

The Edinburgh Evening News - Monday 9 August 2004

Record Cavalcade turn-out

AN estimated 185,000 people lined the streets of the Capital to watch the Edinburgh Evening News Festival Cavalcade 2004 launch this year's summer event.

The sun split the blue skies and helped create a fantastic carnival atmosphere during the two-hour extravaganza.

One float, carrying a giant fire-breathing Chinese temple lion, failed to start and was eventually beheaded and towed away, but thousands more performers set off from Market Street without a hitch.

The Ladyboys of Bangkok nearly smudged their make-up when their lorry stalled and jolted, sending the extravagant performers sliding towards the back. But they quickly regained their composure and went on to bring a gaudy, sparkling, splash of colour to proceedings.

Police said the huge crowd enjoying one of the Capital's biggest events of the year were well-behaved and the event passed off peacefully.

The afternoon got off to a lively start as musical hits performed live by this year's Tempo stage production of Annie pumped out of speakers along Princes Street.

At 2.30pm, more than 3000 participants set off from the bottom of Cockburn Street headed by an 80-strong motorised parade of Moto Guzzi Trikings, Harley Davidsons and Honda Gold Wings.

The entire cast of the Edinburgh Military Tattoo followed, enthraling the crowd as the parade made its way along the two-mile route through Princes Street to Castle Terrace and finally Johnstone Terrace.

This year's event included flagthrowers from Florence, bands from Canada and the United States, dancers from Thailand and Palestine, drummers from Japan, a theatre group from Argentina and bands and groups from all over the UK.

The 28 colourful floats were joined by 86 individual groups; dancing, singing and, in the case of the Falun Gong supporters, adding the sound of gentle cymbal crashes to the cacophony.

Crowd-pleasers included Spider-Man and the Jungle Book, as well as stilt-walkers dressed as giant luminous parrots. Cavalcade director David Todd said: "Everything went very well. The crowd was bigger than last year and the weather couldn't have been better. I followed the Canadian band round the route and everywhere the streets were five or six people deep. We were maybe 20 minutes late, but there were lots of people stopping to perform to the crowds and the Thai dancers stopped to present a gift to the Lord Provost. It was a wonderful atmosphere."

Louise Stenhouse, 39, a legal secretary from Pirniefield Bank in Leith, said she had had as good a time as children Abbie, nine, Rebecca, 12, and one-year-old son Cal.

She said: "It really was marvellous and the kids thoroughly enjoyed themselves. We haven't been for a couple of years and there was so much to see. The music was fantastic."

Richard McKechnie, 33, a stock controller from Brunstane, said his favourite part was the pipe bands.

He said: "I can't think of anything better for goosebumps than the skirl of the bagpipes and they sent a shiver up my spine when the pipe bands marched along. My one-year-old son Ryan was having a ball and there was something for everyone to enjoy. The crowds were great, there were a lot of tourists who looked like they were having fun."

IRENE WILKIE, from Mayfield, Dalkeith, said she comes to the Cavalcade every year with her daughter and four grandchildren, Elliot, five, Wilkie, four, Laird, two and one-year-old Eden.

The 54-year-old Royal Mail worker said: "It is absolutely wonderful. The weather makes it even more enjoyable. We really love the pipe bands in particular, they're great to watch."

Daughter Leigh, 31, added: "The kids love it. It just seems to get better every year."

Lisa Berry, 34, a nurse from Leith, was also enjoying the sunshine and music with her two children Sean, 12, Rachel, and niece Megan, both ten.

She said: "We love seeing the pipes and drums. The weather has made the day and I think this is a great way to start the Festival."

One hundred and eighty-five thousand others seemed to agree.