

It is Wednesday...

by Christine Lies

It is Wednesday. 2:00pm. Schooling is over and the horses have returned to the barn. The riders have returned to their trailers to change from boots and britches to suits and ties or skirts and sweaters. Polished snaffle bits and clean, soft brown bridles hang from tack hooks. Grooms bounce on and off braiding stools, needle and thread between their lips. The horses survey the activity, self-confident and content knowing that is in honor of them. The veteran campaigners stand half asleep, saving their energy for what they know is to come. The first timers keep one ear forward, something in the atmosphere makes their heart race, but they are unsure why this weekend is different. Swearing and spanking and shanking are the grooms of the horses who have broken their maiden, they recognize the routine and long to get started.

As the clock ticks closer to 3:00 riders begin to re-appear and horses are led from their stalls. Their skin is taut, stretching over patiently developed muscles, fitness lines crease their barrels. Months of elbow grease and attention to nutrition have given the bays and chestnuts rich deep coats. The grays and the paints, always the head turners, have found that there are many new stars on this red carpet. Even the veterans have their nostrils flared and their necks arched as they exit the barn. Certainly this competition was not designed to be a beauty pageant, yet for those who find beauty in physical fitness, carefully controlled power and unabashed arrogance, the scene is breathtaking. The "Look of Eagles" lives on every aisle at a Three-Day Event.

The Three Day Event is about the magnificent animal we call the Three Day Horse. I am simply an adult amateur who has had the good fortune to own and ride a spectacular Three Day horse. Every morning when he greets me I think of the things we have done together. To know that I conditioned him and trained him is a source of great pride. To know that he trusted me and was willing to be both supple and strong, fast and obedient, careful and bold will bring me joy when I can only sit on my porch and watch my grandchildren ride.

The Three Day Event is about passing on the legacy. At the one and two star level there are always a few first time horse/first time rider pairs. Pilgrims, these riders arrive overwhelmed and uncertain, they have studied the scriptures, but fear they are not worthy to enter the promised land. Often incomprehensible as they cross the finish line and enter the D box, they babble to any one who will listen about the glory of the battle and the magnificence and bravery of their steed. In these partnerships all that is magnificent about the penultimate competition of the season can be observed.

The Three Day Event is about the planning and the preparation and the struggle. You make sacrifices and put other aspects of your life on hold. You live in fear of every nick and cut. You curse the pouring rain on a galloping day, and are secretly pleased by the naughty behavior that comes with increasing fitness. When circumstances prevent you from competing, you participate as a groom. It is an honor and an inspiration to hold the reins of a Three Day horse at the end of Phase D. Horses express pride like few other animals, and a properly prepared Three Day horse is as proud as a first time father.

For the rest of my life I will be grateful to the men and woman and to the horses that made it possible for me to complete the test. It is a double edged sword that not all horses can complete a Three Day Event. However, if success were a foregone conclusion the value of the achievement would be greatly diminished.

Just getting to the first jog of a three day tells you something about your horse, and your horsemanship. There are no shortcuts. Speed and endurance day strips away the superficial things and you are left with heart and hard work. For five days it is about you and your horse and a handful of people who support you.

The Three Day Event isn't about penalty points. It is about rising to the occasion, against unfavorable odds. It is about mental toughness. It is about pushing harder and being stronger. It is about loving and owning the horses that can do the same. The Three Day Event, at any level demands these things of both horse and horseman. Few among us are destined for Olympic glory, but the full format Three Day event provides a challenge through which we can all take part in the Olympic spirit.

"The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well."

-Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the Modern Olympic Movement