

# Lexington, Kentucky's Mane Event



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*Kentucky Horse Park official*

Some horse events seem to have a music all their own, as each rider and four-footed teammate rhythmically glide through their routine. Crossing the ground on manicured hooves, keeping their necks arched and their shoulders proud, the horses execute tight turns, perform figure Xs, and trot in one place—all difficult maneuvers.

This is just the first of three consecutive days of keen competition at The Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event, held at Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington.

No words are spoken during day one’s Dressage competition, but at the end of each team’s routine, the audience cheers and applauds with pent-up excitement. The relieved riders pat their magnificent, rare horses.

“He’s so classy,” Nina Fout of Middleburg, Virginia, says of her horse, 3 Magic Beans. “I’ll never have another one like him.”

The journey here for these riders and horses takes years. They arrive at the horse park with a lifetime of polish and experience, gained from other international competitions. Rolex is a required event for Olympic hopefuls.

Day two separates the mares from the fillies and the stallions from the colts. The challenging 4-mile-long cross-country course asks competitors to take more than 31 obstacles at a full



PHOTOGRAPHS: MEG MCKINNEY SMILE

**top:** Olympic-gold winner David O’Connor tips his top hat to the crowd after the Dressage competition. **above, left:** Buying a new hat is a thrill for some fans. **above, right:** Eyes aimed straight ahead to the next obstacle, this team clears a triangle-shaped, 4-foot-high wooden box. **left:** Linden Weisman and her horse, Anderoo, sail over a hurdle in the Stadium Jumping event.



**far left:** Whoa! It's a 6-foot drop for Becky Douglas of Virginia, on Highland Hogan.

**left:** Fans and riders from around the world attend this annual Kentucky event. Here, British fans wave their congratulations.

**below:** Fans and young riders applaud their favorites. **bottom:** The names of the horses reflect bloodlines and owners' dreams.

gallop. Some jumps are as simple as a wagon with imitation bourbon barrels nestled at the base. Others are deceptive, such as a jump that is just waist high but spans 6 feet.

The horses must clear these obstacles with speed and accuracy, and afterward their riders eagerly discuss their performances.

"He was raring to go," says Canada's Bob Holman of his horse, A Criminal Mind. "It was absolutely exhilarating!"

It takes all of day two for 60 horses to run the course. Fans bring lawn chairs and picnic baskets, and sit near their favorite jump. They remain respectfully silent as each team sails over the obstacles, then politely applaud as they gallop away.

"A lot of people who attend don't know horses," says one park official, "but it's a nice day in the country, and they shop till they drop."

There is, in fact, an extensive trade fair for horse lovers. Among the offerings are new saddles and bridles, along with hats, custom jewelry, designer

### ON YOUR HIGH HORSE

#### The Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event:

April 25-28, at Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington. Tickets are \$8-\$15 per day. The horse park offers daily events and tours. Hotel rooms are plentiful, but make reservations early. For more information contact (859) 254-8123, or visit [www.rk3de.org](http://www.rk3de.org). For more information on Lexington, call Lexington Convention & Visitors Bureau at 1-800-845-3959, or visit [www.visitlex.com](http://www.visitlex.com).

chocolates, sporting clothes, fine art, horse trailers, lawn chairs, and much more. Artists such as Linda Wasko of Santa Fe, New Mexico, offer contemporary art depicting several different breeds. Photographers specializing in equine portraiture display their work.

Day three's event, Stadium Jumping, occurs in the main ring. There, 16 colorfully painted jumps are fashioned to

1	DRIZZLE	PH
2	EAGLE LION	BRUN
4	MIDNIGHT MAGIC	STU
7	RANGITOTO	IAN
10	GILTEDGE	DAV
11	ETON	EDDY
12	MAKER'S MARK WESHAM	CATH
14	LORD KILLWILBURST	ANDRE
15	PUELLER	SUSANN

resemble familiar Kentucky landmarks. The course covers approximately 650 yards and must be completed in two minutes or longer.

Suspense fills the air with teams from three continents closing in on the top places. Five-figure cash prizes are accompanied by Rolex timepieces.

Last year, crowd favorite David O'Connor, an Olympic-gold winner from Virginia, riding Giltedge, took home the first-place Rolex watch and \$50,000. When he completed his turn in the stadium, the crowd's courteous silence erupted into a chorus of yells, screams, and whoops—a fitting end to this world-class event.

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