

LONDON CALLING

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THE 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES ARE LESS THAN A YEAR AWAY AND LONDON HAS SPENT THE SUMMER PREPARING WITH A SERIES OF TEST EVENTS. ONE OF THOSE WAS FOR THE EQUESTRIAN SECTION WHICH IS TO BE HELD AT GREENWICH PARK, THE SITE ALSO OF THE ROYAL GREENWICH OBSERVATORY AND A WORLD HERITAGE CENTRE. THE LOCATION IS MOST FAMOUS FOR BEING THE SITE OF THE PRIME MERIDIAN FROM WHICH ALL GLOBAL TIME IS MEASURED.

Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) is the starting point for the international clock and all other time zones are measured in advance or in arrears of this standard. It is the oldest park in London and has remained largely unchanged for 500 years since Henry VIII used it to hunt. Consequently, placing an Olympic venue within such a prestigious and treasured area has provoked some controversy and the test event was anticipated with some interest.

These Games, as far as equestrian events go, will be different to most of its recent predecessors in many ways. Not since Barcelona in 1992 has the horse sport been accommodated inside the host city and even then the cross country course was some distance away. Greenwich Park has less than 150 acres of usable space



which will mean that fitting in a 10 minute cross country course is going to be tight and require much climbing of hills and tight turns which is not ideal for that sport but the lack of space and central location has also created other problems very specific to these Games. In Hong Kong virtually all the horses were flown in because of the distance and Sha Tin could accommodate 200 horses at a time easily. That meant there was no need for a 'shuttle' station a few miles away as the flights automatically provide a level of security measures. But in London most of the horses will arrive by their own horse trucks and there was no way the London police were going to let dozens of unsupervised trucks drive into a World Heritage site in the centre of the city! So a staging post has been created where the trucks will unload, all papers will be checked and then the journey will continue by the Games' own transport service. As there is also not enough room for the horses of all three disciplines to enter at the same time, there will be another compound outside the park for temporary housing.



When the test started, the arena was 10 metres smaller than it will be for the Olympics and most of the seating was not in place. A special system of legs had to be put in place to make the arena level because of the gradient in the park and because the rules demand that the arena cannot be dug up. This provided a surprisingly good solution with no evidence at all, when the horses were on it, that there was any effect of riding on a stage.



A three day event is used to test facilities as required under IOC stipulation because in that way all three disciplines are tested. The organisers invited some dressage riders and some show jumpers to attend as well as the eventers so their specific feedback could be gained. The dressage riders were more than happy but the show jumpers, who included recent European dual medallist Nick Skelton, were less than impressed. "The surface was heavy and it moved, frankly they will need to do a lot better by next year" he said. Unfortunately the emphasis on eventing meant that because the jumpers have to jump 1.60m four days out of five the arena surface is more of a concern for jumpers than it is for eventers who usually jump on grass and are mostly

only doing 1.25m maximum, once, out of a hack canter with no jump off. "It is a test event, so we are testing many systems, lots of things will be different and better by next year" said equestrian manager Tim Hadaway.

All of the other facilities seemed adequate even though on a much smaller scale than next year and approximately 35 competitors from over a dozen nations sent representatives to compete. They included riders from Thailand, Jamaica, and Japan as well as the more established eventing nations. Amongst them were Britain's own current World Champion team and the newly crowned individual title holder, Germany's Michael Jung. Michael is becoming almost unbeatable these

days and so it took a performance of real class to beat him on the day. Piggy French, a silver medallist at the last European Championships vied with Michael throughout; the pair led the contest from start to finish despite a determined challenge from Pippa Funnell, also British, and Australia's Clayton Fredericks who ended up third and fourth respectively. Piggy commented about her winning horse DHI Topper W; "Topper has matured so well over the last few months - he could be a contender for next year. That's still a long way away and horses are great levellers so who knows what can happen between now and then, but I reckon he's got what it takes. I just hope we haven't peaked too early!"