

Equestrian Sports at the Olympics

The ultimate competition in any sport is, of course, the Olympic Games where Equestrian Sports are one of the oldest categories. The horse's involvement in the Olympics dates back almost 3,000 years. Horse sports were incorporated into the Olympic Games shortly after their initial inception when the four horse chariot race was introduced. In fact when you think of the Olympics, the huge stadium or hippodrome is one of the most powerful images. The word "hippodrome" which describes an open air sports stadium with a track around the edge, comes from the Greek word "hippos" for horse and "dromos" for racecourse. The equestrian events are made up of three disciplines - dressage, show jumping and the three-day event which includes both the other disciplines together with a gruelling cross country ride over testing jumps. Each of the disciplines has both an individual and a team competition.

Dressage is often referred to as 'horse ballet'. It is a training method designed to develop a horse's natural abilities and responsiveness to instructions from the rider. The original intent was to train the horse to make it easy to ride in any circumstances, and to enhance the horse's natural gymnastic abilities. The earliest roots of modern dressage go back to very clearly defined sequential training methods used by riding masters in Europe and classical dressage techniques are still viewed as an important part of the sport today.

Show jumping is probably the most commonly recognised of the principal equestrian sports - who has not tried to mentally lift a horse over a huge jump when watching it on TV? Competitions vary in style and type but basically the horse and rider have to follow a prescribed path around the ring, jumping each of the obstacles in turn. Most exciting are the Puissance events where the fences grow ever higher round by round, or the mad dash around the shortened courses when more than one horse has had a clear round and a winner has to be found.

The Cross Country event is both an endurance test, and an examination of the teamwork developed between horse and rider as they make their way around a long and varied course with demanding obstacles. Event horses have to be at the peak of physical fitness as do their riders - they are the decathletes of the equine world. Horses are carefully monitored to ensure that they come to no harm during these events.

Equestrian Sports are one of the very few Olympic events where men and women compete on equal terms. In fact over recent years the number of women competing has dramatically increased with around 80 percent of the competitors now being female. This has brought about many changes in the way the sport is developing. Far more emphasis is being placed on fitness, diet and exercise for both horse and rider, rather than just sheer physical strength. Equestrianism is one of the ultimate in team sports, a horse and rider work together for years to develop their skills, combining grace and delicacy with endurance and strength in a way that no other sport can, it is the only Olympic sport where man and animal are established team-mates on an equal footing as the one cannot take part without the other.

About the Author

Tane Moores has been riding since a very early age and has long been involved in all things Equestrian. The experience and knowledge gained over many years of involvement in the world of horses is freely shared with anyone who cares to read. Tane writes regularly on Horse Facts and Equestrian Sports at [The Easy Equestrian](#)

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