

# THE WORLD'S BEST EQUESTRIAN CHRISTMAS PARTY

By Sue Akehurst

ATTENDING OLYMPIA THIS YEAR WAS A SPECTACULAR SPECTACLE. OUTSTANDING EQUESTRIAN DISPLAYS, EVERYTHING FROM THE SHETLAND PONY GRAND NATIONAL RACES, DOGS RIDING ARABIANS, THE PRIDE OF PORTUGAL'S MAGICAL DISPLAY, AND THE HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY. TO WORLD CLASS EQUESTRIAN COMPETITION INCLUDING THE FAMOUS OLYMPIA PUISSANCE, SIX BAR COMPETITION, SHOW JUMPING, EXTREME CARRIAGE DRIVING, DRESSAGE, AND SHOWING. PLUS MANY OTHER COMPETITIONS, DISPLAYS, EXPERIENCES AND EVENTS, TO INCLUDE DOGS JUMPING A COURSE OF FENCES, SANTA CLAUS, CHAMPAGNE ON ICE, DOG AGILITY, A MAGICAL FESTIVE GRAND FINALE AND NOT FORGETTING A GREAT SHOPPING VILLAGE FOR EVERYTHING AND ANYTHING HORSE RELATED AND MORE. BUT PERHAPS MOST SPECIAL OF ALL, WAS THE APPEARANCE FROM ONE OF THE GREATEST DRESSAGE HORSES EVER TO LIVE - VALEGRO AND "THAT" DRESSAGE TEST FROM LONDON 2012 OLYMPICS.



Drummers open the show



Santi Serra



Boyd Exell at the FEI World Cup Driving Leg D&H

## And there we were...

HorseTimes was there in the main arena, and back stage, as all these events got ready to perform in front of thousands of people over the seven days, it truly was an experience for young and old to encourage all walks of life to see what this amazing sport has to offer and how versatile our amazing horses are in all the sports and activities we ask them to participate in with us. Olympia really does show case them all and is a wonderful celebration of all that is "horse".

Along with the wonderful qualifiers for the Longines FEI World Cup Jumping, the FEI World Cup Dressage, and FEI World Cup Driving series were the Mini Major Competition, which pairs up Pony Club Members on 128 cm ponies with Top International Riders. Services jumping championship, champions challenge team relay which saw flat jockeys such as Frankie Dettori, with Coach Nick Skelton jump against jump jockeys such as Harry Skelton with Scott Brash as their coach, a nail biting Six Bar competition, the huge Puissance wall, and of course the Grand Prix. This is the only sport in the world where men and women compete on an even playing field.

## Pride of Portugal

The "Pride of Portugal" demonstration, was breath taking, showing off the phenomenal skills and agility of the Portuguese Lusitano horse. Originally bred for battle, then the breed was bred for cattle work and bull fighting (though in Portugal bull fights do not involve killing the bull). Due to these roles, the Lusitano horse had to be deft, responsive, and capable of short bursts of speed, combined with tremendous agility. These core skills were show cased in the display. The "vara", the long pole also used in the display, was also used to control the cattlem. Used for its strength, power and majestic movements in order to taunt the bull. Nowadays it is used for demonstrations to show off the classical training of the equestrian art. Piaffe, passage, airs above the ground and lateral work come very easily to this breed.

## Shetland Pony Grand National

The Shetland Pony Grand National is one of the other many highlights of Olympia. During the year the ponies and their young riders have travelled the length and breadth of the country in pursuit of one of the ten prized places at Olympia. The "owners" inspecting their ponies in the paddock area of the arena, have purchased the "ownership" of the ponies for one or more races and the money raised goes to the Bob Champion Cancer Trust. After Bob Champion and Aldaniti won the 1981 Grand National, "racing's greatest fairytale" led to the foundation in 1983 of The Bob Champion Cancer Trust. They support and raise funds for the Bob Champion Cancer Research Laboratory, which forms part of the largest male dedicated research facility in Europe. This year raising £37,500 for the charity.

## Masters of Dressage

Two wonderful dressage masterclasses at Olympia this year, the first from Emile Faurie, whose foundation is the Charity of the Year at Olympia. The Emile Faurie Foundation provides disadvantaged children living in inner cities with the opportunity to ride and have contact with horses.

The second demonstration from Tristan Tucker. Tristan Tucker was born in Cornwall, England and emigrated to Australia as a young boy. He came through the pony club as a novelty, jumping and eventing rider, and moved on to track work with racehorses and driving trotting horses in the sulky. Inspired by Morten Thomsen and his approach to teaching horses, Tristan has developed his own training methods and trains his horses from beginning to Grand Prix dressage, teaches students who are competing at international level and gives demonstrations and clinics around the world about his methods. It was extremely interesting



Holly Smith riding Quality Old Joker GBR



Pride of Portugal



Best of Breed Shetland Brinleyview Cammanche and Georgia James



Native British Show Pony Society Supreme Championship



Carl Hester riding Nip Tuck, winner of the FEI World Cup Dressage Grand Prix Freestyle



A group picture with Valegro



Valegro leaving the arena

to see these methods and the crowd loved them.

#### Emile Faurie

Emile Faurie, born in South Africa, didn't start riding until he was 15, and had his first big break on a horse called Virtu. They won individual bronze and team silver at the 1993 European Championships, and went on to compete at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, competed Rascher Hopes, a 16hh 'pony', at the Sydney Olympics in 2000 and has represented Great Britain at two Olympic Games, three World Equestrian Games and five European Championships. Currently, he is the official team trainer for Finland's Grand Prix riders.

Tom Goode, has been with Emile for 6 years and this year at Olympia was riding Dior III, by Gribaldi out of a Good Times mare owned by Emile and Sam Geddes, bought as a foal, started by Sam, he came to Tom as a four year old. Together they have created a much talked about partnership. Emile focussed his masterclass on how to develop collection, and how to take the right steps to Grand Prix on a young horse. Tom is a particularly sensitive rider which seems to suit Dior well. Tom was 2nd in the inter 1 at the National Championships and again at Hartpury CDI with over 74% on this exceptional young horse.

Emile continued his magical time at Olympia when he showcased the talent of his Grand Prix horse Weekend Fun, who scored an impressive 72.06% on their first outing to Olympia, coming fourth in the FEI World Cup Dressage Grand Prix and 8th in the Kur. The 15 year old gelding has only been with Emile since January this year, but the combination are clearly strong contenders for the World Class Podium programme next year.

Emile commented on the event: *"I'm delighted to have had the opportunity to return to the centre stage at Olympia and feel very privileged to have two amazing horses here who both put on such stellar performances. Of course, it has also been a wonderful chance for us to raise awareness of the importance of the work undertaken*

*by the charity, which celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2016."*

From the six bar to the GP we saw the best of the best, in competition not only equestrianism action in the main arena, every vendor Equine related was present to sell their wares. If you have not yet visited Olympia London International Horse Show, it is most definitely one for you to put in your diaries for 2017!

#### Thank you Valegro

The greatest attraction for me this year, was of course Valegro who retires with his amazing record intact, Olympia hosted an amazing **"THANK YOU VALEGRO"** sell out event over two days during the International horse show.

Charlotte Dujardin OBE, was quick to point out that this is not a retirement from the bright lights entirely, but a retirement from competition, *"He loves performing, he loves coming in front of big crowds. I want to retire him at the top of his game. Now we can take all the pressure off and really enjoy ourselves". Valegro will stay in the public eye for as long as he can, and has already been booked for many demonstrations and appearances around the country and will continue to be an ambassador for dressage worldwide. "He's too fit and well not to be seen"* Carl Hester.

When asked what her favourite moment was, "there are so many favourite moments. I can't say I ever had a ride I've been disappointed with" but went on to say that her 2012 Olympic win in London was her most memorable, "I thank everyone who has supported us through our journey." Carl Hester MBE added that, "It's been one of the best journeys in my life. I've loved every minute of it".

Valegro, a 14-year old Dutch warmblood gelding by Negro x Gershwin, has won every dressage title going, is the world record holder in the Grand Prix, Grand Prix Special and Kur to Music. The double European Champion (2013, 2015), the World Champion (2014) the double Olympic

Champion (2012, 2016), the double winner of the World Cup Finals (2014, 2015). Valegro has always won every class he has been entered in since the Spring of 2012, except for two rides at the 2014 CDIO Aachen (2nd, 6th) and the Grand Prix at the 2016 Olympic Games (2nd). He has also recorded 52 international victories at Grand Prix level between 2011 and 2016. Not bad for a horse no one looked twice at and was not licensed at the KWPN stallion grading in 2005, but Carl spotted him and snapped him up. Valegro's final competition in 2016 at the Rio Olympic games defending his title, scored 93.857%, a new Games record.

*"He is my best friend so not going to the shows with him on the truck is going to be really strange," Alan Davies*

Valegro and Charlotte were awarded with a new trophy from British Dressage, recognising their international success. Designed by Jason Brautigam and the board at British Dressage, the "International Champions of Great Britain" trophy aims to reward those combinations excelling overseas when representing their country at Championship level. It will be presented annually to the highest placed British combination at the respective Championship.

Charlotte has also been awarded the CBE in the Queen's New Year honours list.

Carl Hester MBE was awarded The British Horse Society's highest honour, Honorary Fellowship, joining an elite group of Britain's greatest equestrians. The title of British Horse Society Honorary Fellow is awarded in exceptional circumstances to people who have made an outstanding contribution at the highest level.

Alan Davies, Valegro's groom was awarded The Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by Chris Hewlett, the chairman of the British Grooms Association.

After the awards were bestowed, Valegro's co-owners Anne Barrett and Roly Luard were thanked. Carl and Charlotte then came back into the arena with groom Alan Davies

leading Valegro and they were all interviewed briefly. They spoke most fondly about their life with this special horse, meanwhile Valegro was his normal cheeky self, trying to get his nose on the TV camera, and creating a lighter moment as the crowds were silent with restrained emotion. Valegro, they feel, is looking forward to more grass now he has retired! Charlotte was proud that she was "so far" holding her emotions in check, later back stage she was more emotional but overall the entire team were very upbeat and celebrating this great horse.

#### Valegro from an unknown entity to a world class superstar

*"He owes us nothing, he is loved by everybody here, he is loved by everybody in British dressage ... it is just so touching that he will be retired here and loved by all of us."* Carl Hester

The best moment of Olympia this year for me was watching a repeat performance of the amazing, gold medal winning, 2012 London Olympics FEI World Cup™ Dressage Freestyle to Music, which wowed the entire crowd, and was breath taking to watch first hand. Many believe it would have scored even higher this time, if it had been judged, than when we saw it in 2012! Whilst the two days were incredibly emotional they were also wonderful to be a part of and to celebrate this amazing team's achievements.

Charlotte mounted the horse again for his final rounds of one tempi changes, passage and piaffe pirouettes to Andrea Bocelli's 'Con Te Partiro' as the audience paid their respects in the only way they could. They stood and gave a well-deserved standing ovation, louder than I have ever heard. Charlotte and Valegro walked out of the Olympia arena on a long rein, Valegro as relaxed as ever, and not a dry eye in the house as this record breaking partnership left the arena for the final time as Valegro retired from his competition career. 🐾

*All photos by Kit Houghton*

*For the full results check [www.horsetimesegypt.com](http://www.horsetimesegypt.com)*