

YTHAN RAFT RACE SPECIAL

Raining champs!

THE SUN failed to shine on the 17th Ythan Raft Race - but the wet weather didn't dampen the spirits of the hundreds of competitors who took to the river.

Despite almost constant rain, spectators lined the banks of the Ythan on Saturday to watch as 172 colourful rafts of various shapes and sizes left Ellon's old bridge for their journey to Logie Buchan, where 100 eventually managed to clock in at the finish.

And the annual event has already raised almost £14,000 for a number of local and national charities, with more sponsorship money still to be handed in.

Raft race organiser Bill Smith said the race had been a success despite the inclement weather.

"There was a considerable amount of tension as the day went on, wondering just how bad it was going to get," he said. "But it was okay, there were no major incidents at all."

However, the rescue boats were kept busy throughout the afternoon taking people off their rafts when they found it all a bit too much.

Mr Smith said: "People should ensure they have adequate clothing for being on the water. We were working flat out - much more than normal."

But he added that the hard work that goes into organising the race had once again been worth it.

"In the days immediately before the race it is pretty arduous for me," he said.

"You're working in isolation and then on the day of the event you're watching these people who have spent hours on their rafts and you realise you're not in isolation after all."

"It's really quite a nice feeling," he added. "It is extraordinarily satisfying, seeing it all come together like that."

The fastest raft on the day came from William Donald Contractors, who finished in a time of 28 mins with Grampian Police and Mike Webster's Insanity hot on their heels.

Various modes of transport were used to get from Ellon to Logie Buchan - among them planes, a tandem bicycle, Bluebird bus and fire engine - with contraptions incorporating barrels and pallets as usual proving very popular.

Aiming to fly down the river were the team from Cruden Bay's Lodge St Olaf who are renowned for their spectacular creations.

Their raft this year was a vintage aeroplane replica.

Charity is the winner again as race raises over £14,000



Although it arrived with little time to spare before the start of the race, the prize for the most creative raft was once again winging its way to Lodge St Olaf, who have never left the event empty handed.

This is the tenth year in a row they have scooped a prize at the race.

However, the raft performed less impressively in the water, making its way rather slowly towards the finish.

Hard on the heels of Lodge St Olaf was the team from Radtech who were this year taking part in their ninth consecutive raft race.

Dressed as the Addams Family and with their raft decorated as a castle, the team walked off with the prize for the best dressed crew.

One of the most spectacular rafts at this year's event proved to be a real monster record-breaker and offered any interested spectators the chance to take to the water in style.

For Texaco were appealing for volunteers to join them on Izzy

the Dragon, their green and yellow monster, in a bid to take the prize for the raft with the most people on board.

And in the process, they managed to smash the course record for the most people on a raft after 50 people crammed onto Izzy.

But for those spectators who preferred to stay on dry land there were various attractions to keep them amused as they waited for the start of the big race. These included a hovercraft demonstration with a small hovercraft owned by Ellon architect Mike Taylor, helicopter flights, a jazz band playing in the Market Street car park and a visit from the Northsound Radio roadshow.

Those who missed out on the big event or want to relive the moment can catch highlights on BBC Scotland's The Big Country which is screened on Fridays on BBC1.

Intrepid presenters Dougie Vipond and Jenni Falconer both took the plunge and boarded rafts to get first-hand experience of the race.

Former Deacon Blue drummer Dougie joined Cruden Bay's Lodge St Olaf aboard the Spirit of St Olaf while Jenni, who found fame appearing on Blind Date, joined the crew of Balmoral Webco's raft.

And the pair appeared to be enjoying their taste of the Ythan Raft Race. Dougie said:

"It's brilliant, absolutely brilliant. These things are always fun and get lots of support from the town."

The charities which are set to benefit from this year's event are Action Research, Cancer Relief, the Disabled Skiing and Sledge Appeal, Ellon Health Centre Specialist Equipment Fund, Ellon Parish Church Renovation Fund, Ellon Academy art department video computing project, Ellon Academy outdoor pursuits, Rotary student exchange scheme and Gordon Sports Medicine Clinic Equipment Fund.

Mr Smith also praised those who had turned out to help with the clean-up operation on Sunday which saw 24 skips of

rubbish collected between Ellon and Logie Buchan.

"The clean-up squad on the river had an enormous task all day on Sunday, dismantling rafts and putting them into skips," he said.

"There's a special thanks to those people who turned up to assist on the Sunday with the clean-up which is one of the thankless parts of the raft race."

Ellon Centre Canoe Club were among those who helped with the clean-up and they also helped on raft race day itself, as did the Ellon branch of the Red Cross who were on hand to provide first aid assistance.

One event which did have to be cancelled due to the weather was the Ellon Colts balloon race which will now take place on Ellon Gala Day.

The event is raising money for the under 14 football team's Easter trip and the first prize is a mountain bike. Tickets are available from Alan Shand on ☎ 01358 722266 or Mike Annand on ☎ 01358 721895.

Meet Red's wee mate Woodstock

■ **Plane sailing:** The prize for the smallest raft went to Snoopy versus the Red Baron with Michael Cowie as the Red Baron and Mark Watt dressed up as Woodstock.

All the raciest winners

THE FULL raft race results were:-

Fast raft race - 1 William Donald Contractors 28 mins; 2 Grampian Police 32 mins and 3 Insanity 35 minutes.

Most people on a raft - Texaco, monster. Smallest raft - Michael Cowie, aeroplane. Most attractive raft - Blue Toon Theatre Company, 42nd Street.

Funniest raft - Fyvie Venture Scouts, Mummies on a Pyramid. Best ladies raft - BR Contracts, Absolutely Fabulous. Most hilarious start - Petroline, Bob Watson.

Best sailing raft - See Thru Sails Sailing Raft, Colin Simpson. Best mechanical means of propulsion - Cycle Power, Haliburton. Largest children's raft - Richard Templeton.

Best dressed crew - Radtech, Addams Family. Most creative raft - Cruden Bay Lodge St Olaf, Spirit of St Olaf. Raft that made the biggest splash - Esso Petrol Station, INS Contract Services.

Most sophisticated entry - Bluebird Peterhead depot, Bluebird Bus. Special prizes - Lloyds British; Ambulance; Cowboys Covered Wagon, AHT Surveys; the Drowners and Ferguson Sea Cab's shark.