

The SsangYong Blenheim Palace Horse Trials, Oxfordshire UK

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Three equestrian pursuits in one great event

The SsangYong Blenheim Palace Horse Trials is one of the highlights in the annual British eventing calendar.

Over the four days it gives the 60,000 visitors the chance to see top UK and international riders competing in dressage, cross-country and show jumping in the magnificent grounds of the Blenheim Palace estate.

Nations represented include the Czech Republic, Spain and Denmark, as well as from the more traditional eventing nations such as Canada, Italy, Ireland and Germany.

There are pony club and amateur competitions along with displays, demonstrations and more than 200 food and trade stands.

It all makes for a fine day or days out for anyone with an interest in equestrian or country pursuits.

The next SsangYong Blenheim Palace Horse Trials will take place between 17 to 20 September 2020

www.blenheimhorse.co.uk

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The best of horse and country at Blenheim

By Ashley Gibbins

OK, I confess, I am definitely the junior partner in our relationship on all things equestrian.

And yet while Ann is the expert when it comes to horses, I get real pleasure from watching a horse and rider go through their paces.

Horse trials, or eventing, offers a splendid opportunity to see the very best in equestrian pursuits by bringing together the three equestrian disciplines of dressage, cross-country and show jumping in one competition.

And at the SsangYong Blenheim Palace Horse Trials one gets the bonus of being in the most magnificent of surroundings.

The Palace itself makes for a stunning backdrop to the events that take place in the main Pavilion arena.

And the Blenheim estate provides majestic grounds the cross-country course and some wonderful spots for enjoying the competition with a picnic.

The cavalry officers challenge

Eventing apparently began as an ultimate challenge of 'horsemanship' for British cavalry officers and developed from there.

Today one can find competitions throughout the year and throughout the UK, and indeed the world.

For those not fully acquainted with the sport, British Eventing offer this explanation :

This is the ultimate equestrian challenge of dressage, show jumping and cross country.

It requires horses and riders to combine to show harmony and rhythm in the dressage, balance and precision in the show jumping and accuracy and bravery in the cross country.

The combination with the lowest penalty score at the end of the overall event is the winner.

Competitions are tailored to those just starting out through to more established combinations and international level competitors.

In addition to the horse trials themselves, there will be a range of other equestrian, country and outdoor pursuits for the visitor to enjoy.

At the SsangYong Blenheim Palace Horse Trials, the riding and pony club show jumping challenges are an attraction in themselves, as are British eventing master classes, BMX trick riding displays and a programme of arena parades and demonstrations.

The 200 or so retail stands sell horse tack, clothing and supplies along with others offering garden furniture, high clothing and designer goods and arts and crafts.

SsangYong, as the sponsor, displays its vehicles and, finally, the 'food walk' offers excellent gourmet fare, along with beers wines and spirits.

It all adds up to a marvellous country show with the top class horse trials to boot. What more could one ask for?

The 2020 eventThe next SsangYong Blenheim Palace Horse Trials will take place between 17 to 20 September 2020.

www.blenheimhorse.co.uk

For other horse trials in the UK visit :
www.britisheventing.com.





My first time at these trials will not be the last

By Ann Mealor

My first time at the *SsangYong Blenheim Palace Horse Trials* and my first three day event.

As a horse owner and rider of many years I was really looking forward to seeing the professionals in action. I was very excited and full of expectation.

Having visited Blenheim Palace earlier this year, I knew the setting for this event would be stunning, with beautiful undulating parkland surrounded by mature trees and the river running through it.

What's more, the weather forecast predicted sun, blue skies and temperatures in the 20s.

All this combined with top class equestrianism close up made for the perfect weekend.

The Eventer Challenge

On arriving on the Friday, there was so much going on I didn't know where to look!

We stopped at the first arena we came to, the Bladon Arena which was hosting the Eventer Challenge for riding and pony clubs from all over the UK.

Teams and individuals rode over a testing course of show jumps and cross country obstacles, all in the same arena and on tricky terrain.

They had to ride at a good pace to finish within the time allowed.

All the young riders rode well and showed real commitment and team spirit.

We then wove our way through the many interesting stalls and stands, mostly aimed at the horse and rider, so of great interest to me (less so for Ashley!) and headed to the main Marlborough Arena for the dressage.

The dressage

To gain maximum points, horse and rider combinations need to show relaxation, suppleness, balance, obedience, rhythm, energy and accuracy.

Riders need to keep their horses attentive and listening as there is so much to distract them – people moving around in the stands, flags waving, music playing etc.

I was engrossed, watching the different movements and seeing where marks were gained and lost.

By the end of the day, I could tell a good flying change of leg across the centre line from a poor one and what made a good medium canter.

It was faster than I thought – especially on half a 20 metre circle!

I will have to practice.

Having the dressage test printed in the programme was really useful and made the different movements easier to follow for the spectator.



By the end of the first day, Izzy Taylor on *Monkeying Around* led the field in the principal CC14*-L event.

However, over the gruelling three days the leader board changes many times.

I knew I would be coming back for more on the Saturday and Sunday whatever the weather – I was hooked.



Cross Country

This took place on a gloriously sunny Saturday and really attracted the crowds.

The jumps were beautifully decorated with flowers and foliage, but this didn't disguise their height or difficulty.

These were huge and almost impossible looking. Frightening.

How could any horse and rider jump something so narrow, so large, so wide, so steep?

But they were bold, brave and accurate and the majority made it look easy.

I appreciated too, for the first time, how fast horses had to travel to finish the course within the time allowed.

Horses galloped past me, hooves flying, riders focused, both oblivious to the crowds and marquees, concentrating on the task in-hand.

As well as the great skill and courage needed by horse and rider to complete this course, both have to be extremely fit and trust each other.

The rider has to give the horse confidence, even when they know they are jumping a hedge and ditch that's about six foot deep.

Dogs are welcome at the horse trials but owners are asked to keep them under control.

One dog broke loose and chased one of the competitors for about four jumps until it was eventually caught.

I don't think they even noticed their focus was that great.

Other riders had swans to contend with who were reluctant to share their favourite place on the river with a horse.

Nine out of 82 horses went clear within the time.

The event was thrilling and a true test of horsemanship.

Dressage leader Izzy Taylor unfortunately decided to retire from the competition during the cross country phase.

By the end of the second day it was Britain's Piggy French who occupied first and fifth place on her horses *Brookfield Innocent* and *Castletown Clover*.

Retraining of racehorses

Once the cross country had finished I enjoyed taking a look at the Retraining of Racehorses dressage championship.

It is great to see these ex-racehorses enjoying a second a career and doing so well off the race course.

I also took the opportunity to have a ride on Henry, the mechanical horse on the British Horse Society stand.

There was an instructor on hand to give tips and advice, and I have to say Henry performed very well despite my wobbly leg aids.

I headed back to London, tired but enthused and looking forward to the Sunday show jumping, which is the final phase of the SsangYong Blenheim Palace Horse Trials

Show Jumping

After two glorious days of warmth and sun, Sunday brought the rain.

However, this didn't dampen spirits and the stands were packed for the final phase of the competition – the show jumping.

This is a real test of a horse's fitness and accuracy.

After doing a tiring cross country course of solid fences the day before, the horse now has to find enough energy to complete a course of testing show jumps that can fall at a touch, in under 80 seconds.

This proved a challenge. Only eight horses out of 57 went clear within the time.

Two of these came from Saturday's leader and 2011 Blenheim winner, Piggy French.

She maintained her lead on Brookfield Innocent to take the title once again.

She also moved up from fifth to third place on her second horse Castletown Clover. What an achievement.

I'm already looking forward to Blenheim 2020 and taking in some of the sessions and attractions I missed this time around.

A snapshot of the SsangYong Blenheim Palace Horse Trials



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www.allwaystraveller.com



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