

Barking mud!

ONE OF the last large-scale events of the 'summer', the Monmouthshire Show went ahead last Thursday, despite the fact that large parts of the site turned instantly into a sea of sticky mud.

Exhibitors told tales of the 'nightmare' of setting up on the waterlogged showground beside the River Wye, and one senior manager at Hales of Drybrook told us of their efforts to improvise a base for a complex patio structure that they were forced to lay onto plywood - since the ground was mud and could not support the weight of the stones, which threatened to vanish into the mire.

But, like at many other events this rain-lashed season, exhibitors and visitors alike simply gritted their teeth and got on with it. The judging of all the livestock and produce classes went ahead seamlessly, while the events in the huge outdoor arena also went ahead despite the softness of the ground.

The walkways between the Craft Tent and the Food Hall and around the main site soon turned into a sea of saturated Wye Valley clay and soil, the consistency of cold porridge, which clogged wheelchairs and prams and caught the welly-less, literally, on the hop!

But in the Rural Crafts area, the Dean Forest Beekeepers Association had a spacious display that included several 'live' hives. They attracted huge

numbers of people to their exhibition and events - and they got rather a surprise during the afternoon when, on this their first visit to the show, they were awarded best educational stand in the show.

Children were well catered for throughout the day, with both live displays from stunt motorcycles, and falconry, while in the Country Matters area, they could try their hands in 'The Big Skill', learning about spinning, ceramics and wood carving.

In the main arena, the thrill and spills of scurry racing were on display, as their feisty pairs of ponies propelled their driver and assistant at break-neck speed around the circuit - surely this must be the closest anyone can get in modern times to Roman chariot racing.

Of course, centre stage was given to the display and judging of the best livestock the area can muster - and the judges especially praised the high standard of animals entered this year.

Overall, it appears that visitor numbers to the show, in its spectacularly picturesque location on the Redbrook Road, were slightly down on last year - not surprising considering the conditions underfoot.

And as if getting off the muddy site wasn't enough of a challenge for the drivers, the traffic lights on Monmouth Wye bridge failed at mid-afternoon, leaving long tailbacks all around the area.



•The atrocious conditions made navigating the site perilous - especially for anything with wheels. Here a couple with a push-chair attempt to cross the mudbath to the crafts tent.



•About the only people not worried about getting their car off site... Bryn Charles and Geraldine Hooper of Whitecliff Off Road Driving Centre, Coleford, appear unconcerned at the mire around them.



•The crowds gasped at the speeds of the scurry racing.



•Wye Valley Youth Rangers showcasing their talents with wood carving and whittling. Here Louis slices his finger to display his cutting-edge approach to twig carving for the Review.



•Members of The Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers try to get a better vantage point.



•Local boys Jack and Ross enjoying learning to create clay models to add to the giant structure on the Osprey Studios stand.