

Northern Pride revellers party on despite the downpours

Even the rain couldn't dampen the spirits of the hundreds of revellers who turned out for the North East's biggest gay pride event at the weekend.

The fourth Northern Pride took place on Saturday (July 16) and although the rain poured, plenty of people grabbed their umbrellas and joined the party.

No fewer than three marching bands drummed out the beat as the flamboyant parade made its way through the streets of Newcastle, from the Civic Centre to Leazes Park.

And at the head of the parade was one of Newcastle's most successful football teams of last season - the cup-winning Newcastle Panthers.

The Panthers saw off other teams from the GFSN league - the world's biggest league for 11-a-side LGBT squads - to lift the GFSN National Cup.

Team captain and manager John Harper was thrilled to be leading the colourful parade.

"It's such an honour that we've been given the opportunity to lead the parade," says John. "And hopefully by doing this we can challenge the stereotypes that some people still have and get people to accept the LGBT community more."

John is one of the original members of the Panthers football team, which was set up three years ago.

"It's down to the success of us winning the cup that we were asked to lead the parade," said John.

"I've been to the parade before but always just mingled in near the back. Being right at the front is something different and I never thought we'd be doing it when the Panthers set up three years ago."

Mikey Richards, parade co-ordinator, said: "Every year Northern Pride is getting bigger and better and we hope to carry on building on that success.

"It's a celebration and we hope everyone has had a good time.

"However, it's also about challenging attitudes towards the LGBT community because we're still fighting for equality and change.

"We're really pleased that so many people have come along, despite the weather."

The parade of around 1,000 people arrived at Leazes Park at 1pm for the start of the Pink Picnic. Organisers estimate that 8,000 people attended the Pink Picnic.

The leader of Newcastle City Council, Councillor Nick Forbes, opened the event with a speech. He said afterwards: "Pride is a symbol of the visibility of the LGBT community and the contribution that we make to Newcastle and the North East. It is our chance to not only demonstrate our visibility but remind people that the struggle for equality still goes on.

"Northern Pride goes from strength to strength. It is now one of the most important community events hosted in the city and I am delighted and proud to have been a part of it today," he added.

Also speaking at the event was Politician Brian Paddick. Until his retirement in 2007, Brian was the UK's most senior openly gay police officer.

Brian said afterwards: "It was a great atmosphere. The rain has not dampened people's spirits. I have been in Newcastle several times before but this is my first Pride. It is really important for the gay community to show people what they're made of."

Headliner Ruth Lorenzo, star of ITV's X Factor, performed a rip-roaring set through the day's worst torrential storm.

She said: "I've performed at events where it has rained before, you have just got to get on with the show. I was really excited to be back in Newcastle and, as ever in the North East, the crowd were just fantastic."

Ruth was followed by Laura Steele, a Pride favourite. Her infectious electro-pop tracks got the crowds jumping.

"Newcastle is one of my favourite Pride events. The crowd were brilliant and just stayed out in the rain to enjoy the music and make the most of the day," Laura said

"I have been working on a new single and album so I haven't been doing many live performances, but when I was asked to come to Northern Pride I couldn't refuse. It's always so well-organised, is such a great event, and I just love the crowd here."

The Lady Gaga tribute turned heads in a blue wig and leotard and her new arrangement of songs went down brilliantly with the audience.

"I love coming to Northern Pride in Newcastle," she said. "Every city should have one and celebrate their LGBT community. Everyone should be equal regardless of their sexual preference, but sadly that's not the case."

Jay from MTV hit Geordie Shore was an unexpected visitor to Pride. He said: "Last year I worked at Pride as a shot boy, so it is great to be back and not be working. It was good to see everyone was still buzzing despite the weather."

The crowds not only enjoyed the performances on the main stage, but also the fair ground, stalls and information stands, sports area, dance tent and entertainment from drag artistes.

Laura Empson, Chair of Northern Pride, said: "Pride happens only once a year and people were determined to come out and make the most of it, whatever the weather threw at us."

"Pride gives our LGBT community the chance to celebrate their identities with their friends and family. On Pride day for one day, our LGBT community don't have to worry about what people think of them, they can just be themselves and have a good time."

"Many thanks to all our sponsors and all the volunteers who have worked for the past year to make Northern Pride happen today and also all the volunteers who helped on the day," she added.

To find out more about Pride, please contact [Simon Duke](#) on simon.duke@npride.org.uk or call 07825 869 017.

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