

Some of the best days of our lives **A weekend festie at Endorse-it in Dorset**

Alan and Sam were both at the same festival – but didn't meet – at beautiful Oak Farm in Cranborne Chase on the edge of Salisbury Plain.

Alan: I'm a festival old-timer having started in the sixties with Phun City and the Isle of Wight festivals, plus lots of memorable Glastonbury events, Big Green Gatherings and more since then. I'd not been to *Endorse-it* before, but heard on the festival grapevine that it was 'one of the best' for being friendly, chilled and value. I travelled all the way down by train from Eyemouth in the borderlands of Scotland for this festival. I had arranged to meet two mates, Dave from Norfolk and Phil from Devon. I arrived the night before and camped at the Salisbury campsite out of town by Old Sarum. It was raining buckets on that Thursday night and continued all night long. So, I travelled to the festival site on a bus with some soggy clothes and an already soaked tent. But folk on the double decker bus were happy, smiling and enthusiastic about the Endorse-it festie, and it rubbed off on me.

Sam: I have been going to festivals for 15 years and for the past 5 years worked at over 50 festivals. I was at the first Endorse-it and have been back ever year with the exception of last year. Endorse-it has been my favourite festival since that very first year.

Endorse-it has grown and then shrunk with the times. This year's festival was slightly smaller than last year, this was reflected in a £7 reduction in an adult weekend ticket. The organisers listened to what people wanted and tried to bring the festival back to its roots. One of the organisers, Flounder says, *'Last year we spent a lot of time and money on the line-up and it didn't really work, this year we've just picked names out of a hat!'* Not strictly true I bet but I get the feeling that the organisers reached the dizzy heights of running a successful festival but realised that what is most important is the 'vibe' of the event not what big names are on the line up. Gone is the big outdoor stage but there is still three stages in tents making the entertainment weatherproof if needed. The overwhelming consensus from guests though is they come for the atmosphere and the old school feel of the event not the bands.

Alan: Getting onto site was a mite muddy. In fact, all the vehicles were being given tractor tows to get across the stubble fields to the car park area. At the end of car area was the wrist-band issuing area, and hey, would-you-believe-it – there were my friends, Dave and Phil, so we were able to collect their gear from the boot of Phil's car and carry it all through the mud-slides to the back-field camping area. Some of the campers must have arrived days in advance, since we were technically arriving only an hour after the 'official' opening. Put our three tents up and gradually we were



joined by a few 'neighbours'. Nearly teatime on the Friday. Time for a sortie round the main festival area.

Sam: Our Endorse-it adventure began with getting our van towed onto the



campervan field. Rain from the past few days had made the site muddy and there was no way that most vans were going to be able to get onto the site. Luckily the sun was shining by the time we arrived and we saw no rain until Monday morning :) The organisers had arranged for tractors to tow everyone on which worked brilliantly with no one having to wait too

long. Campers were also ferried onto the site by trailer with all their bags. For anyone whose ever been to Glastonbury you'll be aware how far you have to carry kit from your car whether it's muddy or not and I think this shows how much Endorse-it care about their guests. It must have cost the festival a small fortune to get these tractors working all day Friday and over the weekend and no one was charged a penny. I have been to festivals where you can get charged to be towed, again I really feel this shows the spirit of Endorse-it. We also got a cool live-in vehicle sticker that will stay on a lot of vans for ever more.

Alan: Into the main arena – exchanged smiles and positive vibes with Phil and Dave. Chatted with lots of other well-friendly festival-goers. This felt like a good place to be. And the sun was shining! Two marquee main stages plus smaller mini-stages and tented areas and three main areas serving, beer, cider and more. The usual mix of stalls for food, clothes, official T-shirts and CDs and festival nick-knacks. We wandered around catching a few numbers from different bands and particularly felt at home in Strummerville – the campfire and mini performing area established in memory of Clash-man legend, Joe Strummer, to support keen, imaginative new musicians around the world. During the weekend I bought their compilation album – some inventive new voices. Worth checking them out at: www.strummerville.com

Sam: Endorse-it opens the campsite at midday on the Friday but the arena doesn't open or the music start until 5pm. This gave us plenty of time to get the van sorted out, have a chill out after the driving and hook up with friends. We got into the arena to catch Godhead, a punk rock band with dubby influences. They were really good, loads of energy, some rocking tunes and they had great tattoos too! There wasn't much of a crowd by this point but those there seemed to be enjoying it. We looked round the festival, everything was clean and tidy and most people weren't too messy yet. I hoped the site would stay clean and tidy but that the people would get messier! There was the usual merchandise stall selling programmes and t-shirts, we got a programme with a badge and sticker, bonus! There were also numerous stalls selling clothing, hats, ethnic goods and other trinkets.

Alan: Witnessed the Urban Voodoo Machine for the first time. The Voodoo Machine have some fabulous songs penned by frontman, Paul-Ronney Angel. They are a blues and boogie-fuelled mix of Tom Waits' gravel and bourbon-soaked swamp music. I especially liked the 'Orphan's Lament', about the orphan who ran off to the circus to become the 'scariest clown you've ever seen'. 'Love Song #666, which is a bit reminiscent of a flamenco Jim Morrison lament about incest. And the great do-wop, 'Down by the river' with lines like:

*'Down by the river, just
sniffin' glue, drinkin'
Special Brew
Down by the river, me n'
you, your blood-shot eyes
Down by the river with
you.'*



They even sport two drummers, one of whom, the massive Late J-Roni-Moe is green, yes, a giant bearded green person!

That first night I outlasted my friends who sloped off to their tents at about ten. I think *Tragic Roundabout* were probably my favourite outfit. As we realised even on the first night, the musical emphasis at *Endorse-it* seemed to be on punkish, reggae/ska sounds tinged with Eastern European Gypsy influences. Not a bad thing either. But we kept returning to the Strummerville encampment for chilled near acoustic sounds.

Sam: We went back to the van for food before the evening really got going. The campervan field had a real variety of vehicles from battered transits to horseboxes to winnebagos. There was more than enough toilets and rubbish bins to go around which gives the few who still think it's OK to drop litter no excuse. Later that evening



we went to see Pronghorn who as always put on an entertaining show with their very own cow-punk style. Next was Dreadzone (picture, left), the last band on the main stage who got the crowd really rocking with old favourite tunes and a few new ones like 'Beyond a Rock' and 'Gangsta' from their forthcoming album. They played a blinding set and a great way to see in the first night of *Endorse-*

it. I had interviewed them earlier for UK Reggae Guide and they were all excited about playing the festival and banging out the new tunes. Their forthcoming tour and album are well worth looking out for. We ended the night in the arena by catching the

last part of Tragic Roundabout, a firm festival favourite with their own unique style of punked up ska folk.

Alan: A few memories of Saturday. Another great day of weather and good to see some new-to-me bands and some bands I already knew like Molar, with her great



vocal power, now fronting Powersteppers. She used to be with Zion Train and it was a shame she didn't join them on their closing set on the Sunday. Attila the Stockbroker did a great turn of poetry cum songs. Mostly new stuff including a poem dedicated to his wife – all about swine flu. He pulled no punches with a vitriol-dripping, vengeful attack on the shambles in government that used to be new Labour.

I caught a couple of sections of the old-school trance dance set from Eat Static. Not really my scene, but good at keeping the dancers' dancing and lots of arms raised high in the air. But the highpoint of my day was once again seeing the Tofu Love Frogs, who provided the seething end of the night crowd with a lively nightcap.

They were, and still are, one of the spikiest, most Traveller-friendly bands on the circuit. They out punk the Pogues and Levellers with their speed-freaked cyber folk. Lots of favourites in the setlist including the rabble-rousing, 'Folk off reverend' and squatting hymn, 'Hackney Downs'. Time for a last chill-out round the Strummerville fire (on the right).



Sam: Saturday saw another glorious day of sunshine which always helps the vibe. When people can sit around outside chilling, drinking, eating and listening to the music it makes for a much nicer festival experience. There were kids running around and a few adults and everyone seemed to be really enjoying the festival. We saw Attila the Stockbroker who for those who don't know is a punk poet that has been around for years. He writes very in yer face political and funny poems and songs. I had never had the chance to see him before so this was a must. He did a couple of great anti fascist poems and a very topical swine flu one! Back to the Planet came on at 4pm, they played here a couple of years ago after not gigging for years. Then as this weekend they played all the old favourites like 'Teenage Turtles' as they are not writing new material but they banged out those tunes as if it was still the mid 90s and we were at a free festival. After that it

was a dash over to the other stage for the first of two sets Ed Rome played at the weekend. This set was a folky ska type affair with some members of his other band The Big. It was entertaining and the crowd enjoyed it but I was personally looking forward to his reggae set the next day. Again we rushed back to the main stage to see Powersteppers.

I have seen Powersteppers a few times and the set can be anything from dub to dance to dubstep. This time they had long time vocalist Molar with Lofty from Dubmerge. He has a more hip hop style and this was reflected in the set they played. It wasn't my favourite Powersteppers set but it got me bouncing a little and the crowd loved them. Shortly afterwards came Mikey Dread and Channel One sound system, mashing it up with some classic reggae tunes. The records were a little scratched in places but after the DJ told us they had been spinning them for 30 years you can understand why, it even added to the vibe of the gig to know that. It was lovely to bounce to a proper reggae sound system. We then went to catch some of New Groove Formation a band I had never heard of before. They are a ska, beats, breaks type band with reggae and dubby influences. Two guys on vocals, one more of the singer, one more of a MC, drums, bass, percussion and two girls brass made up the group. I enjoyed them particularly the more reggae/ska stuff. We decided to get food as we hadn't eaten all day and had been wandering around loads, with full bellies and suddenly feeling quite tired we made the mistake of going back to the van for a cuppa. Before you know it we were fast asleep and the next thing I heard was the sound of Inner Terrestrials playing the last few songs of their set. It was 1am... damn! We had missed the last part of the Saturday night, we went back to sleep so at least we would be wide awake for the whole of Sunday!

Alan: Scrumpy Sunday and Ladies' Day for the men to live out their little fantasies... I know I tried hard on both counts – the dressing up and the cider drinking! We'd got up quite early, and I went for a wee jog up the lanes to and across fields around Six Penny Handley, the local village. Back to chat with our camping neighbours, who



were determined to do as many legal and err, less legal substances as possible – but no less fun or friendly for that. Time to put on the skirt, wig and a bit of lippy. Dave proclaimed I was Gypsy Meg – maybe it was the hoop earrings with little skulls!

Anyways, by the time we strolled into the festival arena, there were many remarkable ladies. Great fun to see so many people get into the *Endorse-it* spirit. Super fun acoustic scrumpy n' western set from Who's Afeard down by the cider bus. Think we danced quite a lot! Add about ten pints of scrumpy and memories of Sunday are little through a glass blarily. Definitely

remember a great piano and conjuror act down where we were scrumpying. We also kept on joining in with other ladies for photo-sessions. And then it was nearly all over, with Zion Train cooking up a dub-stepping storm to close the night on one main stage, while the dancing continued well into the new day. We were there!

Sam: Another perfect day of sunshine welcomed us when we opened the van door on Sunday morning. I was really excited about seeing Zion Train later that evening

but before that and on very early at 1.30pm was Dubheart. I had only heard about this band a few weeks before the festival and hadn't really checked them out properly. They are six guys, an amazing vocalist, percussion, keyboard, guitar, bass and drums. We were in for a treat as they put on a beautiful performance of Dub Reggae. They were certainly my favourite unknown act to me I saw all weekend. We then spent many hours wandering, sitting, eating, drinking and chatting, taking in the festival without entering a tent playing music. It was Ladies' Day, which meant half the blokes on site had dresses on which is the most amusing thing you will ever see at a festival, particularly those with balloons for boobs! As the afternoon gave way to evening it was time to see Ed Rome again. This was much more of a Reggae/Ska set still with some members of The Big. It was a great set with some songs from his album 'A Life in Minutes'. He is a great performer with loads of energy and great stage presence. Next was Subgiant, a firm favourite of Endorse-it festival. I think they have played every year so far. They mix drum and bass with beats and breaks and have a great scratch DJ which makes for an amazing live electronic sound. They played a cracking set, the crowd really went wild and it was the perfect band to be on before the mighty Zion Train.

The crowd were still buzzing from Subgiant when Zion Train came on and the whole place erupted as soon as the first sound was heard. Front man Dubdadda inspired the crowd with great lyrics, sometimes sang, sometimes spoken. Dave and Richard on brass sent sweet notes through our bodies whilst Neil kept the tunes coming with



his live dub mixing. There was a point just before the end where the crowd exploded in noise so loud it was like nothing I've ever heard before. Everyone was absolutely loving it, the tent was rammed with sweaty dancing bodies that spilled outside. All too soon it was time for it to end, Zion

Train ended with the classic 'War inna Babylon' but they could have gone on all night. No one in the crowd wanted it to finish yet! The Town Crier told us there was no more and so we departed to find some more entertainment.

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Respect and thanks to all those involved in putting on one of the friendliest events I've had the pleasure of attending. (www.lgofestivals.com). Sorry that Sam and myself didn't meet up this time around. See you next year, Sam!

Read more words, see more pics from Alan Dearling and Sam Wilkinson, at their websites:

Sam: www.positive-evolution.org.uk

And Sam's pictures of the festival: http://photobucket.com/samsimillia_endorseit2009

Alan: www.enablerpublications.co.uk



And info on some of the bands:

Endorse-it Festival - <http://www.lgofestivals.com>

Pronghorn - <http://www.pronghorn.co.uk>

Dreadzone - <http://www.dreadzone.com>

Tragic Roundabout - <http://tragicroundabout.info>

Attila the Stockbroker - <http://www.attilathestockbroker.com>

Back to the Planet - <http://www.myspace.com/backtotheplanet>

Ed Rome - <http://www.edrome.co.uk>

Pow ersteppers - <http://www.myspace.com/pow erstepper>

Mikey Dread - <http://www.rootsandculture.co.uk>

New Groove Formation - <http://www.newgrooveformation.com>

Dubheart - <http://www.myspace.com/dubheart>

Subgiant - <http://www.subgiant.co.uk>

Zion Train - <http://www.wobblyweb.com/zt>

Godhead - www.myspace.com/godheadgodhead

UK Reggae Guide - <http://www.ukreggaeguide.co.uk>