



Around 500 from the world of Eventing attended the highly successful International Eventing Forum held at Hartpury in Gloucestershire on the 8th February 2010.

Organised by Jean Mitchell, together with Karen McKeown and Eric Smiley, this year's theme "Training For Safety" focused on all three disciplines, and aimed to highlight the common ground between the training processes. The trio need to be congratulated for securing some of the world's most influential and respected trainers and Yogi Breisner, Pammy Hutton, Shane Breen, Di Lampard and Eric Smiley did not disappoint. All presented structured and thought provoking demonstrations, which were, as an added bonus, supported by 'guinea pig' riders from the top of their sport.

The audience, which was equally illustrious, was encouraged to participate throughout, and indeed many contributed to the lively discussions. Olympic, World and European medallists filled the seats as well as a glut of high profile individuals from all aspects of the sport. Olympic 2012 course designer, Sue Benson was joined by fellow designers Hugh Thomas and Mike Etherington-Smith, while making the journey from Italy was the Chairman of the FEI Technical Committee, Giuseppe Della Chiesa as well as his predecessor Wayne Roycroft, who arrived from Australia.

Ireland's Eric Smiley kicked off the proceedings with an intelligent demonstration titled 'Jump Ownership.' Working with three green horses aged four and five years, he emphasised the importance of time spent in the early stages of training. He commented on how horses differ, with some learning quicker than others, and how by 'playing with poles' you can learn about their skills and note their reactions. It was interesting to watch both horse and riders develop their own balance over simple lines of fences, noting the importance of a good canter and self carriage. Eric focused upon straightness – first in walk, then in trot - concentrating on regularity and balance. He went on to explain the need to develop the horse between leg and hand, gradually seeking an athletic step, which is not so much forward but "up a bit" to simulate the jump reflex. Riders were urged to stay in balance so that they did not interfere with the horse. They learnt to communicate with the horse when riding 'out of the saddle' and practised both trot and canter so that, although not interfering, they were able to ride the canter. Over the session the young horses were introduced to a variety of simple fences jumped in straight lines and on curves. Riders were encouraged to support the horses' efforts but not telling it to jump. It is important that the partnership can make mistakes and that the horses learn from it. All three horses coped extremely well with the situation and in closing the session Jean Mitchell aptly commented, "We saw the horses grow up before our very eyes."

British Team Manager Yogi Breisner then held the crowd spellbound with a rarely seen workshop, concentrating on balance in racing and jumping at speed. Sporting crutches following a second hip operation, he joked that he would not pass a trot up,

but physical disability aside there was no doubting his talents. Britain's champion lady point-to-point rider, Polly Gundry was joined by event rider Chris King who gamely stepped in when N.H. jockey Daryl Jacob was called up to ride in a chase at Southwell. Gundry also supplied the horses, both of which were winners, and, never having worked with them before Breisner explained to the audience that he is deeply involved in National Hunt racing, through the training of both horses and jockeys. He went on to say that racehorses come in three categories. 1. Those that are naturally good jumpers. 2. Those that are bad jumpers and find it difficult to co ordinate. (They are the ones in Eventing who should not be competing!). 3. The majority, however, fall into the third category - horses that have a certain amount of ability that can be improved by work and schooling. Some of these can even move into the top level, but the jumping needs to be practised so often that it happens automatically. Breisner went on to explain that when a horse is really tired his brain is not thinking rationally, and when they are 'wrong' at a fence instinct will take over. Jockeys are responsible for the balance, pace and rhythm, while it is the horse's responsibility to jump. On top of that the jockey responds by making it as easy as possible for the horse.

The session began with poles on the floor and Breisner watched the horses demonstrate three instincts. He then built a simple related distance on three strides. The horse looks, adjusts (by playing with his feet) and tries to avoid. Polly and Chris then rode down over two small fences at a related distance, first at trot then at canter. No wings were used as the horses need to focus on the jump. Gradually the size of the fences was increased and also the distances altered to suit the horses. Yogi was not worried if a pole fell from time to time because racehorses don't need to be too careful – how they take themselves to the fence is more important than technique, and how they arrive at the take off spot is more important than where they take off.

He went on to discuss the final three or four strides in front of a fence and how jockeys can assist. A racehorse should be able to go in deep and to stand off. Jockeys can't take 'a pull' - any adjustment is made through balance. If they are likely to be spot on, the jockey simply needs to retain rhythm, but if they are likely to take off early the jockey can ride more forward. In reverse, if they are on a deep stride the rider needs to bring his shoulder back away from the horse's neck. The racehorse needs to gain ground when he meets the fence well, but more importantly he must not lose ground when he meets it wrong.

At the end of the hour, both horses were happily jumping sizeable fences, confidently adjusting themselves when necessary. In a crowd-pleasing finale, they were told to imagine they were approaching the last fence at Cheltenham and, to much applause, completed the session jumping a chase fence 'up sides several times.'

Prior to lunch, the more serious subject of safety was broached. Giuseppe Della Chiesa and British Eventing's Jonathan Clissold spoke about the necessity of minimising the risk, in a risk sport. He informed the audience that the Technical Delegates collect profiles and measurements of every fence, while the fence judges record the falls - thus a safety audit is maintained. Several prominent members of the audience voiced opinions and suggestions, including Jennie Loriston-Clarke, Declan Cullen, Jayne Wilson and Chairman of the Riders Association, Francis Whittington. Jennie commented that the rails used are much thicker than those that were used years ago, and maybe there is case to reduce the diameter. This point was accepted by Clissold. The subject of 'yellow cards' was well aired. International riders Declan Cullen and Francis Whittington reiterated the need for clearer guidelines. When does the ground jury intervene? The phrase 'dangerous riding' requires clearer guidelines

and Della Chiesa confirmed that this is actively being pursued by the FEI Eventing Technical Committee. Riders were also reminded that a 'watch list' is in existence. Accredited trainer and rider, Jayne Wilson asked if 'roll top fences' are making horses jump worse. Della Chiesa commented that a variety of fences (including verticals) is most important.

Changing the theme, dressage rider and trainer Pammy Hutton examined the relationship between dressage and jumping. Her brief was to try to dispel the myth that the higher level of dressage can be detrimental to jumping. 'Has bad dressage anything to do with accidents across country?' she asked, answering. 'The answer is no. The aim is for improvement, but to leave the instinct intact.'

She started her demonstration with a light-hearted impression of 'how not to warm up', executed by her son Charlie riding a dressage horse. Later he was supported, riding his young Grand Prix dressage horse, by Nick Gauntlett riding the advanced event stallion, Chilli Morning, Chris King on a six year old and Daisy Dick riding her evergreen bronze medallist, Springalong. Hutton talked about the importance of a good position with a check list that concluded with the word '**smile!**' Her guinea pigs then performed a variety of warming up and suppling exercises which included examining the merits of half steps and problems with changes. Time was spent discussing teaching horses that have difficulties with their changes or are 'late behind,' and in this case Hutton finds it useful at first to try to teach hind changes only. All gamely went on to jump in their dressage saddles, and although Hutton did not quite stick to her theme, she provided a highly entertaining and amusing demonstration.

Finally, the highly rated British trainer and former International show jumper, Di Lampard teamed up with Ireland's Shane Breen to discuss what the eventers can learn from the show jumpers. They had the services of some of Britain's most talented young Eventing riders, namely current European Gold Medallist Laura Collett, Kitty Boggis and Georgie Spence. All were riding horses of similar ability and experience in the event field, with Collett's Jitter Bug also having had considerable show jumping mileage. Once again the words rhythm, smoothness and straightness were paramount. Both trainers stressed the need to develop a punchier canter - to increase the pace in order to become more active. They started off over a few gymnastic fences before moving on to jump a course with some very demanding distances. Discussions took place with the riders after each jumping effort, where comments were listened to and advice given. Tips on body weight, pace and approach made a noticeable difference to the performance and quality of jump. All three hugely impressed their trainers and finished up riding some very tricky distances with great aplomb. Di Lampard summed up by commenting. '**It is the attention to detail, and the simplicity of the detail, that is so important.**'

The floor was open again to the audience and another lively discussion completed the day. Without doubt, the forum achieved its aim in offering riders, trainers, coaches, owners and supporters an invaluable learning opportunity from which they can enhance their own skills to further the aim of "Safer Eventing".

"The day exceeded all our expectations" concluded Jean Mitchell. "We haven't held a forum for the past few years, and, as you have seen by the fantastic turnout today, all sectors of the Eventing community were definitely ready for this one."

We have had countless congratulatory e-mails and messages of thanks, and there is no doubt that the wonderful back up support we have had from Phillip Cheetham and Janet Plant, at Hartpury Equestrian Centre, shows that this is a brilliant venue.

**{ Sincere thanks to Sally Parkyn [Irish Equestrian Journalist]
for compiling these "observations" from the 2010 Forum }**

"Provisional Date" for the 2011 Forum is:

Monday 7th February at

Hartpury Equestrian Centre