



(Left) Mark and Ruth demonstrate what is expected during the jog. (Right) A competitor on steeplechase.



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# Oakhurst Hosts Long-Format Clinic

BY TRACY HANES

**T**hirty-eight riders got to experience riding in a long-format event and absorb a wealth of education at the Oakhurst Three-Day Long-Format Event Clinic and Competition in late August at Oakhurst Farm in Ashton, ON.

Oakhurst Farm owners Ruth Allum (a member of the Equestrian Canada Eventing Committee) and Mark Nelson (Ontario Equestrian Federation president) organized the event to allow grassroots competitors a chance to learn about what it takes to prepare for international competition and to fill in gaps in riders' education that might be a barrier to them competing in eventing. The competition, held August 17-20, was the only long-format three-day event offered for lower level competitors (entry, pre-training, and training) in eastern Canada and attracted 38 competitors, along with their grooms and coaches.

"Oakhurst made a great success of the event. It was well-organized,

delightful for the riders and spectators, and even managed to appease the usually malicious gods of Ottawa's weather," said Akaash Maharaj, former CEO of Equestrian Canada and a volunteer at the event.

Nelson explained that the only time eventers have the opportunity to compete in long-format events is at the international level, thus making it much more difficult for Canadians to prepare for that level of competition, especially young riders.

The big difference from the typical one-day horse trials or short-format events was the inclusion of a full endurance day that began with roads and tracks, where competitors rode a set distance at a slower, measured pace to warm up for the speed portion; the steeplechase, ridden at a fast gallop over obstacles; then a slower roads and track portion to cool down before presentation to a veterinarian to ensure the horse was fit enough to proceed to the final cross-country portion.

Competitors took a group tractor ride around the 2.6 kilometres of phases A and C (Roads and Tracks) to learn what was expected there, and also around the five-jump steeplechase segment while they learned about the role of conditioning, heart rate, and optimum speed.

"The riders could come Friday and practice over the steeplechase course and we had a speed gun to record their speed," Allum said. "A lot of riders didn't know what speed they were at. When we watched them on cross-country the next day, they were more confident about their speed. A lot of them worked on their pace." Allum said it opened riders' eyes as to what it takes to get a horse fit.

Allum and Nelson explained what was expected during a horse inspection and demonstrated how to present and jog their horses. Then all 38 horses (including a 12-hand pony) were presented and accepted.

Coach and competitor gatherings

were held between phases, as well as education sessions. Guest clinicians included:

- Jessica Dilliot, Equine Canada's head of sport science, who talked about riders' athletic ability and the importance of fitness;
- Sandra Andresen, former CCI\* competitor and long-time groom for Jessica Phoenix who, along with Dr. J.D. Adams of Russell Equine Veterinary Service, explained how to cool down a horse and what to expect in the 10-minute box;
- senior B dressage judge Evelyn Ore, who provided a commentary on riders' dressage tests;
- jumper and high performance event coach Jeff McKessock of Westar Farms, who took competitors on the show jumping course walk;
- Canadian Team member Colleen Loach, who debriefed riders after show jumping;
- course designer and builder Dylan Barrie, who talked about course designing.
- retired CBC journalist Elizabeth Hay, who educated participants about how media interviews are conducted and interviewed the top three riders after each phase, which were livestreamed on Facebook.

Nelson says he and Allum plan to offer the long-format competition and clinic again next year, and perhaps will add a component for coach education. Commented Maharaj, "The hard reality for us as equestrians is that at the highest levels, the rules of our disciplines are being re-written to suit the short-term demands of broadcasters, sponsors, and sport bureaucracies, rather than the long-term interests of horses and riders. In this context, I think it becomes all the more important that at the grassroots level we work to nurture the fundamentals of humane horsemanship and to uphold the better traditions of equestrianism. The success of Oakhurst's long-format event is proof that there is still a real demand for this approach."

See results on page 61.