

## Vicky Bishop reports from Burgundy

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Lafon vaults onto Dromara; chunky horses at Clos Vougeot; awesome cassis and the Patron Saint of Travellers on Horseback...

From Condrieu we rumbled north to the first of our two bases in Burgundy pausing only for water and carrots for the horses. As we left the motorway at Beaune and made our way through Savigny les Beaune our electric mint green horse box continued to draw much attention from the French. It can certainly take all our attention getting through some of the narrow streets!

Lily and Dromara hopped out at Bouilland nearly at the top of the valley above Savigny les Beaune to be greeted by not only Abigail and Jasper Morris but Hengist the horse and all four cats. This is a magical spot and it took our girls no time at all to settle into their lush new field. We have been trying to separate them with mobile fencing but Lily decided to live up to her breeding name of 'Pushy Woman' and jumped out in the middle of dinner so we abandoned this and left them together in peace as the great friends they have become.

The best way to really understand terrain is on horseback - you can see the soil variations close at hand, you feel the incline as the horse climbs up the vineyard tracks and you can see the leaf foliage and flowering close at hand. This is just how Abigail and I saw the great hill of Corton and went on through the vineyards surrounding Pernand Vergelesse and then back through the woods. Three hours' education you don't forget in a hurry.

I had been told that Dominique Lafon was a great horseman and I was very keen to taste his wines. He apologised for being too busy to ride with me, but when we arrived to visit his *domaine* with Lily and Dromara on board the temptation was obviously too great. Quick as a flash Dominique deftly vaulted on to Dromara who proudly walked him around Clos de la Barre. He too admitted that it was a perfect way of viewing a vineyard! I kept a tight hold on Lily for fear of any additional pruning that she might attempt while the spotlight was on Dromara...

We were welcomed to Domaine de la Vougerie by Pascal Marchant who will be supplying one of the wines for the special case offer being prepared as I type by Lay and Wheeler (a large percentage of the profits of which will go direct to my charities). As we stepped into the cool depths of the cellar to taste we were greeted by a reporter from *Bourgogne d'Aujourd'hui* come to trace the trail of The Great French Ride for this very informative regional magazine. Together we tasted over 20 wines from the impressive Beaune 1er Cru Clos du Roi 2001 and Charmes Chambertin 2001 to the completely unique Clos Blanc de Vougeot whose white vines were planted by monks in twelfth century.

Pascal is using horses to plough some of his best vineyards as they cause far less compaction than using tractors. Fairfax and I tracked down Josef and Amériq his faithful Comptoir horse in the vineyard at Clos de Vougeot slowly making their way through the vines. Whilst they were doing a thorough job we couldn't help but feel that the lean and wiry Josef was considerably fitter than the chunky Amériq!

Pure cassis - it had to be done. Before leaving for Chablis I wanted to find someone who really knows how to express the true flavour of blackcurrants without being cloying. Lily had lost a shoe on a grassy early morning gallop and fortunately the blacksmith was already booked for the next morning so we turned them out and set off for Arcenant with Abigail. Here we tasted the the most wonderful cassis at Jean- Baptiste Joannet. A true expression of liquid blackcurrants spun with the aroma of their own crushed leaves. There will definitely be a bottle of that lurking in the horsebox marked 'London - do not touch!'.

Chablis here we come! Didier Picq of Domaine Gilbert Picq is another keen horseman and he had kindly offered us the loan of a field in Chichée for the weekend. This time the fencing worked and Pushy Woman was kept on her own side of a more solid fence! Didier not only makes excellent Chablis but was a great guide (mist permitting) on Sunday morning when Abigail drove up from Savigny to join us. We rode around all the Grand Crus in Chichée including Vaucoupin and came back through the woods as the sun tried to come out. n in

Another case offer tip will definitely be a wine from Jean- Pierre Grossot whose La Part des Anges we all enthused about. I am also a fan of his 1er Cru Vaucoupin 2001 with all its layers of citrus and minerality.

Since I was last in Chablis La Chablisienne has built a very impressive new production site with huge glass windows looking out on the Grand Crus including la Grenouille. It is a great spot from which to see the terrain before a closer examination with Lily and Dromara. I tasted Chablis from the 1998 vintage which are now showing honeyed aromas before moving on to 1999s which have much more natural acidity and typical minerality, especially the 1er Cru Mont de Milieu and steely Grand Cru La Grenouille.

My other main mission in Chablis was to find the church door in the centre of the town that I had been told was covered in horseshoes dating back to the visiting pilgrims who nailed them on to ask the saints for strength for their horses. Much to my amazement they were all upside down - in England a sign of bad luck. But here in France they believe they should be this way up in order to let the good luck flow. Just round the corner we met Lorraine Corrigan at Domain Laroche who told us all about St.Martin - the patron saint of Travellers on Horseback. We then tasted the Chablis dedicated to him. She also showed us a magnificent hand- painted chest dating from the eighth century that opens up to show St Martin on his horse inside. We raised a glass of their Chablis dedicated to St Martin and wished Lily and Dromara 'Bon Courage!' - and went to gather our bags for Alsace.