shooting man of great talent and expertise. I arrived first but soon a steady stream of vehicles arrived practically in convoy, and everyone met to enjoy coffee and biscuits.

Guy introduced himself and his fellow instructors to us: Roger Eames, a man of many talents and quite a following, John Grace, also a well respected instructor, and James Tootall, a young, handsome, truly committed man. This had to be the best team of instructors possible! We couldn't believe our luck.

An astonishing 33 ladies turned up on a windy Sunday morning so we were divided into three teams: the A Team for those with shooting experience, the B Team for those with minimal experience and the C Team for the beginners.

I was in the A Team along with my friends from Berkhamsted. We started with a very thorough safety talk from Guy, which kept our attention, especially when he described in detail what could happen to a person that inserted the wrong cartridges down the

wrong barrels! Point well and truly taken!

Then off we went down the grassy field to the shelter of the three traps in a slight hollow, gratefully out of the wind, with our allotted tutors. We had the gorgeous James.

Our first trap was a clay going away from us and after the warm-up our scores improved considerably. Then we swapped traps and our next one was coming towards us on the left and turning to the right. I expect there are appropriate names for these flying missiles, like teal or widgeon, but they escape me at the moment. Once James got it into my head that I was shooting to the left, then I managed to hit them... well a few, anyway.

Our last trap was a clay coming towards us and dropping. Most of our team did really well on these but I must say I struggled. Looking at how others shoot makes you realise how everyone has a different way of judging a shot. Jordan succumbed to James' suggestion to change to her left arm and she hit almost everything she aimed at. How amazing that he knew she would be better off shooting from the opposite side! I learnt so much in that three hours, including the need for more tuition.

The top gun in our team was Emily Harbour (pictured above), who had to now compete against the other team's top guns, who were Sarah BG, Lynn Guthrie (apparently her first attempt at clays) and Nicola Bullock. After a very close shoot-out Emily won. She is also the reigning south Midlands Novice and Ladies Point to Point Champion 2006 – some girl, huh?

At last it was time to go back to the house for a lunch created by Guy himself – no wonder they call him 007! Walking up the field



there was that quiet feeling you get when you are completely satisfied with a day and you wonder why you don't do it more often.

Lunch was a delicious spread of jacket potatoes, beef stew, cheese, beans and bread followed by drinks. When I looked at the faces, I only recognised Kate, Elaine and Ali from The Hunt Kennels at Kimble, but I knew we all had something in common now. Emily was presented with a trophy from Guy and the expression on her face says it all.

My thanks go to Annie Roads and the members of South Oxfordshire Hunt Club for all their efforts and for such an interesting day. The club is £10 per year to join and they have a varied selection of events going on. Thanks must also go to Guy and his team of instructors; we all hope we see you again soon – very soon.

To contact Guy Bond: tel. 01296 641936 or go to www.gbshooting.co.uk

To contact Annette Roads for events at the South Oxfordshire Hunt Club: e-mail her at boomerroads@hotmail.com. See p14 for more SOHC news.

Pony Club Focus

THE VALE OF AYLESBURY HUNT PONY CLUB

DC Donna Westermann profiles the club

The Vale of Aylesbury Pony Club covers an area from Aylesbury to Amersham in one direction and Haddenham to Chesham in the other. Established in 1931, we welcome anyone who owns a pony or a horse. With membership currently at 150, we're probably one of the larger branches in Area 12.

We offer training for tetrathlon, hunting, mounted games, hunter trials, eventing, dressage, show jumping and pony racing, and members can take all of the Pony Club tests, as well as a variety of achievement badges, such as bandaging and first aid. Instructors include Gail Keen, Katy Payne, Mia Cutting, Danielle Protheroe, Jackie Punell and Bella Tschaikowsky.

We run inter-branch and open shows including show jumping, dressage, hunter trials, mini one day events and tetrathlon, and one of our members, Chloe Aston, was selected for the Mini Majors at Olympia 2006. We also organise many social events, such as quiz nights and trips to Olympia and to visit the King's Troop.

We have our own club field at Meadle, and use Milesfield Farm and Bury Farm EC at St Leonards for training and events, not to mention hiring Patchetts, Addington Manor, Rose Hill and Great Westwood on a regular basis. None of this would be possible without the tireless support of our fantastic committee, parents and landowners, together making a very happy and successful Pony Club branch.

To join the Vale of Aylesbury Hunt Pony Club, call Donna on 01844 213231

HOW TO OUTRUN YOUR PARENTS

Katie Stimpson of the VAH PC goes hunting for the first time

On Saturday 2nd December 2006, I went hunting for the first time from Hawthorn Farm at Great Missenden. We were down our yard early to plait and smarten up, and then travelled over to meet our escorts at Middlegrove Farm. We hacked down to the meet, which was a little way down the road from Middlegrove.

The excitement mounted as we joined the rest of the hunt and the hounds mingled with the horses. We set off across the fields after a short speech and a sound of the horn. It was lovely to ride through the fields and over the jumps in this very picturesque area. It was great fun to have a charge across fields and up



the hills – and also rather amusing watching my parents trying to keep up on foot! After a couple of hours of thoroughly enjoyable riding, we decided to call it a day and return to the boxes.

It was a very enjoyable day – although we did get very muddy! Many thanks to Elaine Wallis for organising the escorts and sorting out the day and enormous thanks to the Vale of Aylesbury with Garth and South Berks Hunt for allowing us to hunt with them.

ABOVE: Katie Stimpson (on the coloured pony) jumps one of the many challenging fences at the meet at Hawthorn Farm on 2nd December 2006

GOT TIME ON YOUR HANDS? JOIN YOUR LOCAL PONY CLUB!

Bethany Wallis, also of the VAH PC, tells us what she gets up to at her Pony Club

My sister Millie and I joined the Vale of Aylesbury Pony Club at the ages of 5 and 8 and over the years have been given the opportunity to learn new disciplines such as dressage, showjumping, cross country, gymkhana, polocross and tetrathlon. In the summer, we have a fab week at camp with its grande finale of the legendary musical ride, where each group and their ponies gets to dress up to a theme and ride a display to music.

Also in the summer we have our beach ride! Four brilliant days in Norfolk where we can ride our ponies on the beach, go crabbing or just chill out in the field with a barbeque and friends. During the winter we have fortnightly rallies indoors, and weekly outdoor rallies all summer. There is always a rally to go to in the holidays.

Thanks to the Pony Club we have been able to improve our riding, try different things, take part in team events and,

above all, we have made loads of new friends. All this has given us the confidence to take our ponies hunting, which we both love, and I also had the wonderful experience of racing Clive Gough's Sheltand Pony, Minnie, at Windsor a couple of years ago. I hope to take my pony, Monty, racing at Kimble (see page 12) this Easter. Who knows what we will try next – whatever it is, it won't be boring.

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THIS SEASON'S HUNTING



TOP: Northfield Grange, Aldbury, 15/2/07
MIDDLE: The Lee, 21/12/06
BOTTOM: Poors Farm, Hailey, 11/11/06



ABOVE: Harriet Griffiths (left) and Lucinda Corrie, members of the Woodland Hunt Pony Club, The Rising Sun, Witheridge Hill 30/12/06



TOP: Cholesbury Common, 26/12/06
BOTTOM: Northfield Grange, Aldbury, 15/2/07

IS IT TOO BIG TO GO AS HAND LUGGAGE?

Steve Quince buys a hunter on a day trip to Ireland

At the end of last season my previous horse, Whiskey, a 15hh grey Connemara gelding strained the suspensory mechanism in his near hind leg. This took most of the summer to heal and the vet (Chris Blackmore) recommended that I either hunt more conservatively or not hunt him at all. I did not trust myself to hunt conservatively, so I sold the horse to a hacking home in the yard next door. Whiskey is happy and sound in his new home and the new owners love him.

I then spent six weeks looking for a new hunter in England. I drove what seemed like all over the country in my search. I was looking for but couldn't find a bold, scopey, robust young horse with experience of hunting that would not cost silly money. I also realised what a good horse Whiskey was and that it was going to be difficult to find a replacement that would be as good as he had been.

In December, I spoke on the telephone several times to Paraic Kelly of Ballinasloe, Ireland about a 15.2hh cobby piebald gelding that he was selling. The horse had hunted several times with the Galway Blazers. On one of these occasions the horse had hunted for five hours carrying Paraic for the first hour and a different rider for the last four hours. The horse had also been loose schooled over 1.35m jumps and won a wall jumping competition.

Paraic took some photos of the horse and got a friend of his to e-mail them to me. The horse looked and sounded ideal but Ireland was a long way to go. Gill Nash, the owner of the livery stables where the horse would be kept agreed that from the description the horse would probably be just what I wanted. Gill also said that the horse possessed the 'show jumper's bum' so it would be likely to have a scopey jump. Since I needed to ride

and jump the horse, I decided to go and see it. Gill agreed to accompany me to provide professional advice.

Paraic informed me that Aer Arran flew from Luton to Galway, the nearest airport. The original plan was to fly out one day, see horses, stay at a bed and breakfast overnight and fly back the following day. I checked Aer Arran's website and found that there was an early flight from Luton to Galway and a late flight from Galway to Luton. Since Paraic agreed to pick us up from the airport and drive us back, we could therefore do the visit in one day.

A few days later we left Chorleywood at 7:20am and arrived in the Luton Airport terminal to catch the 9:30am flight. As we passed through security I had my riding clothes in a sportsbag and my riding hat in the other hand. A jobsworth baggage handler told me that I was only allowed to take one item of hand luggage. I pointed out that the second item was a hat and if he objected, I would put the hat on my head at which point he backed down. We took off 15 minutes late but, amazingly, this was the only delay that we experienced.

Shortly after take-off we went through low cloud so we could not see England from the air. As we flew over north Wales the low cloud cleared and we saw Anglesey. A short time later the pilot announced that we would soon be crossing the Irish coast north of Dublin. I had my first sight of Ireland. It seemed to be made up of lots of small fields.

As we only had hand luggage we walked through the airport terminal in a few minutes and met Paraic in the arrivals area.

As we were driven to the yard I noticed that this area of Ireland was principally agricultural and consisted of small fields

separated by stone walls. Any horse who hunted here would very quickly learn to be careful over jumps. After approx 40 minutes we arrived at the yard.

We looked at several horses in their stables prior to having a cup of tea or coffee in their house. Paraic said that he had other horses that might be suitable for me if I was not interested in the piebald gelding. He also said that every horse in the yard was for sale. During this introductory period we met Paraic's parents Christy and Mary who made us feel extremely welcome. After refreshments in their house, I got changed into riding clothes because it was time to try some horses.

Paraic tacked the piebald gelding up and literally vaulted on. Initially he rode the horse around a track onto the road so that I could see that the horse had a 'good step'. He then rode him in a large sand arena that was a bit soggy in the lower end due to the huge amount of rain that had fallen over the previous days. He jumped the horse over a decent sized jump. Gill pointed out that Paraic was a phenomenally good rider and the horse would be no good to me if I could not ride it.

So I was given a leg up and began riding the horse. Although somewhat green in his flatwork the horse felt powerful and as if it could really jump. I jumped the horse over a reasonable fence that was a lot lower than the one Paraic had just jumped, rode it through their farm past all the farm machinery and down the road a short distance. The horse seemed fine in traffic so that was another box ticked. I definitely was keen on the horse when I jumped off. Gill said that the price asked was about right, thought that the horse would pass the vet and suggested that I think about it over lunch in their house.

After lunch, Paraic rode another potential horse, a Connemara gelding. We also saw an unbroken 16.3hh cobby coloured gelding who looked like he would carry a substantial amount of weight. Another unbroken horse was loose schooled over decent sized jumps. However I had made a decision.

Subject to vet, I agreed to buy the piebald gelding and gave Paraic a cash deposit to be refunded if the horse failed the vet. I inspected the piebald gelding's passport for breeding but it did not contain any information. It did show that the horse was born in 2001 so he was only just six. I asked what the horse's stable name was and he didn't have one. Paraic said that he could arrange the transport of the horse from Ireland to Gill's yard for about £200. He needed to check with them but expected to use McMahon's because they were 'good horse people'.

Later in the afternoon Paraic drove Gill and I back to Galway airport in plenty of time for the 6:45pm flight to Luton. We landed

at Luton at 8:15pm and I dropped Gill off in Chorleywood at 9pm.

After our trip the horse passed the vet. I also spoke on the telephone to the vet who performed the examination. He told me that the certificate would say that the horse is suitable for hunting/pleasure riding and there would be no additional comments.

I sent the balance of the purchase price using a bankers draft via registered post. Paraic then passed the horse to McMahon's. The horse stayed in a stable at a yard not far from the docks until the sea was calm enough for it to go on the ferry from Dunleary to Holyhead.

Whilst waiting for the horse to arrive I looked at lists of horses names on the internet and eventually named him Roscoe.

Roscoe was not allowed on the ferry until Sunday morning due to rough seas. He arrived in Chorleywood at close to 10pm on a large lorry that was partitioned for 12 horses. I met the lorry in a layby just off the M25. The

lorry followed me into Chorleywood village using the only route suitable for a large horsebox. Roscoe was towards the front of the lorry but there were three or four horses in front of him. The lorry driver said that hundreds of horses come across from Ireland every week.

So far I have found him to be ideal and hope to take him hunting in a few weeks when I am more used to him and I am a bit fitter.

So that is how I bought a new hunter on a day trip to Ireland. It took a bit of organising, a lot happened in one day but I still cannot believe how smoothly the day went. The way the horse is currently turning out, I would recommend the process because I think that I have bought a very good horse for a very reasonable price.

BELOW: Paraic with Roscoe just before check-in



I know what you did last summer...

Ever wanted to buy a young pony and bring it on to sell as a summer project?

Tina Mash, then aged 16, did exactly that and tells us how.

My name is Tina Mash and in the summer of 2005 I needed to get a summer job to earn some money so I could buy a laptop – I was going into the sixth form in September and I knew this would be a good thing to have. The trouble was I also wanted a pony.

I put the idea to my mum and she ummed and ahhed, and I never really got a definite answer. One day my mum and I went with one of her friends to find a horse for the friend. When we were there the lady had a little pony for sale and I asked to see it. He walked out of his stable and looked a bit shabby and unhealthy but straight away I saw his character in his gentle but witty eye. He had the most amazing name – ‘Dundee Spirit’, how perfect! He was a perfect size for what I wanted. Mum was not convinced but I asked if I could see him ridden and ride him myself. I saw him walk into the school and be a bit naughty I thought: ‘Wow just what I want!’

I have always wanted a pony that I need to get after once in a while and I thought what a challenge it would be to get this pony and sell it at a profit within a couple of months. As I was watching him approach a jump he bucked and nearly made the rider fall off. I thought: ‘This pony is so mine.’

I wanted a pony for the summer that I could make a definite improvement on so I could make a bit of money. It would be much more fun than working in a shop for the summer! I also wanted to do senior Pony Club camp as I had not done Camp for a couple of years and missed it very much.

Dundee had come over from Ireland where he had done a lot of cross country but not much else. He had the most amazing jump but had no idea how to go round the arena. He was a bit poor-looking too.



I thought I could get him fit and build him up, teach him some flat work and take him show jumping.

The day of his arrival came – after much persuading of the parents and the money situation. When he arrived we had a saddler at the ready to kit my new pony out and the next day I went on my first proper ride and came across a bit of trouble. He didn’t want to leave the yard but we could not work out why for a bit... until we saw the pigs.

Pigs! My brother had pigs and Dundee was scared of them. We tried everything: sticking him in a stable right next door to them, letting him look at them, making them run around the yard not too close to him but enough for him to see that they were OK, but the problem didn’t go away. I just had to give in every time and lead him past the pigs instead of riding him. He preferred to see me in the corner of his eye as reassurance.

The next day our friends were going cross country training to Deep Mill and offered to take us in their trailer. Mum said we would go and just hack him round and do a couple of small jumps. Well, he was unbelievable! He loved it and jumped everything – the bigger the better. I knew we had bought a winner.

Dundee’s main weakness was dressage, the same as mine really, so once a week we had an hour’s lesson with a lady called Rebecca who was a professional. She improved both Dundee’s and my performance but we still weren’t great. He didn’t like to stay in the arena and when he did he just wanted to complete the test as quick as possible. He also used to try and canter everywhere. His best area was cross-country and the trick was to just sit there and enjoy the ride – don’t tell him what to do.

Over the summer I took him down to my godmother’s stables and they helped me with Dundee. We fattened him up and I had lessons on him everyday, maybe twice. They have wonderful woods to hack out in, so twice a week I would take him out on a gentle hack to relieve all the stress from learning in the school. The Sussex downs were his favourite! My godmother’s daughter is a three-day event rider and is soon to compete at Badminton. She exercises her horses ready for the cross country on the downs; she does sets of gallop, canter and hard trot. Dundee Spirit loves to be up on those hills galloping his little heart out with the wind in his hair and the mud splashing up on his tummy.

We stayed in Sussex for about five weeks and then, when he came home, I tried to go out every weekend. I did Pony Club camp, which he loved. We worked on dressage, show jumping and cross country.

Then I took him out to compete at local shows. We won every jump-off he got into – the bigger the jumps, the better he liked it.

People were asking me if he was for sale or going to be for sale because lots of people knew he was a summer project. He got loads of compliments. The first cross country competition we did was a Pony Club one day event over a pre-novice course and he just flew!

When we wanted to sell him we advertised him on the Pony Club website. It was really important to me that he went to the right home where he would be loved and with a good rider who could let him have a good time. I had some interest but when people came to see him and ride him they were not really impressed because he wasn’t in his best environment: we were showing him in a small field with a few small show-jumps and not enough real space to show him really operating. Three people came to see him but he wasn’t right for them.

Then one family sounded very interested. They wanted a cross country pony to compete at Pony Club Tetrathlons. We decided to show him off on a cross country course. We met them there and they brought their daughter’s

trainer along to help. I showed him off by a good canter and then I jumped a few fences – he loved it, of course.

By the time the girl got on he was very excited and wanting to jump everything in sight but she did some flat work on him and then some jumps. She had a grin from ear to ear and she loved him straight away! After a big discussion over the price he was sold to a very nice family. I was incredibly sad to see him go but it was my project. He was the best pony I had ever had. Fun, talented, beautiful, and a delight to ride.

The family have kept in touch and let us know of his successes. He qualified as an individual for the Tetrathlon National Championships where he did really well and has won many other things.

And I got my laptop!

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