



CLARE BALDING SADDLES UP FOR FUN AT RIDING CENTRE LAUNCH

She is a famously good sport who's not known for getting on her high horse, but Clare Balding was happy to make an exception when she paid a visit to a very special London children's charity.

A passionate supporter of the Riding for the Disabled Association, Clare was asked to try out a life-sized mechanical horse as she opened the Therapy Stable Yard Classroom at Wormwood Scrubs Pony Centre.

The 44-year-old former champion amateur jockey rarely rides these days, but was clearly comfortable getting back in the saddle. "It is a great idea and fun too," said Clare after she and instructor Resh Giwa tried out the new equipment (below right), which will enable people with disabilities to learn essential riding skills before testing them out on a real horse.

Clare also took a tour of the centre – which provides riding and equestrian activities for inner-city children, many of whom have special needs – with Resh, who was also keen to show off the therapy classroom's new rescue donkeys (left). "The pony centre is just a fantastic facility," said Clare. "The children I have met are a true inspiration. Working with animals is so therapeutic and teaches the children life skills."

Clare isn't the centre's only famous fan – its indoor riding school was built during a *Challenge Anneka* show in 1994. Tweeting the programme's then-host Anneka Rice, Clare wrote: "I was dead impressed with your handiwork!" In response, Anneka asked if Clare had met "awesome" Sister Mary Joy Langdon, Britain's first female firefighter turned nun, who founded the centre 25 years ago. "Oh I have indeed," said Clare. "I told her you'll come with me to visit later this year."

• wormwoodscrubsponeycentre.org



Say it with flowers: Pony centre pupils Max Laurence and Jessica Wilks present Clare with a bouquet



ZARA AND MIKE TINDALL AUCTION PRIZE PROVES TO BE A DARK HORSE

As ideas go, buying a racehorse without even seeing it seemed lame to Zara Tindall. But she had to change her tune when mane man Mike's £12,000 purchase came in third at the Grand National.

The former rugby star and three friends bought Monbeg Dude

(right, with Mike) at an auction in 2009 – a purchase that had Zara branding him an "idiot".

But far from being a nightmare, Monbeg Dude showed you're never pasture prime. With 40-1 odds, the horse earned £105,000 for romping home behind winner Many Clouds

and Saint Are. Mike and Zara looked nervous before the race (below left) but were soon shouting themselves hoarse as the action unfolded (below right). But Mike lost out on further winnings after failing to confirm an online bet that would have netted £12,500.



REPORTS: ELIZABETH CARR-ELLIS. INGRID LAURENCE. PHOTOS: PAUL H LUNNON. REX FEATURES