

Jumping FOR JOY

at the Rockingham International Horse Trials

From Zara Phillips to William Fox-Pitt, Oliver Townend and Sir Mark Todd, the best riders in the **eventing world** can be seen this month at the **Rockingham International Horse Trials**, just over the border in Northamptonshire. Hilary Manners previews the event, which takes place from **22nd – 24th May** at the 11th century home of the Saunders-Watson family.

World class equestrian talent, in a stunning setting; it goes without saying that the eventing will be top notch at this year's Rockingham International.

Many of the biggest names in the sport will be galloping out of the cross country start box as top riders from around the world fight for the spoils, the most notable of which is a hand made £7,500 watch donated by the Official Timekeeper, Robert Loomes & Co from Stamford.

Last year Ireland's Austin O'Connor was the proud recipient, having finished closest to the optimum time allowed in an Open/Advanced Intermediate section.

The best British riders are expected in 2015; Zara Phillips, William Fox-Pitt, Oliver Townend, Pippa Funnell, Piggy French and Nicola Wilson were all spotted last year.

New Zealand CCI4* and medal winners Caroline Powell, Andrew Nicholson and Mark Todd were also among the stars, Mark winning the Advanced Intermediate class ahead of Australia's multi-medal and CCI4* winner Andrew Hoy.

In fact over 16 nations have been represented over the past two years, with most of the names at the top of the World Rankings among them.

The excitement in the office gains momentum once entries open; this year that is on 17th April, as Pride goes to press.

"Even knowing that we have done everything we can, within reason, to make the event a success, it is still a mixture of apprehension, anticipation and delight to see the entries roll in. Watching them pass the 1,000 barrier is a real buzz, although that is when I become obsessed with checking weather forecasts," admits Event Administrator Andrew Norman.

A further sign of the Event's growing prestige is the appointment of Captain Mark Phillips as this year's CIC2* cross country course designer. His world wide reputation as a course designer at the

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highest level will add to the challenges faced by this year's competitors.

Now in its third year, Rockingham International Horse Trials has gone from strength to strength. It has become a firm favourite with both competitors and spectators, and this year looks set to be no different.

A fairytale castle complimented by the breathtakingly beautiful backdrop of the Welland Valley make for a stunning venue, even before all the action and excitement has been added to the mix.

Rockingham Castle stepped on to the eventing calendar in 2013 following the sale of long-term Horse Trials host, the Brigstock Estate.

As happens so often in the sport of Eventing, key members of the Brigstock team threw their experience into the hat to ensure a fabulous event from the off.

Andrew Norman remembers that first year very clearly. "I had plenty of sleepless nights," he confesses. "There is nothing quite like being faced with a challenge when you have no experience of the specific task.

I might have organised hundreds of events before, but my knowledge of anything horse-related was close to zero. Having such



Rider: William
Fox-Pitt.

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an experienced team behind me was very reassuring.

“Eventing is an extraordinary sport; I was overwhelmed by the extent of knowledge sharing by those involved with other horse trials up and down the country, from small events right up to Burghley. There can be few areas of business where this happens, and it was incredibly inspiring and refreshing.”

With Rockingham Castle already an established visitor attraction, the team recognised the importance of laying on a wide range of activities from the start – and this has grown, year on year.

“We bring in the sort of attractions and activities that we think will entertain those less horse-minded, so there truly is something for every member of a family,” Andrew explains.

When energy levels start to drop, there is a range of food outlets catering for every taste, and not forgetting the all-important bar for those in need of a stronger form of refreshment.

Last year Hugo, the lovingly restored Citroën van of the Little Soup Kitchen Company was hugely popular, as was the stand shared by The Marquess of Exeter, Lyddington, and Launde Farm Foods, who ran a very successful BBQ, drawing crowds from every corner of the show ground.

Alternatively, why not pack a picnic? There can be few better settings in the Midlands to enjoy a relaxing lunch with entertainment laid on, with friends and family.

With the clock ticking, work both on the ground and in the office is picking up pace. Volunteers are being allocated their roles, stables have been ordered,

tentage confirmed, tradestand bookings finalised... and all the while that all-important ground work continues.

Local hotels, pubs and restaurants, who also benefit from event-related bookings, are also looking forward to the annual surge in business.

There is no reason for those less-horsey members of the family to stay at home – there really is something for everyone to enjoy at Rockingham International Horse Trials. For the children there is a fabulous climbing wall, bouncy castle and a petting farm.

For would-be naturalists and country lovers, Xtreme Falconry will give regular displays, and there will be terrier racing, a shire horse and dray, courtesy of the Shire Horse Society, and a fly fishing demonstration.

Also, let's not forget over 70 trade stands ready to sell their wares; everything from clothing to cupcakes, lawnmowers to Land Rovers, horse feed to handbags and jewellery to jetskis. If you felt so inclined you could spend a whole day barely setting eyes on a horse!

“Expanding the number and type of classes that we can offer at the Horse Trials is very exciting. The more riders and spectators who can experience our ever-more action packed programme, and enjoy the stunning parkland at Rockingham Castle, the better.

“We are counting down to the arrival of the riders, horses, owners and spectators with a wonderful mix of elation and trepidation; visitors can be sure of a warm welcome at this year's Rockingham International Horse Trials!” Andrew concludes.





Competing at Rockingham...

You don't have to be a household name to ride at Rockingham Castle, says Hilary Manners...



British Showjumping classes return to Rockingham on the Saturday, 23rd May, with classes from Newcomers to Open. For younger showjumping fans the Pony Club will also be running a team competition.

New for this year, Rockingham plays host to the very popular Dubarry Burghley Young Event Horse classes, in which riders bring their top four- and five-year old horses in a bid to qualify for the Young Horse Championships at Burghley in September. See if you can spot the stars of the future!

Rockingham will also host a qualifier for a brand new series, launched this year by British Eventing (BE); Arena Eventing. This two-phase competition is open to both BE Members and Non-Members, and is held at BE90 and BE100 level (with jumps a maximum of 90cm and one meter respectively). With the choice of Championship destinations named as Blenheim Palace and Blair Castle, competition is bound to be fierce.

■ *The Rockingham Horse Trials takes place over the weekend of the 22nd – 24th May in the Park at Rockingham Castle. For more information on the event visit www.rockinghamcastlehorsetrials.com, or call 01536 770240.*

1. Zara Phillips at last year's Rockingham Horse Trials.

2. Plenty of fun for the family in addition to equine thrills.

3. Robina Hill and Robert Loomes present Ireland's Austin O'Connor with a beautiful hand-made watch.

4. Emily King rides against a background of the stunning Welland Valley.

5. There will be a range of show jumping classes at the event.

6. Family entertainment this year includes The Sheep Show.

7. Over 70 trade stands will be selling their wares.

8. Obstacles include fences from 2012's Olympic games.

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