

# I'll drink to that

There's nothing like a tequila slammer to help you break ice, make friends and influence people, says **Charlotte Reather**

**N**OTHING seems to bring our nation together more readily than alcoholic excess (unless it's taking the rise out of Germans). Booze crosses the social divide. Farmer, farrier or the fourth Marquess of Frimley – all like to get off their heads occasionally.

And there's nothing like sporting adventures and drinking stirred together. When skiing, hunting, fishing or curling the *après* (and sometimes *pendant*) drinking is as essential as the sport itself in bringing people closer as true friendships are cemented by legendary anecdotes. The worse things get, the funnier they are in the telling. Broken bones, arrests and fights, annoying at the time, invariably become pet stories for dinner parties.

Riding and a dash of alcohol can be seriously fun. My school friends and I decided to have a jumping lesson in preparation for a day out with the Berkeley. Having survived the evil regime that was boarding-school, we thought we were ready for anything but we hadn't reckoned on our instructor, The One With No Neck (TOWNO). We had become slightly over-refreshed at lunch and when faced with this fiery dictator we really wished we hadn't. As she barked orders around the arena we were individually cut down to size. Coming from polo, I was told I rode like an "effing cowboy". Next in line, "Beaver Bonce" was told it was "some kind of effing miracle" he stayed on at all. Pinkie was a "sack of bloody potatoes". And as for "Biker Boy" (as he became known from that day forth), he was reminded, at maximum decibels, that he was on "an effing horse not an effing motorbike" so "stop effing leaning out when cornering".

We were then ordered to imagine ourselves as trees. Why, I have no idea. "What tree are you, Cowgirl?" I declared myself to be an oak. "What tree are you Biker?" "A beech tree, ma'am." "And you, Beaver Bonce?" Biker Boy and I exchanged glances. Beaver Bonce went for it. "A Lava-tree!" We exploded with laughter. TOWNO roared: "Get out of my class!"

Beaver Bonce was forced to sit out of the arena for a good five minutes until the instructor was sure he'd mended his ways. Strangely

enough, he benefited most from the lesson. She smartened up his jumping style enormously: "seeing as he was a dipsomaniac", he should imagine he was in his favourite armchair, watching television, with a crystal tumbler filled with Glenmorangie on a table in front of him. To jump well, he needed to reach for the whisky while keeping his eyes on the TV screen before sitting back down again. Beaver Bonce went from Thelwell to Andrew Hoy within five minutes flat. It stands to be one of the single most useful riding tips we've ever been given and it combines our two loves: horses and drinking.

If you don't ride, there's always the sport of drinking on its own. Recently, an urban comedy friend, The American, came to the country to finish a film script and suss out whether we should work together. I quickly realised a bonding bender was essential.

“ Salt, tequila, lemon: the modern slam method is to lick the salt off the lady's neck, drink the tequila and snog the lemon out of her mouth ”

It all started as a rather innocent Sunday lunch. I'm not sure when I suggested we send tequilas over to a couple in their sixties enjoying a roast in the corner, but it was roughly around then that things started to kick off.

The barmaid point blank refused to take the tray of salt, lemon and tequila to their table, so it was up to The American or me. We tossed a coin. The American was up. He braced himself and casually walked up to the couple's table: "Good afternoon, are you enjoying your meal? It's another Tequila Sunday and these are with compliments of the house. Have a great day." A mixture of confusion and shock registered on their faces. The American and I laughed uncontrollably but soon returned to our cider. Some time later I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was the male of the couple. Had he

come to shout at us? Not quite. Nigel the chilli farmer had supped his tequila from the shot glass. He'd never had tequila before. He wanted to thank us so much. Tequila was the business. He'd drunk his date's shot too. His



date? He was so tanked up that she'd stormed off, and it was entirely our fault.

Nigel was not overly concerned. In fact, he offered us a tequila. We reluctantly necked the shot, showing Nigel how to slam: salt, tequila, lemon. I told Nigel it could get interesting on a date as the modern method is to lick the salt off the lady's neck, drink the tequila and snog the lemon out of her mouth. Nigel liked slamming *a lot*. He declared tequila to be his new drink and ordered another round. We were now on a mission and locals at the bar wanted in.

At midnight we said goodbye to our 25 new friends. And sealed our deal in the most fitting way – by falling over a wall as we left. ■

**Charlotte Reather is winner of the Gloucestershire Glamour Award 2008**