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The European Championships held at Punchestown in September 2003 not only welcomed European competitors, but also Eventing Judges, Course Designers and Technical Delegates from twenty countries, ranging from the Americas to Australia, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates. Course Director Hugh Thomas orchestrated an excellent three days with many shared discussions.

The use of individual radio transmitters whilst watching the Dressage enhanced for judges the valuable guidance from Mr Eric Lette and resulted in lively discussion between the judges (and some eaves dropping members of the knowledgeable public!!) Mr Lette's emphasis on the quality of the basic way of going, and not looking for errors or loss of concentration, clearly appreciated the fitness of the event horse, but no compromise was made by way of accepting "eventing dressage". The scales of training must be followed and adhered to by judges and riders alike.

I must add at this point, everyone was deeply impressed by Nicolas Touzaint and his lovely horse Galan de Sauvagere who ran out the eventual winner.

On Friday morning delegates divided into the now familiar mixed groups of CDs, TDs and Judges to assess the course and other facilities. A few interesting language interpretations developed, but the dedication, depth of knowledge, experience and desire to learn and improve was evident on all fronts. Everyone handed in a brief written assessment of the course before we "escaped" the classroom.

Saturday was a typical wet eventing day, the likes of which we had almost forgotten! Our groups set out to walk the cross-country, but for some, the excellent big screens around the course had a magnetic attraction!! Tommy Brennan's big bold course, including five water complexes, took plenty of attacking riding and many of the assessed problems of the previous day proved to sort the men from the boys, and showed the true 3*** level of the course. Many interesting points were raised by our various groups and discussed until after 6.30pm when those on the Course who were based more locally and had more stamina than some, danced the night away at the Black and White Ball held in honour of Tommy Brennan.

At 8.15 on Sunday morning, little did the surviving competitors realise that they were trotting up under the watchful, and sometimes bleary eyes of about 10 "Ground Juries". We students agreed completely with the decision of the Jury who held the ultimate say!!

Shortly afterwards, Brian Henry walked us round his Show Jumping Course, sharing his approach to the design and build of his track, after which Jon Doney gave us a fascinating insight into the planning and thoughts behind the Show Jumping phase for eventing. This generated much debate, ranging from how the horses see colours and profiles of fences, to the planning of combinations, striding, and the need to balance the track in terms of design. Jon was generous with his time and expertise and provided an in-depth morning, which taught us a lot.

Amongst these various sessions Hugh Thomas put us through a written test (Rule Books and conferring allowed – even "phone a friend"!!) Questions covered all aspects of our respective roles and responsibilities, and even the most experienced amongst us had some problems!

This was a wonderful opportunity to learn and share so much about our sport and about our own and our teammates jobs. Our special thanks must go to the Organising Committee at Punchestown, to Eric Lette (who stayed on throughout and walked the Cross Country, which proves what a wonderful all round horseman he is), to Jon Doney and Hugh Thomas for all their time and expertise, and last, but not least to Liz Pottie for her organisation and providing for our every need.

Sue Stewart and Jane Tolley.