



Eventing & Showjumping

by Talitha Bakker ■ photos by Reindert Jansen

Eventing is the ultimate test of a horse and rider – comprising three disciplines – Dressage, Cross Country and Show Jumping, the scores from each combine to produce an overall total. Eventing (sometimes known as Horse Trials) takes place over one, two and three days depending on the level of competition – evolving from the training of cavalry horses the sport is rather like a pentathlon in that it combines different disciplines in one competition and is run on a cumulative penalty basis.

Eventing demands of the competitor considerable experience in all branches of equitation and a precise knowledge of the horse's ability and of the horse a degree of competence resulting from intelligent and rational training.

It covers all round riding ability and horsemanship: the harmony between horse and rider that characterize

Dressage; the contact with nature, precise knowledge of the horses' ability and extensive experience essential for the Cross Country; the precision, agility and technique involved in Jumping.

Eventing is one of the three disciplines in competition at the Olympic Games, the other two being Jumping and Dressage. Modern competitions consist of three distinct tests: Dressage, Cross-Country and Jumping. they take place on separate consecutive days during which a competitor rides the same horse throughout.

1. Dressage Test – After an opening Horse Inspection, a Dressage test is performed, the object of which is the harmonious development of the physique and ability of the horse. The test consists of a series of compulsory movements at walk, trot and canter gaits, within a rectangular arena 60 m.





long and 20 m. wide. To perform a good Dressage test, the horse needs to be flexible and fluid. To keep the strong Eventing horses under firm control required by the exacting Dressage movements involves great knowledge and understanding. A good Dressage test lays the foundation for the rest of the competition and horses that are found wanting in this phase face an uphill struggle to get up amongst the prize-winners.

2. Cross-Country Test - the focus of the entire event is on the Cross-Country test, the objective of which is to test the ability of athletes and horses to adapt to different and variable conditions (weather, terrain, obstacles, footing etc...) and jumping ability of the horse, while at the same time demonstrating the rider's knowledge of pace and the use of his horse. Exceeding the time allowed and refusals result in penalties. All penalties are added together and recorded for inclusion in the final classification. Fall of a horse and/or of a rider entails immediate elimination.

3. Jumping Test - e Jumping test takes place on the last day after a second Horse Inspection. Riders may voluntarily retire their horses if they seem unfit to continue. This test is run in reverse order of merit and its main objective is to prove that the horses have retained their suppleness, energy and obedience in order to jump a course of 11 to 15 obstacles. The winning individual is the competitor with the lowest total of penalty points. The winning team is the one with the



lowest total of penalty points, after adding together the final scores of the three highest placed competitors in the team.

All horses and riders need to build up their levels of skill, the sport has different levels of competition ranging from Intro classes, to Pre-Novice, Novice, Intermediate and Advanced. As horses progress through each level gaining points and experience the level of the competition increases. It is one of very few sports where professionals and amateurs compete on a level playing field with even the most experienced riders having to start at the lower levels with the young horses.

Eventing is an Olympic discipline and is amongst just a handful of sports where men and women are considered entirely equal – there are no distinctions or single sex classes.

Before anyone decides to take up eventing, they will need a good range of basic riding skills and a high level of horsemanship. Horsemanship is important in eventing, where so much is being asked of the horse – a true partnership. Therefore, the rider must be able to communicate easily and openly with their horse.

Once a good level of riding has been acquired, the rider will need to learn how to jump, if they do not know how to do so already. They will also need to study dressage and the range of manoeuvres they will be expected to perform – which can be anything other than the very highest level movements.







Once the individual components have been mastered, the rider must start putting them together. They will need to train in such a way that their work in, say, the cross country element, does not leave them too tired to be able to compete properly in the dressage. As well as riding skills, a three day eventer will need to work on their general fitness and stamina levels to ensure that they do not become fatigued in a competition. Do not forget that in most cases, men and women compete on equal terms at eventing. Although this is testament to the ability of female riders, it does mean that they will have to work particularly hard at building up stamina and strength while men may have to concentrate on their grace and elegance when riding. The horse too will need to be well trained for a three day event.

At lower levels, any horse can be used in competition. But it must always be well-conditioned. However, as the levels get higher, the horse will need to be a thoroughbred to compete convincingly as these have the maximum athleticism and stability. It is here that the Arabian Horse is at its best though they lack in height and sometimes jumping technique. The horse must be trained to listen to its rider at all times. It needs to listen well to be able to perform the many and varied things in an elegant and careful manner. In cross country particularly, the horse must be a good listener because the risk of falling is so much higher.

A perfect jumping ability is not usually necessary, although the horse must be competent and confident at the jumps. Three-day, and indeed one-day, eventing is an arduous sport, because of the disciplines. It requires a lot of training and if the rider is not prepared to put in the work and be completely dedicated, it may

be better to concentrate their efforts on the individual disciplines alone. These too are hard work, but can be more recreational at lower levels, than the time consuming three-day eventing.

Once the rider and horse are good prepared, Eventing is one of the most exciting discipline in the equestrian riding. It is also a lot of fun and gives a true bonding with your horse. Eventing is also a discipline during the European Arabian horse sport championships. With its various jumps, it is a great one to watch as a spectator as well. For those that are not comfortable yet to do a complete 3-days-eventing can also choose to do a cross country practice. These are organized everywhere in the world and are being organized to give more confidence and experience to horse and rider. It is often without time and you can ride the cross country route more than once, so you have the time to let your horse be familiar with all the variety of jumps. Especially the water can sometimes give an extra challenge to the ride! Despite the risks for horse and rider, Eventing is a very popular sport with a great atmosphere and a lot of fun!

I myself am performing eventing with my mare ASE Falaree (Fadi al Shaqab x Dakaree) and have performed in the past with Manilah (Radames II x Marischka) and the stallion Jazzmeen (Essteem x Jasmyn). I am performing on the lower level which is challenging enough for me! Besides the three day eventing, we also do one day eventing where all the three disciplines are on the same day. These are all low till medium level of events where you find all kind of breeds! It is fun and if you are into jumping, it is really recommended to try it out! □