

HORSE & HOUND[®]

9 JUNE 2011 EVERY THURSDAY £2.50

Brilliant Bramham

Cliffhanger as Polly Stockton is best of British

GREENWICH 2012 TICKET ANGST

- Cross-country capacity slashed
- Why over 64% of you lost out

'Off my land!'
Meet the team who remove pony squatters

Epsom analysed
By Marcus Armytage, Michael Bell and Hughie Morrison

DON'T MISS!

- Nick Skelton's £200k win
- Totilas's debut with new rider
- Ian Farquhar on hound-judging sins



Now you see them, now you don't

What do you do if you suddenly find your field inhabited by a herd of ponies you've never seen before? You send for the specialists.

Neil Randon goes undercover



Many animals that GRC remove have not been handled in the past, which can make a job more difficult – they normally take an experienced handler with them to assist

IN the dead of night a dog barked. A number of horses in an adjacent field became agitated. Within five minutes a horsebox had been reversed into the field, horses had been loaded on-board and the box was disappearing off into the night.

The next morning, the only clues that anything had taken place the night before were an unlocked gate, a bailiff's notice and, more importantly, an empty field.

The lift in the night

GRC, a commercial bailiff company, have specialised in horse evictions since 1989. They go where other bailiffs fear to tread and can be found working all over Britain.

Under common law every landowner has the right to remove trespassers from their land, using reasonable force if necessary, and having a company willing to do this type of work is good news.

Apart from when it has been impossible to discover who the animals belong to, 100% of the horses and livestock GRC have dealt with are owned by travellers. Often the locations have historical issues – for example, land

that has recently been bought by a council or wildlife trust, which travellers have used for many years.

And it's not just horses either. GRC have been instructed in the past to remove sheep, cattle and goats.

Most lifts are carried out during the night and the covert nature of the work adds to the firm's mystique.

"The travellers sometimes don't know who we are, what we are or where we are from," says Andy Shaw, operations director of the firm for the past 18 years. "But if we turn up, they know

soon enough what we do."

Over time, travelling families have learnt they ignore a GRC notice at their peril.

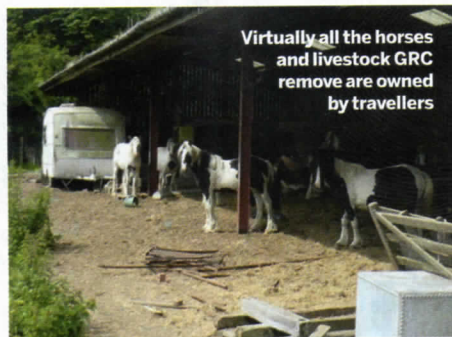
"In most cases where we post notices, because our name is known, the animals are moved by the travellers themselves," Andy explains. "That is what we want them to do. It is easier for us, easier for the travellers and easier for the animals, because it doesn't cause them any distress."

Within 24 hours of being instructed, the bailiffs will act. Usually seizures are made using powers provided under the Animals Act 1971. When they are contacted they will put up notices for the attention of anyone attending the land. A copy of the notice is also sent to the local police and to the owner if their whereabouts are known.

Every job is different

ANDY and his team will visit the site beforehand to gauge the best course of action. The biggest challenge is organising a way of getting the horses on to the lorry.

"Most of these animals haven't been handled before," Andy explains. "It's a bit more involved than just reversing the lorry into a field."





For some horses lifted by GPC, this will be their first experience of being stabled

He continues: "Some of the sites can be 100-acre fields. We have to find a way of getting in, loading the horses and getting out."

Occasionally landowners are concerned with possible reprisals, but in GRC's experience, retaliation is virtually unknown, but they will advise on any issues if necessary.

All lifts are different: "On one case, we had to work on a mountain side at a disused colliery in Wales," says Andy. "There was one road leading into the village and it was narrow. If we took the lorry down that road we were in danger of waking everyone up."

"Our client liaised with the Forestry Commission and we decided to go in over the top of the mountain. When we got there, we discovered the horses had been brought down to level ground. We were lucky that they had headcollars on, so we had to run them up the mountain. It was hard work."

Negotiating the return

ONCE the owners have made contact GRC will, on behalf of the landowner, liaise and negotiate with any person claiming the animals. But they insist that any remaining animals are removed before dialogue takes place about their return.

Usually the horses are loaded within minutes of arrival. If the site is next door to where the travellers are living, Andy and his team, including an experienced handler, need to get in and out without being compromised. That's why they work covertly, because there is

less chance of confrontation at the time of removal. As it is, GRC are building a growing reputation within the travelling community and have never suffered any reprisals.

GRC did a lift for a local authority in which the horses were tethered by the roadside.

"We went in the early hours and lifted all but one animal," Andy explains. "The woman owner rang us the next morning, very angry. Her parting words were: 'You're a coward. You would only come and do it at night.'"

The owner paid a fee to the local authority to have her animals returned, but in a two-fingered gesture, she again tethered them to the roadside, but only during daylight hours. GRC went back about a month later:

"We went back at 9.30am. Working with the police, who set up a roadblock, and using two trucks, we drove along the road, a police car in front, a police car at the back.

"We knew exactly what we were doing and we had all the horses loaded, including a grey pony we had missed before, and were gone in less than 90 seconds.

"The look on the woman's face as we drove off was priceless. She didn't have time to pick up the phone or set her rottweilers on us."

So is it dangerous?

THERE is always the potential for confrontation. After one lift in South Wales, the team were pursued on the M4 by an angry group of travellers in a van. The lorry was



the travelling community is a trotter — a cob crossed with an American standard-bred. These are used for racing, with regular events held (sometimes on stretches of dual-carriageway, unlawfully closed off by the travellers for the duration of the race) often with huge sums of money being wagered.

Keeping within the law

A landowner faced with the problem of trespassing livestock has four options:

- **Do nothing**
- **Try to contact the owner of the animals and arrange for their removal**
- **Issue possession proceedings against persons unknown for the return of the field**
- **Make use of the self-help procedure in section 7 of the Animals Act 1971**

Relying on section 7 of the Animals Act 1971 is often the best solution. This allows for the detention and removal of trespassing animals and, if the animals are not claimed by their owners, their subsequent sale or disposal.

The procedures in Section 7 of the Animals Act 1971 are not ideal and a landowner relying on it is taking a risk in doing so. Once detained, the landowner assumes responsibility for the animal's welfare and can face legal proceedings if the animal is not properly cared for. Issues can also arise in relation to the Horse Passports Regulations 2009.

GRC works closely with Knights Solicitors of Tunbridge Wells who can be contacted via its 24-hour helpline, tel: 01892 537311, or on its website www.knights-solicitors.co.uk.

ambushed in the Brynglas Tunnel, near Newport, bringing the M4 to a standstill at five o'clock in the afternoon. The travellers were hellbent on releasing the horses in the tunnel. GRC successfully prevented a catastrophe prior to the arrival of the police. The police escorted the lorry off the motorway through an emergency exit, with a rolling roadblock behind, to prevent them being tailed.

Once horses are safely on board a truck, they are taken to a holding station. There are several locations throughout the UK where GRC keep animals. All the animals are checked by a vet within 48 hours of arrival and even more quickly if there are welfare concerns.

Once vetted, they are then either sent to new homes or returned to their owners at a neutral destination.

The cost of a lift can vary but it will usually be a minimum of £1,000, dependent on the type and condition of the animals, how much the landowners are hoping to recover on costs from the owners and how much the owners are prepared to pay. The horses are often in poor condition — undernourished and in dire need of worming — but keeping the animals for any length of time can pose problems. While in the care of the bailiffs, the client is responsible for the animal's welfare, so if a horse needs treatment the client has to pay.

The work GRC does is important. Land owners, including property developers, farmers and local councils know they have an option to get trespassing livestock off their property.

And let's face it, using a company with nearly 20 years' experience is a more straightforward and cheaper option than going to court. **H&H**

➤ For further information, visit www.grcgroup.co.uk.

Traveller ponies — what do they use them for?

TRADITIONALLY, a travelling man's wealth and status is judged by the number and quality of the horses he owns.

Originally, the gypsy community bred cobs for pulling wagons such as traditional-style caravans, or for trotting — road racing in sulky traps.

Caravans have been replaced by the motorhome and permanent housing, but the cob is still much sought after. The more successful travellers export their horses all over the world, including to the USA. Some are also bred for the food chain and usually sent to the Continent for horsemeat.

The other type of horse associated with