



The Magic Millions Festival of British Eventing, UK

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## Horses to the fore in stunning Gloucestershire setting

The Magic Millions Festival of British Eventing takes place annually at Gatcombe Park, over a weekend in early August.

This is the Gloucestershire estate of Her Royal Highness Princess Ann, who won a three-day-eventing Olympic gold in 1971 and is a passionate supporter of the Festival.

Princess Anne's daughter Zara Tindall is a regular competitor at Gatcombe.

Gatcombe offers the equestrian aficionado the chance to enjoy dressage, show jumping and cross country at international elite level.

There's also the chance to spot up and coming riders in the junior and novice classes.

But this event is equally enjoyable for those who enjoy a dog friendly, family day out at an equestrian focused country fair in Cotswold countryside.

The 2023 event will take place from 4 to 6 August 2023.

[www.festivalofbritisheventing.com](http://www.festivalofbritisheventing.com)

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Cross-country



Dressage



Show Jumping





# Something for everyone to enjoy at Gatcombe

The Magic Millions Festival of British Eventing (Gatcombe) offers a wonderful three-day celebration of horse and rider in glorious Gloucestershire countryside.

By Ashley Gibbins

Ann and I have written a number of features on three-day eventing, and we have at last been able to get to Gatcombe.

I can tell you this splendid event has jumped straight to number one in our list of the best.

This is because Gatcombe is not too big or too small, offers fine viewing of all the action and has the family friendly atmosphere of a country show.

It can also be enjoyed whatever one's level of equestrian expertise.

Ann, for example, is a long-time horse breeder, rider and amateur competitor.

She therefore really appreciates exactly what it takes to get horse and rider performing in unison (see below).

She can judge each performance with a nuanced eye.

As for me, I just enjoy the whole occasion.

The excitement of the show jumping rounds, the thrill of seeing horse and rider tackle the cross-country course and watching the absolute precision of the dressage with total admiration.

Gatcombe is also a day out for family and friends, and their dogs.

Regular attendees know just what to do, laying out tables and chairs and a picnic spread in a favourite spot overlooking the cross-country course (there are so many), From this base it's a short stroll to everything.

## Getting there

Getting to and from Gatcombe Park is a pleasure in itself.

We stayed at the historic Stonehouse Court, and the 20-minute drive took us across stunning moorland ambled over by free roaming rare breed cattle and wild horses.

If all that slows one down is a small herd of cows sauntering across the road, well that's fine by me.

The immediate approach to the Gatcombe itself was tailback free and, once arriving, one finds the car parks are right on the edge of the main events arena.

## So much going on

There is also so much going on, and so many places to sit and view.

Show jumping is likely underway in the main arena, with seating all around including on a long stretch of dry-stone wall and grassy slope.

Next to this is the practice ring, interesting in its own right and just beyond this, a second show jumping ring nearby for junior and novice competitions.

When the jumping has finished for the day the programme of family friendly events take over the main arena.

These include the Shetland Pony Grand National and the Pony Club Games.

Beyond this the glorious grounds of Gatcombe Estate provides any number of grassy 'grandstand' views of the cross country.

The dressage arenas are found a 15 stroll at the other end of Gatcombe But this allows one to discover the artisan street food and drink offering, watch the delighted little one's at a small funfair or browse the equestrian themed shopping village.

The Magic Millions Festival of British Eventing really does provide three marvellous days out for anyone who enjoys watching horses and riders within a country show in the stunning Gloucestershire countryside.



# My first visit to Gatcombe is sure to be the first of very many

My first chance to get to the Magic Millions Festival of British Eventing and I could not have enjoyed it more.

By Ann Mealor



The weather was glorious, the competition exciting, the horses superb and the setting stunning.

Sponsored by Magic Millions, Australasia's leading thoroughbred auction house, the Festival of British Eventing took place over three days in the grounds of Gatcombe Park, Princess Anne's home.

The Festival, which has not been held since 2019, attracted some of the world's top riders.

Although very competitive, the show had a relaxed country fair atmosphere about it, with spectators sitting on a long stone wall to watch the show jumping or on one of the many grassy banks to get a good view of the cross-country course and to enjoy a picnic.

Dogs of all breeds, shapes and sizes were everywhere and welcomed as long as they were kept on leads.

It's a veritable dog show Daschunds, Retrievers, Labradors, Collies, Whippets etc all enjoying their day out.

And in some cases, an ice cream, from indulgent owners, helping them to keep cool in the heat.

That said, there were plenty of doggy water bowls around the grounds for a cold drink whenever needed.

However, the stars of the show were the horses. Fit, lithe, athletic and beautifully turned out, their coats gleaming in the sun. Plaited manes, oiled hooves, polished tack and patterned quarters – they were ready for business.

## The three elements of eventing

There are three elements to Eventing: Dressage, Cross Country and Show jumping.

It is similar to a triathlon where the three different disciplines make up one event.

Dressage tests the horse and riders' ability to work together through a set sequence of movements. Combinations are judged on balance, rhythm, suppleness, obedience and harmony between horse and rider.

The lower the score received (meaning less penalties) the better.

Show jumping tests athleticism, control and accuracy. It's four faults for a fence knockdown and four for a refusal. If a rider has three refusals or falls off, they are eliminated. The course also has to be completed within a set time, or penalties are incurred.

The cross-country element tests stamina, speed, jumping and bravery and is the most exciting part of Eventing. Approximately 30 timber built, solid obstacles need to be tackled. Courses involve water, steep slopes, narrow fences, and obstacles of all shapes and sizes. Many look extremely frightening!

Horses travel at a gallop as the course has to be completed within a time limit otherwise penalties occur. It is thrilling to watch.





## The competitions

Five championship classes took place over the event with *The Magic Millions British Open Championship* (this is for the big guns); *The Evelyn Partners British Intermediate Championship* (for experienced and up-and-coming horses); *The Dodson & Horrell British Novice Championship* (for amateurs and professionals); *RoR/NTF Retrained Racehorse Event Championship* (open to former racehorses and my favourite event) and *The TopSpec Challenge for the Corinthian Cup* (for amateurs).

Horse and rider combinations qualify for these classes throughout the year, and Gatcombe brings them all together for a scintillating and engrossing grand finale.

There is always something going on in the main arenas with dressage and show jumping on each of the three days, and cross country on the Saturday and Sunday.

## Dressage

Dressage takes place at the far end of the showground, and although it's quite a walk, on your way there you get to see horse and riders warming up for the cross country.

Once at the dressage we stayed a while to watch the various classes in progress.

There were four arenas with tests taking place in each one.

It gave us a chance to watch the professional horses and riders perform as well as the amateurs.

## Show jumping

Show jumping is in the main arena and I have never seen a course on such undulating ground.

Horses had to jump fences uphill, downhill and on a sloping angle.

It was very challenging and only took a few jumps down for the leadership board to change dramatically.

## Cross-country

The cross-country course, so well designed by Captain Mark Phillips was a real test of endurance and ability. We watched from a number of vantage points over the two days so we could see competitors tackle different elements.

The height, the drops, the narrowness, the width of the jumps - all never ceased to amaze me.

It was a tough, steep track so the horses needed plenty of stamina.

What also surprised me was how many of the horses and riders make it look so easy.

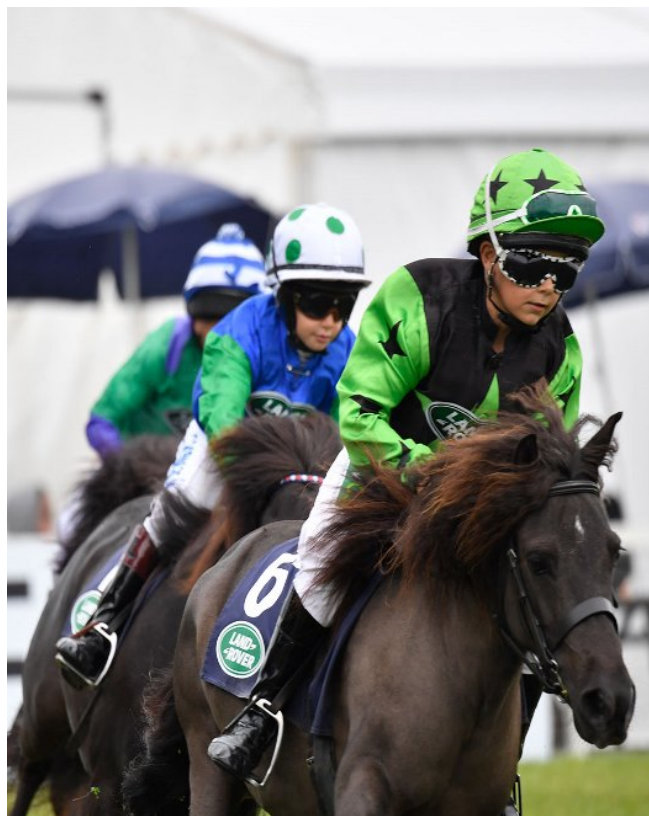
Testament to their skill, professionalism and partnership.

Winner of the top competition The Magic Millions British Open Championship was Newzealander, Tim Vince on Vitalli.

I saw him jump a superb cross-country round, going clear with just a four second penalty.

Runner-up was Olympic Gold Medallist and world number one Oliver Townend on Dreamliner and third Pippa Funnell on Billy Walk On. She was leading coming in to the cross-country phase and last to go, but 8.4 time faults pushed her down to fifth place.





## Other attractions



I really enjoyed watching the Arena eventing. Competitors jump nine show jumping fences and nine cross-country.

The fences were much lower than those in the main arena but gave those younger and amateur riders the exciting experience of competing at Gatcombe. And Captain Mark Phillips designed the testing course.

The Shetland Grand National is always a crowd pleaser. It's great fun with the cute ponies and their young jockeys, in full racing colours, galloping flat-out over a circuit of small brush fences, spurred on by a cheering crowd.

The very competitive Pony Club Games also took place in the main Arena.

Teams took part in a several races including bending, relay and flag. The speedy and nimble mounts mostly cross the finishing line at full gallop, with riders clinging on one way or the other - such is the desire to win!

Between classes, I enjoyed a bit of retail therapy. There is great shopping to be done here at Gatcombe. There was an interesting selection of art, crafts, jewellery, home furnishing, clothing, hand-made toiletries and of course plenty for the equestrian enthusiast.

I came home with a bag full of goodies for me and my horse!

There was no shortage of food on offer and service was quick and easy for pizzas, burgers, cheesy chips, hot dogs, noodles, ice cream, pastries and bars selling wines, champagne, beers and scrumptious Kicking Goat draft cider.

So much was going on at the Gatcombe Horse Trials that there was never a dull moment.

It was very well organised, with the people friendly and helpful and spectators had the chance to see riding at grassroots and elite level.

I've already slotted next year's Gatcombe into the diary.

## More information

[www.festivalofbritisheventing.com](http://www.festivalofbritisheventing.com)





## A snapshot of the Magic Millions Festival of British Eventing



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