

In the pink, with tears and cheers!



No, there isn't a pink cast on the picture! This was the colourful scene at the end of the Ladies' Road Run, with all 70 tractors and their drivers safely gathered in as the rain clouds loom. Photos by Libby Searle unless otherwise indicated.

FIRST find your tractor, then learn to drive it and go out and raise your own sponsorship. Then, when you've got the tractor to start, decorate both it and yourself in pink and tackle a 20-mile drive. Oh, and also be prepared to handle some emotion along the way.

These were the challenges of the Suffolk & Norfolk David Brown Tractor Club's Second Ladies' Road Run on Sunday 3 July, writes *John Chapman*.

Of course there was never going to be a second run. The first, which took place on 4 July last year, when 50 women rose to the challenge and raised no less than £16,000 for Cancer Research UK, was meant to be the one and only. Annie and I felt we'd never be able to equal that day, and should quit while we were ahead. Then we realised that we wouldn't be allowed to say no – the charity, club, and friends, mothers and daughters of the 2004 drivers saw to that!

So, on the first Sunday in July, our hosts Peter and June Thorpe saw BBC *Look East* presenter Amelia Reynolds cut the tape and send off a cavalcade of 70 wonderfully-decorated tractors driven by ladies who in some cases looked even more outrageous than their mechanical charges.

They spilled out on to South Green Road and headed for the nearby Market Town of Harleston, usually a sleepy corner of south Norfolk on a Sunday morning, but not this



The infectious smiles come from run participants Kay Creasy and Donna Davies.

time, for people were waiting everywhere. I got many a cheery wave as I piloted the flashing ambers through town, but what I was completely unaware of was the trail not only of tractors but also of emotion behind me.

The ladies were clapped and cheered as they drove through, not a few moved to tears by the utterly unexpected wave of affection and goodwill that greeted them. Even Rob, our chief mechanic who was taking up the rear, confessed to using his oily rag for non-mechanical purposes!

If there were any doubts that the gods were smiling upon us that day, they were dispelled as we pulled into our lunch stop site – a rolling, tree-lined meadow at the entrance to the Gawdy Hall Estate. The sky was blue, the sun shone and hundreds of people had turned up to share a humble crust with

the tractor drivers and support crew. Actually many of the 'crusts' were laid out on rather special tables and didn't look all that humble – and I've never heard of a tractor driver popping a cork out of a bottle of cold tea!

We were to enjoy some miles off-road that day, driving through the farmland and woodlands of the estate, and the generous help of the estate manager, David Green, was vital to the run. His wife Wendy wasn't to be left out either, raising sponsorship with a large and shiny John Deere 6920S.

Before we moved on for the afternoon section the marshals, ably directed by Roger Connah (frightening the wildlife with his strange pink woolly headgear) were already in position.

This was a road run by and for ladies, but the blokes deserve a mention too, for they transported, marshalled, lent



Annie Chapman (right) introduces Nicki Stapleton from Cancer Research UK (left) to Amelia Reynolds of BBC *Look East*, who cut the tape at the start of the run.



Margaret Robinson's 1954 Vendevre AS 500 was festooned with pink balloons in the shape of the Breast Cancer logo.

their precious tractors to complete novices (and often complete strangers to boot) and gave driving tuition with that good humour and quiet generosity that makes the classic tractor world such a special place.

That generosity, although I say nothing about his humour, was typified by Keith Keeble and one of his sons from Harleston Tyres, who'd volunteered to provide 'pneumatic support' on the day, but ended up the day before on



Behind the wheel of this Fordson Diesel Major, Old Ram Tractor Club member Pam Grimmer brings good cheer by the trailerload.



On her 1950 petrol/paraffin David Brown Cropmaster, Annie is eager to go as Amelia Reynolds cuts the pink starting tape.



Here they come! With her irrepressible sunshine smile, Christine Creasy leads this group along an off-road section on a Fordson Dexta.

a very long trip to the A14 to rescue our participants from Dorset when two national tyre companies had declined to help.

Seventy tractors started, and every one of them finished. The ladies had come to Pulham St Mary from as far afield as Dorset, Wales and Bedfordshire, and drove machines ranging from a 1946 International WD9 through the familiar Fergies, Cropmasters and Dextas to a brand new and rather lovely Valtra T180. As last year, some had faced much bigger personal challenges than the Ladies' Road Run, and as last year, this special day was all part of winning the battle.

Monica was typical of the winners. Taking part last year as she was recovering from breast cancer, and struggling over the off-road sections as a result, she finished the run and raised over £1000. She was hesitant about doing it again and once more asking for the money, but she finished the run driving a David Brown Cropmaster loaned by the club chairman and again raised over £1000.

Will there be a third Ladies' Run? On my desk already is a note from Bill Kemball saying that 'Power of the Past' has been cancelled, so insurance and health and safety concerns will be our next great challenge.

Finally, we keep saying that it's about more than just money, but at the time of writing our 'pink ladies' have delivered more than £15,000 – and we're still counting!