

few, it's a four-minute course so you won't have any catch-up time."

Sparks nodded, Titch yawned.


"Balance him down the hills, keep coming to the fences, move on up the hills."

The jockey gave a confident "OK" while the pony itched its foreleg with its nose. They looked as ready as I could possibly manage and then came the execution. It was 4min 20sec of poetry. It flowed, it was smooth, there was rhythm, there wasn't anything missing... it was a well judged and majestic bit of riding that left them on their dressage score to claim an emphatic win.

We've also had the very rare experience of something known as a social life. It's not for everyone as it requires spending a few hours away from the horses. Allow me to explain further. An example of such an occasion was our big day out to London where a mass gathering formed in Hyde Park in order to listen to some chaps have a sing-song. The nice boys in question were collectively known as Kings of Leon and although we regrettably didn't manage to introduce ourselves in person they seemed extremely popular with lots of the young men and women in attendance. The music was very jolly although a little bit loud.

We also had the pleasure of witnessing a couple of marriages. These began in a church where the guy wearing the large white sheet and a dog collar tried his best to deter my cousin Kate from marrying her fiancé Will. He explained that love isn't a feeling, it's a choice. While the couple presently 'feel' in love, it won't last for very long, at which point they have to choose to stay together despite not really wanting to do so. The older heads in front of me, including my parents, nodded enthusiastically in agreement. Sparkles put her hands over my ears so I didn't hear anything after that. Kate and Will were too busy gazing lovingly at each other to realise what the man was talking about so thankfully all went ahead as planned.

Back at Pugs Hole life also goes on. Our yard manager Becky celebrated her 69th birthday for the fourth time and seems more determined than ever to evade the dreaded milestone of 70. Oscar, my unruly Jack Russell terrier, made the mistake of playing rather violently with Becky's cat. The resulting noise, which included the yard manager attempting to vocally separate the pair, would have cleared Hyde Park and its 60,000-strong crowd in a flash. Thankfully all parties have made a speedy recovery.

The much talked about Greenwich CIC** Test Event concluded last week. All signs point towards a similar competition to Hong Kong three years ago with the cross-country looking like a serious test of speed as much as stamina. It produced a thrilling spectacle for those watching and a terrifying one for those competing — just what eventing is all about. 



Comment Harry Meade

Build big to be safe

After a day spent at London's Test Event, HARRY MEADE warns that next year's Olympic cross-country course will need to test the best, not pander to the least experienced

GREENWICH Park proved to be a spectacular setting for the Olympic Test Event. The dramatic views of the London skyline were breathtaking and the organising team should be congratulated on the execution. Although the day was a great success, one can't help but wonder what legacy might have been left had a permanent equestrian site been built 20 miles outside of London.

It is important to note that the Test Event was a CIC** and therefore considerably shorter and easier than the Games will be. However, it did provide a fascinating preview of the stadium and park and it gave riders and spectators an insight into the characteristics of the venue and what the actual Olympic event might be like.

The course was twisty and the hills were very steep. William Fox-Pit likened it to "a BMX track". The terrain at Greenwich is likely to be as influential for both horse and rider as any fences that are built. The Test Event would suggest that a rider with a horse who does not pull will be at a definite advantage

as less time and energy will be spent on the continuous corners and undulations. A polo pony might be the best option.

In recent years courses have become shorter, twistier and more intense with reduced average distances between jumping efforts. This was done in the joint name of safety and excitement for spectators. However, the rhythm that these modern courses demand is far more hectic and hurried than longer, smoother and more flowing courses. The former does not lead to a safer sport, nor does it encourage good horsemanship.

There was the odd frightening round at the Test Event — a reminder that championships cater for a very broad standard of riders. The heart-stopping ones go too fast, paying little respect to the fences. An understandable reaction to this is to cater for the least safe competitors by building on the small side with forgiving fence profiles. However, this can have the reverse effect as smaller, more forgiving fences are even less of a deterrent to slow down and show respect. While the course at

the Test Event is unlikely to mirror the Olympic track, I hope the designers will be brave and include some rider frighteners in key places that demand respect, thus avoiding a hurdle race. Whatever the standard of the least able jockeys, the course should provide a challenge and a fair test for the best horses and riders to produce a worthy champion.

Ian Stark has been congratulated on his courses at Tattersalls and Bramham. It is great to see tracks that reward positive, attacking riding and that are built to test the better horses and riders. The skill is to be able to do this without over facing the less experienced. Ian manages to do this admirably.

Bramham also threw up some interesting issues concerning the rules of breaking a frangible pin. Unfortunately there is no way of quantifying damage done to pins when they are hit by previous horses. Everyone

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appears to agree that if riders are penalised for breaking a frangible pin they should only collect penalties where a horse is likely to have fallen had the pin not broken. By considering each case individually, the ground jury penalised those

they felt were 'saved' by the pins. However, the method the ground jury adopted was to automatically penalise anyone who broke a pin and then remove the penalties from those they felt would not have fallen had the pin not broken. They could have reached the same result by penalising no one at the time and later adding penalties to those who would have fallen. Although the outcome is the same in both scenarios, the method they actually employed is designed to be more diplomatic.

Although this way of penalising worked well at Bramham it relies on strong juries who do not interpret the rules to mean that only in exceptional circumstances should the penalties be removed, and also those who are not susceptible to pressure from riders in the wrong.

There was a great line of communication between rider reps and the ground jury at Tattersalls recently, with Katie O'Sullivan reinstated after being eliminated for failing to attend the first trot-up. This was a perfect example of a proactive rep and a ground jury who were keen to listen and discuss.

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