

LITTLE BOOK OF EVENTING

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First published in the UK in 2013

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Printed and bound in Europe

ISBN 978-1-782811-99-2

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Introduction

The *Little Book of Eventing* will take the reader through the history, development, scope and opportunities in what, at the highest level, has been an Olympic sport since 1912. Eventing involves riding horses and is enjoyed by both adults and children, male and female, in an increasing number of countries around the world.

The term, when typed, always throws up the spell check, which is perhaps unsurprising, since the term in no way describes the activity. It doesn't help that in its ever evolving history, it has been named many things, and undergone many formats.

This book aims to be an introduction to the uninitiated, a history for participants right up to Olympic level who may be unaware of the roots of the sport they love, and a guide to those who may have high or modest competitive ambitions, or just want to be part of an outdoor pastime, which still relies on a vast number of volunteers at all levels to make it happen. Likewise, spectators who come to watch at the bigger events will increase their enjoyment with a little more knowledge.



Cross Country

As in all sports, Eventing has thrown up its stars over the years, both human and equine, and this *Little Book* will introduce the reader to many of these.

As will become apparent to the reader very soon, Great Britain, first with the first Badminton, and then the network of events that have followed over the years, swiftly became the world centre of the sport, so the book, almost by definition, is very British based, though I hope unbiased. Britain hasn't won an Olympic team Eventing gold since 1972, though they have done well at European and World Championships. Both the USA and Canada have had triumphs, as have some continental competitors, but it is those from Australia and New Zealand who have had the greatest outside impact over the years, either coming on raiding parties or basing themselves in the UK.



Show Jumping

What is Eventing?

Eventing is the test of all-round horsemanship, made up, today, of three distinct elements: Dressage, a subjectively judged, compulsory test of ridden movements in an arena; Cross Country, a jumping test over several thousand metres, involving up to 30 solid, natural obstacles, which must be cleared without refusal or fall in a set time, and Jumping, a round of about a dozen knock down coloured obstacles in an arena. The scoring is penalty based and the horse and rider with the lowest score, is the winner. Horse and rider must complete all phases as a combination. Men and women compete on equal terms.

Its history, however, owes everything to the training of male, military officers and their chargers. Equitation as an art spans several thousand years and, from the beginning, the soldier has used this art for his own needs. The military horse needed to be fast and tough, obedient and agile. In pursuit or retreat, speed was required to catch or avoid the enemy, on forced marches, endurance was needed to cover difficult terrain over long distances, and in close quarter fighting, obedience and agility were essential for survival. Underlying these requirements were the fundamental ones, soundness and condition. Lose your horse and you were relegated to the more exhausting ranks of the common foot soldier.

To provide a keener edge in peacetime, training competitions were devised, in which the necessary cavalry skills were put to the test. It is in these tests that Eventing

has its origins; until recently many European nations still referred to the sport as 'The Military'. The format of most of these early tests is lost to history but Lt. Col. C.E.G. Hope gives some examples in his 1969 book *The Horse Trials Story*. He dates his research right back to Xenophon, who wrote in 365 BC, 'As there will, doubtless, be times when the horse will need to race downhill and uphill and on sloping ground; times also, when he will need to leap across an obstacle, or take a flying leap from off a bank, or jump down from a height, the rider must teach and train himself and his horse to meet all emergencies. In this way the two will have a chance of saving each other.' This could be the description of the skills needed to ride round one of the great events, such as Badminton or Burghley. Much of this history is also included in *Little Book of Badminton*, as it will be explained later that Badminton is the ultimate competition in the entire sport.



Army Tests



Pony Club

The sport has distilled itself into the three phases mentioned, because each one reflects a different aspect of the training test. The Dressage tests basic obedience and control. At the more esoteric 'High School' level, not required in Eventing, some of the movements, still performed by the Lippizanners of the famous Spanish Riding School in Vienna, such as the Courbette, a flying leap with a kick back to knock an opponent off his horse or the defensive Levade, when the horse stands on its hind legs, had practical battle uses.

The Cross Country tested braveness and mutual trust of horse and rider, and the final Jumping phase was to reflect

the horsemanship required to keep the horse sound after the heroics of battle day.

Cavalry Schools had their manuals, and one from the Cavalry of King Charles XI of Sweden in 1688 helpfully suggested, "When jumping a fence the rider will grab the mane, close his eyes and shout, 'Hey'."

There are reports of some other tests in the nineteenth century of 'Complete Cavalry Charger' competitions. Mainly these were straightforward long distance endurance rides, ridden collectively by the officers, covering distances of anything from 25 to 370 kilometres. Sometimes military tactics were involved towards the end of such a ride. For the US Army these competitions were, according to General Tupper Cole, "A military event based on the duty of the officer courier who got through or died."

Though the sport now consists mainly of truncated one-day versions of the allround test, with the Cross Country, oddly running last, the original concept was a several day affair and remains the ultimate level of the sport in the format of the Three Day Event.

The French ran the first recognisable version of this concept. The 1902 Championnat du Cheval d'Armes was put on for officers. On the Dressage day after some compulsory figures, riders could earn more points by showing off in a freestyle. Some took to performing tricks like cantering backwards, spinning on the back legs, on the spot trotting and backwards Spanish Walk. The next day there was a 4,000m Steeplechase ridden by four competitors at a time, with a speed requirement of 450m per minute, and this was followed by an Endurance section of Roads and Tracks which was 50km long. On the third day the Show Jumping, which was designed to make the competitors known to the public, was held in the Grand Palais in Paris before a large crowd.

This event was considered a great success and it became an annual affair with the intention of helping to improve

the quality of riding throughout France in the tradition of hardiness, good training and style of the army, in developing equestrian tact and finesse, and increasing the experience of men and horses. Certain modifications were brought into the format. The Dressage freestyle was abolished; horses were to be examined after each phase and given points for condition and the Steeplechase was run singly and immediately after the Roads and Tracks. A Cross Country course was included much later in 1922, and civilians and females were allowed to enter.

Meanwhile, in the early 1900s, other countries, including Sweden, Belgium and Great Britain – under the auspices of the Indian Army School of Equitation in Sangor Central Provinces – had been developing similar competitions. The British efforts were concentrated in India, as officers back home devoted their extracurricular equestrian activities to the hunting field and polo pitch. In India the expressed object was to, “encourage young officers to buy and train horses of the right stamp.” The Swiss called their competition, *Gebrauchspferdeprufungen*, which can be roughly described as ‘Trials for all-round horses.’

1912 turned out to be a seminal year for the future of these cavalry tests. Count Clarence von Rosen, Master of Horse to the King of Sweden at the time, promoted the idea of introducing equestrian events to the modern Olympic Games, which had been revived by Baron Guy de Coubertin in 1896. They had been proposed for London 1908, but never materialised.

