Oakhurst Farm completes first paperless scoring Horse Trials in North America using Compete Easy scoring

July 29, 2020 – Ashton, ON

In March 2020, when business and social life ground to a halt with the lockdown and states of emergency brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, horse shows were put out of mind and keeping horses and riders healthy, happy and engaged became the priority. In early June as riding horses got back underway, Ruth Allum & Mark Nelson - owners of Oakhurst Farm in Ashton, ON came up with a challenge for the Oakhurst team: Let's run Oakhurst's scheduled Horse Trials on July 25 &26, 2020!

At a time when running a competition seemed an improbable venture, the team jumped into the challenge with both feet and started planning. Oakhurst has run Horse Trials for 25+ years, but this one would be different. How do you run a contact free, safe and inviting event that local competitors can enjoy safely? Several changes would have to be made to the usual routine.

As the team considered how to run the event safely, one of the biggest questions was scoring.

For example, let's look at the path a Dressage Test takes:
1. Printing by the secretary or organizer for show day (human #1)
2. Sorting and labelling for each judge's clipboard (human #2)
3. Writing on by the scribe during the test (human #3)
4. Signing and comments by the judge (human #4)
5. Pickup by a runner to bring to Scorer (human #5)
6. Entry into Scoring system by Scorer (human #6)
7. Return to Show Secretary for handout to competitors (human #7)
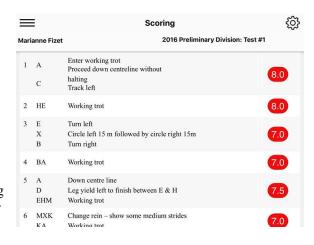8. Collection by rider (if lucky) or coach/friend/parent/neighbour, etc of written test (Human 8+)

Wait…8 people are going to touch each dressage test. Minimum? What about cross country sheets…Show Jump judge sheets…printed pinney numbers...and course maps and ride times?   This is a problem. Both a safety and efficiency problem to be solved. Oakhurst's event scoring is managed by Helen Richardson (Ruth's sister) and Helen was given a challenge to find a solution to the paperwork madness that usually surrounds a Horse Trial. In-house solutions were proposed but would take a ridiculous amount of work to put in place, so the team started to look around for another solution. Ruth read an article online about a company in Australia – Nominate – who had a paperless dressage scoring app (Livescore Dressage) and urged Helen to take a look. This could solve part of the problem – the most paper heavy phase could be scored online.

With a month to go before the competition, Helen contacted the Nominate team and got very quick replies from them. After a Zoom call to see the Paperless Dressage scoring app, they mentioned that they also had a live scoring app for Jumping (both Showjumping and Cross Country) and an entry system – Compete Easy – which would let us bring together scoring from all three phases using the Dressage and Jumping apps – and display results through their Compete Easy Scoreboard. And this has been around in AUS for years so it has been tried and tested over and over. You can just plug-in and get going!
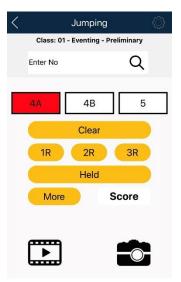
After sending the Nominate team entry forms, omnibus listing and Dressage tests, the AUS team set up our entry portal for competitors – in a day. Oakhurst started processing entries through the app but still took local entries by email as well. From an organizer point of view, having the entries included in the system dramatically shortened our time needed to input information. Competitors and spectators (who couldn't be on site) were encouraged to download the free Compete Easy app from the Apple App store or Google Play store to follow the scoring on the weekend.

Oakhurst's dressage judges and scribes met onsite for 2 hours the week before the event to learn to use the Dressage Livescoring app. Basically, if you can use a stylus to write comments and click buttons, or type on a keyboard you can score a dressage test on your tablet. The test looks just like the paper test. Movement by movement a scribe enters a score and writes a comment, and the comments look just like they would if they were written on paper. The judge can review the marks given, comment and sign at the end. No passing of tablets is needed. The scribe can sit in one booth writing and send the test to the judge to review and sign on their own tablet with the click of a button. Seriously. Why hadn't we done THIS before?

From a competitor point of view, the Compete Easy app allowed viewers to follow the progress of the test, seeing scores and movement by movement percentage updates as the test is ridden – in real time! By the time the competitor left the dressage area, the judge had reviewed and signed the test, the score was finalized, and a digital version of the test sheet was automatically sent to the competitor. No 8+ person jog around the property and 2 hour wait to get a dressage sheet back.

In the show jump ring, our judge Laura Kelland-May scored using a tablet – entering results jump by jump and timing. The penalties were all calculated by the Jumping app and the score posted to the scoreboard when complete. Competitors could see the penalties before they got out of the ring. Sort of felt a bit like being in an Olympics with scores coming in so fast – Oakhurst just needs a jumbotron…

Cross country judges and timers had a Zoom call meeting a few days before the event where general jump judging rules and criteria were reviewed by our Technical Delegate Linda Plank. Jump Judges were given a walkthrough of the jump scoring app; basically = login, choose the division, choose your jumps, wait for your rider to appear, enter their number and then click a button to show what happened (Clear, 1R, etc.). If Jump Judges were at tricky elements (i.e. Water) they could take a video which sits on their device until the TD calls it up to review for scoring queries – which we did, and which the team at Nominate could also see from Australia in real-time! As we watched horses leave the startbox, our XC team started entering results out on the course – Ruth and Joan Allum (Ruth's mum and show secretary) acted as Control watching the scores come in and making sure results were complete. It was a lot less exciting than dealing with a mass of papers at the end of a division with hot tired handwriting that may have been done with a blunt crayon while a jump judge shelters under a tree and swats at deerflies.

From the spectator point of view – they could watch a rider on XC "Live" and see the results coming in through the app – following the little horse on the display in Compete Easy move from jump to jump and instantly seeing their result.

So how many papers did we use to score Oakhurst Horse Trials I 2020? None. Scoring was all done online. NO PAPER WAS USED. (except the one the Scorer doodled on by the afternoon of day 2 because everything was running so smoothly 😉.) We even posted Maps and Pinney numbers online.

Worried about the bandwidth required to do this? Oakhurst did have Internet in the Show Jump and Dressage rings, but the Compete Easy apps are setup to keep storing all records until they find a connection and then upload when they find your hotspot or wifi. So even if the Internet gods decided to take a break and shut down for an hour, we'd be fine. Everything is saved and the scorer could run around with a hotspot periodically and upload scores.

One interesting side effect of such instant scoring was the lack of protests on the weekend. Since competitors saw scores immediately after completing a phase, it was much easier to understand the result – it's a lot easier two hours after your ride to try and justify that step backwards or extra circle – and there's no handwriting for a scorer to decipher. Linda Plank (our TD) was heard saying "Why isn't everyone using this?" over and over under her breath this weekend.

What else did we do to run the Horse Trials successfully and safely?
To ensure that the protocols were adhered to and provide a level of safety and comfort for competitors, no spectators were allowed – competitors could bring a coach and a groom/parent – if you didn't fit into one of those categories, you were hoping to be on the volunteer list or you'd have to miss the fun. One of the biggest safety changes the pandemic had us introduce was screening of all who entered the property. Joan Allum – Oakhurst's competition secretary (and Ruth's mum) was challenged with having EVERY PERSON who wanted to step foot on the property over the 2 days of competition register and complete COVID-19 protocol waivers in advance of the start of competition. Along with accepting competition entries, Joan's email was constantly chugging along with a flow of "paperwork" that all had to be completed in advance. We're hoping to automate more of that through the Compete-Easy app – which also has a feature to allow riders to "Check-In" when they arrive at your property – for tracking.

To ensure that Oakhurst had the best Covid protocols in place, Woody Woodfine and the Tack Two team of medics were hired for the weekend. The Tack Two team manned the entrance to the property where every entrant was recorded – temperatures taken, name date and time recorded so that a complete list of those on the property over the weekend is maintained should the need for contact tracing arise. Volunteers were given Oakhurst facemasks and everyone on the property was reminded to self-distance and wear masks when in close proximity with others.

Ruth sourced face masks and hand sanitizer (huge thanks to Ontario Eventing for their generous donation!) – created social distancing signs and organized and ran volunteer training for different roles over Zoom. Running a volunteer briefing by Zoom is a new challenge for organizers, but it can be done and the entire Oakhurst Horse Trials volunteer crew came into the competition prepared and confident in their roles and their safety.

Ride Times were kept in coach specific groups and spread out over two days to ensure few competitors in warm up areas at any time – and were kept in farm groups to keep moving together around the property. A jump crew was assigned to the Show Jump warm-up to ensure coaches could distance around the outside of the ring and only one person was touching jumps. Mark also ensure parking was spread out and appropriately distanced parking spots identified in the parking area to make it easy for those trailering.

ShowJump warmup - Elyse Howat

Zoë Richardson - happy volunteer at Oakhurst HT!

Oakhurst is happy to share the experience – we are in love with the new (to North America) Compete Easy scoring system and will definitely be using it again for upcoming Horse Trials and Dressage Shows (next HT in September!) The team at Nominate are quick, friendly and knowledgeable – their head of product development (Lloyd Raleigh) is an eventer, and may not actually sleep because he was online for the entire first day of our event – despite the 14 hour time difference. We'd encourage anyone who is thinking of taking the plunge into running a pandemic competition (or who just wants to make the leap to a 21st century scoring solution) to get in touch and the Oakhurst team will share what worked so you can be successful too. We should have switched to this system years ago – and we'll definitely keep using it in the future. It's too easy!

Oakhurst Farm

Oakhurst Farm is a premiere Equestrian Eventing facility in Eastern ON, CANADA owned & operated by Ruth Allum and Mark Nelson. Since opening in 1994, Oakhurst has had riders proudly representing them regionally, provincially and internationally and strives to continue this trend in the future. Oakhurst Farm runs many competitions on site every year, as well as taking students all over North America to compete. Follow Oakhurst on Instagram @oakhurst3d, Facebook at @oakhurstequestrian or on the web at www.oakhurstfarm.com

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Nominate AU
Nominate was established in 2001 and was set up to process online entries for Equestrian events. Today, Nominate processes in excess of 10,000 transactions per week and was the first company in Australia to offer online entries for events. Nominate has since grown to process entries for a wide range of sports and have integrated membership and ticketing systems that are used by a large number of sporting and non sporting clients. Nominate has developed the worlds first technology in their SpeedCheck and LiveScore dressage systems. https://www.competeeasy.com/

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