

WEG REPORT CARD, HOW DID LEXINGTON DO?

BY KAREN BRIGGS

IN THE 20 YEAR HISTORY OF THE WORLD EQUESTRIAN GAMES, WE'VE SEEN IT ALL, FROM THE NEAR-CHAOS THAT WAS THE HAGUE IN 1994, TO THE CLOCKWORK PRECISION OF AACHEN IN 2006. WE'VE EVEN HAD A NEARLY-DIDN'T-HAPPEN GAMES, WHEN DUBLIN PULLED OUT IN 1998 AND ROME STEPPED IN AT THE 11TH HOUR TO MAKE IT HAPPEN, SOMEHOW. BUT NO-ONE REALLY KNEW WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN THE WEG VENTURED ACROSS THE OCEAN TO AMERICA.

The Alltech FEI 2010 World Equestrian Games are now in the books, of course, and the reviews have generally been positive. Were they as spectacular as Aachen? Perhaps not, especially in terms of the opening and closing ceremonies, which suffered from slashed budgets... but then Aachen was a very hard act to follow. The facilities, footing, course design, and décor in Kentucky were all first-rate, and the fact that the Kentucky Horse Park was the first venue in the history of the Games to be able to host all eight disciplines within its confines (even the endurance race emanated from the Horse Park, with loops going out onto neighbouring horse farms and returning to a central vet check area) got a big thumbs-up from those who had attended previous WEGs. It fostered a cross-discipline camaraderie rarely seen before, with show jumpers cheering on combined driving competitors, and able-bodied dressage riders misting up while watching the extraordinary efforts of their para-counterparts. FEI president, HRH Princess Haya, summed up the experience from her point of view at a closing day press conference, saying, "These Games have ticked all the boxes. I don't think there is any doubt that the Alltech FEI 2010 World Equestrian Games is a great success."

HERE'S OUR OWN RATING OF SOME OF THE SUCCESSES – AND FAILURES – OF THE LATEST GAMES.

FACILITIES AND FOOTING: A+

Where the Alltech FEI 2010 World Equestrian Games really got it right, was with the competition venues. The footing was impeccable – even on the eventing cross-country and driving marathon courses, where extensive watering and aerating had to be done to alleviate the effects of an eight-week drought which had elsewhere turned the famous bluegrass brown.

Otto Becker, German show jumping chef d'équipe, commented, "The facilities are very good. All the arenas, the footing, the course-building, all are excellent. We feel very well here and we are happy. The place is big, but in a few days we were used to it. We travel

around on our bikes which is very healthy."

Belgian show jumper and 2006 world champion, Jos Lansink, did remark that the lighting was perhaps inadequate in the main stadium in late afternoon, as the shadows got longer. "For me it's already over with three rails down," he said with a tinge of annoyance. "I had to ride at the end, and the lights are on, so there are shadows at some of the fences. The lighting should be better at a show like this."

HOSPITALITY: A+

"The hospitality here in Kentucky has been absolutely paramount. I cannot say enough good things. It's a very appreciative crowd," said combined driving competitor Deborah Laderoute from Canada.

Although the army of 5000 volunteers, recruited mainly from Kentucky and neighbouring states, weren't always the most well-informed, they were universally friendly, patient, and accommodating. Many reportedly worked on 12-hour shifts in all sorts of weather with few complaints and few perks, beyond blue or yellow uniforms sponsored by Ariat. Special kudos to those who laboured parking cars in the far-away parking lots and never even had the opportunity to see a horse.



Photo: Pamela Young

ORGANIZATION AND INFORMATION: C

"I think no matter what you do when you're organizing something like this, you're going to run into snags. You really need to run something like this more than once to get all the kinks out. So it's hard to criticize. There are no snags here that are keeping me up at night," remarked show jumper John Pearce.



PARKING AND ACCESSIBILITY: B

Over 110,000 cars were reportedly parked during the World Equestrian Games, most of them a 1 km or better hike away from the actual competition venues at a neighbouring farm called Spy Coast. Shuttles took the farthest-flung patrons from the car park to the entrance gates, and there were also wagons, pulled by huge John Deere tractors, going between competition venues. For riders, grooms, the media, and practically everyone else, golf carts were the name of the game.

There was also a shuttle service for the disabled, with wheelchair-accessible golf carts, and a number of multi-lingual volunteers were assigned to Language Services to assist those who did not speak English. Signs and announcements, however, tended to be in English only (apart from the announcer for combined driving, Geoff Morgan, who made use of both French and Spanish as he described the action). Directional signs with pictographs of the various venues would have been useful for this global competition.



FOOD: D

Too little variety, too few vendors, too few seats, and prices were high. That was the consensus on the culinary offerings at the Alltech FEI 2010 World Equestrian Games. Though what was available was tasty, and line-ups were speedily dealt with, the pinch at the cash register and the shortage of a comfortable place to eat your hard-won burrito, pasta, or salad made purchasers grouchy. There was, however, no shortage of alcoholic beverages to soothe bad tempers, from Alltech's Kentucky Ale to raspberry vodka lemonade.

ACCOMMODATIONS/TOUR GROUPS: D-

Outrageous prices for hotel rooms was one of the chief complaints about these World

Equestrian Games. Area hoteliers reportedly jacked up prices to triple or quadruple their normal rates, and when bookings failed to materialize, some offered last-minute discounts, vexing those who had taken a big hit on their credit cards and had booked years in advance. A planned five-star hotel on the Kentucky Horse Park property was the victim of budget cuts mid-way through the planning process, and many of the hotel rooms available were more than 45 minutes away by car. Some had spectator shuttles running to and from the Kentucky Horse Park, but others did not, although attendees staying in downtown Lexington were also able to board an inexpensive city bus which went to KHP.

Eduardo Tame Azar, of ABC Turismo, a Mexican-based tour company, had major difficulties in organizing a trip to the 2010 WEG, saying "The organizing committee was totally unresponsive to tour operators. I met in Lexington colleagues from Germany and Switzerland who faced the same problems. The organizing committee did not realize that tour operators are a big part of big



events. They sell tickets by the hundreds, transport their own guests, and make it easy for the organizers. In Lexington, they were against the tour operators."

Tame also remarked that ticket prices were "more than double what they were in Aachen" and that tour operators were expected to pay two years in advance. Tour bus companies commissioned by the organizing committee had also inflated their prices, according to Tame, wanted cash up front months in advance, and then were inflexible as to drop-off points for Tame's patrons.

"And finally, the situation with the expensive and bad food offered on site (only hamburgers, hot dogs, pizza and nachos), and the incredible high price they charged for a VIP table, from \$50,000 to \$70,000 to seat eight persons, at the far side of the stands where four were facing the stadium and four had their backs to the competition! Paid a fortune and could not even watch the Games!

"I finally enjoyed the Games as the competition and the athletes were phenomenal, but these are the real reasons the ticket sales were short. Let's be truthful," concluded Tame.



Photos: BCM/Remco Veurnik