

# A galloping start to married life!



It was wedding bells at Musselburgh Racecourse today when an Army doctor and his new bride got married life off to a winning start with a gallop across the hallowed turf as part of their wedding day celebrations.

Major Chris Baird-Clarke and Shelley Clark (correct) had earlier tied the knot at the East Lothian racecourse while astride their Arab and Irish Draught horses in what is believed to be the first wedding of its type held in Scotland.

Assistant registrar Jan Boyd oversaw the wedding vows in a ceremony held at the Winning Post which tonight (Frid 31 July) will resound to the clatter of hooves as jockeys compete in Musselburgh's Carnival Racenight meeting.

Major Chris Baird-Clarke, who often went racing at Musselburgh during a three year posting with The Royal Scots in Edinburgh was resplendent in family tartan trews and Bonnie Prince Charlie jacket while his beautiful bride Shelley opted for a traditional Ivory wedding dress, as they exchanged vows in front of their two-year-old son Alex and guests.

Racecourse management agreed that as a one-off wedding day treat, the happy couple could enjoy a celebratory gallop along the home straight and past the winning post.

The new Mr and Mrs Baird-Clarke were toasting a triple celebration. In addition to becoming man and wife, the couple are moving to a new home in Edinburgh from Exmoor in Somerset, as the Major is promoted to Lieutenant Colonel as Head of Defence Occupational Medicine for the Army in Scotland and Northern Ireland.





Major Baird-Clarke has served in Iraq with The Royal Scots, including a seven month stint near Basra during the second Gulf War, and in Germany, Canada, Iraq and Afghanistan with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Duke of Lancaster's Regiment.

Shelley is a respected horse trainer and specialises in the rehabilitation of psychologically damaged horses. She trained at the Duchy College, Cornwall, in equine management and riding instruction. She has worked for a number of racing stables, including champion trainer Martin Pipe, the late Lambourne-based John Hill and show jumping trainer Andy Reeves.

Major Baird-Clarke said: "We originally thought of getting married on the beach at Gullane and having our reception at the racecourse but then got round to wondering if we could do something at Musselburgh with our own horses.

"Compared to down south where there are quite strict rules about where, when and how you can marry, we have been very impressed at how unbelievably hospitable and accommodating everyone has been in making this all come together."

Mrs Baird-Clarke added: "Jane Walker from the racecourse and the Registrar's Office have been very supportive and we are thrilled the racecourse has allowed us to canter down the home straight, adding to our special day. It is the second time married for both of us and we wanted to do something out of the ordinary, which was just for us, and this was perfect."

The couple's other children Jake, 10, Faith, 9, and Isabella, 5, are looking forward to visiting them in Edinburgh once

Major Baird-Clarke starts his new posting.

Musselburgh Racecourse marketing manager, Aisling Thornton, said: "We do receive some left of centre requests from visitors to Musselburgh and we always do our best to accommodate within reason. We are delighted that Chris and Shelley chose the racecourse to hold their wedding and hope the setting and special arrangements will bring happy memories for years to come."

- Major Chris Baird-Clarke was astride his chestnut Irish Draught, Rosie, while Shelley rode her bay coloured Arab, Mimi.

Photos courtesy of Ian Jacobs