'It has taken three months to get permits for this show'

Louise Carelsen and Foxy Snob on their way to clinching second at Le Godimo Horse Trials

Botswana-based event rider **Louise Carelsen** makes a rare sally to neighbouring South Africa for a horse trials, and finds some French tuition has worked wonders for her and her exciting young horse

FINALLY we have made it to an event. Le Godimo is in South Africa in the Magaliesberg mountains — a mere 600km from us in Botswana. It has taken me many phone calls — and about three months — to get permits for this show.

We arrived a day early, to a big empty field with temporary stabling. Our horses were very happy to see fresh green grass — something we don't have at home. I have brought Foxy Snob, my young horse who I evented for the first time in December 2013. Tsaone, a guide at Limpopo Horse Safaris, has come with the veteran Twist, usually ridden by Mpho, who was lead guiding a group of guests on safari.

Dressage day dawned, and all plaited up I followed with Foxy in a headcollar to see Twist do a very nice test. Suddenly Foxy disappeared from my side — he had found a pile of sand left by builders to roll in.

I should explain that while on safari the horses are led in headcollars to a pile of sand to have a roll, so of course Foxy thought that was what we were doing there. Foxy also did a good dressage, and we went on to the showjumping that afternoon.

Showjumping has always been an issue for me, and so we were delighted to have the well-known French showjumper Michel Robert join us on safari in August.

Tsaone enjoys his second show, riding Twist

Apparently I quote him every other sentence since his visit, but I am not exaggerating when I say that it was a life-changing experience.

His focus is on mental preparation for riding, training and at shows. He is adamant about riding with soft eyes and looking past the fences. My older horse Coolmore, who has a huge jump, has always been tricky for me to showjump. Michel suggested that I approach each fence thinking that I am going to stop on the other side, focusing not on the fence but on the other side. It worked!

A correct canter in a good rhythm and lots of mental preparation has made such a difference to my riding. Most instructors focus on technique and the horse's way of going so this was a revelation for us.

So, now to see if our homework paid off at a show. For Tsaone it was his second ever

show and he jumped a super clear round. Then came Foxy's turn. He jumped so well, so big and round that we had at least two offers to buy him as I came out of the arena.

The first day had been boiling hot; the next, the heavens opened at 8am. Our horses in their temporary stables were soon drenched. I didn't have any waterproof blankets, so we used our usual stable blankets, which were soaked after 10min. I thought back to my Pony Club days — "better a wet warm horse than a cold dry one!"

Twist and Tsaone did a lovely cross-country round inside the time, but with an unfortunate run-out at a skinny going into the water to finish 10th.

Foxy again amazed me with his jumping, locking onto the fences and never breaking stride. What a fantastic young horse. It reminded me how much I love this sport and that all the effort getting here is worth it. He finished second overall.

As we headed out of town towards home the next morning, I saw what looked like an overturned truck's contents on the road — but then found we had driven right into a protest. People demanding more government housing had blocked the road.

Typical me to find myself in the middle, along with the horses and my two kids. We floored it and pushed our way through. What an experience — not something you would see leaving a show in the UK.

We are already planning our next event, maybe in March, if we get permits in time. E

Foxy finds an enticing pile of sand for a roll

Pictures courtesy of Louise Carelsen