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Tom Gill's Marathon Horse Challenge

This year's Llanwrytd Wells annual 'Man versus Horse Marathon', which takes place against a scenic Welsh backdrop on Saturday, 12 June, will have a special interest for Tom Gill (23) who currently lives in Clapham, South London, but originally comes from Stratford upon Avon where his family still live.



Tom said "The man versus horse marathon has been run since the 1980s and is the biggest horse race of its kind in the country. It covers 22 miles (less distance than a normal marathon) but with an ascent of 3,000 feet it is more like fell-running over very rough terrain. Last year there were 300 runners and 50 horses and riders."

It's not often two legs can beat four over a marathon course but Tom, after hearing about Huw Lobbs, a south Londoner, who was the first man to beat a horse over the Welsh course, became inspired to take up the challenge in

memory of his cousin James Hurd who died at the age of 14 in 2002, after being diagnosed with a rare and very aggressive rhabdoid brain tumour.

"It was in 2004 when Huw won in two hours and five minutes, finishing two minutes before the fastest horse"

"For the last six months I've been in training to take on this challenge of a lifetime. I have made several blogs on 'Youtube' of my progress and will be filming the event itself."



"James was one of the most wonderful human beings I've ever met. I have always struggled with his death and question why such a lovely boy, who wouldn't hurt a fly, was taken away from us. I am trying to raise money for Brain Tumour Research so that other loving, wonderful people won't be taken away from their families and friends. I'm hoping people will give generously to this as it means everything to me. I'm going to do everything I can to try and beat a horse and raise money in memory of James."

James was two years younger than Tom; he was very caring and had a fantastic sense of humour. Tom has many great memories of him. He lived in York, with his mum, dad and sister Becky.

"James's funeral was in the middle of my GCSEs. A service for the celebration of his life was held in York Minster, where many family and friends attended.

Tom always said he'd run a marathon for James, but never thought he'd get round to it.

"I often have trouble committing to things that I have said I will do, often not finding the time, but this is a great opportunity to put my promise into practice"

Tom started his training just before Christmas 2009, having not done any running since school. Six years ago he was quite good at cross country and represented ChippingCampdenSchool. Slowly he has built up his stamina. Initially his chest was tight and sore after just 10 minutes' running! Now he does up to two seven or eight mile runs in the week and a 15 to 20 mile run at weekends.

"Doing it sounds - and probably is - crazy, but trying to beat a horse is a good way to have fun and most importantly raise money for an excellent cause and, whatever the outcome this

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weekend, I hope people will donate generously."

Donations can be made at www.justgiving.com/manvshorse and more information is available at www.manvshorse.co.uk

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