

John Deere Brings Reining to Your Couch

Thanks to sponsorship by John Deere, coverage of the reining at the 2010 World Equestrian Games (WEG) in Lexington, Kentucky, will be seen on live television for the first time. It is hard to believe that the sport has been part of the games for less than a decade.

The road towards reining 'coming home' to the USA for the 2010 WEG began in 1996, recalls Don Treadway, Executive Vice President of the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA), which held its own FEI (Federation Equestre Internationale) reining competition at the 2009 World Show in Oklahoma City.

"We organised a demonstration at the Atlanta Olympics as part of the campaign to get reining approved as an official discipline of the US Equestrian Federation and the FEI, and there was tremendous interest," he explains. "And 14 years on, in Lexington, the AQHA, National Reining Horse Association (NRHA) and John Deere, as the sport's title sponsor, will work closely together to put on a competition which will attract participants from 25 nations. It will be a great focal point for our sport and for the American Quarter Horse."

When the FEI agreed that reining could become its seventh discipline, plans for the forthcoming WEG in Jerez, Spain in 2002 were already well underway.

"We worked with the NRHA to put together a package to hold the reining in Jerez, or it would not have happened," explains Don.

In fact the two organisations underwrote the competition and attracted such a level of sponsorship that reining offered the second highest prize money of all the disciplines at WEG 2002.

The joint effort continued in Aachen, Germany at the 2006 event, where AQHA and NRHA hosted the competition and raised sponsorship – the final was a sell out, and leading lights from more established disciplines such as show jumping and dressage were keen to come and see what all the fuss was about!

What they saw was an exceptional level of competition in which the USA narrowly held onto its team title from Canada and Italy, with the host nation close behind. What they heard were the roars and cheers of a crowd, which adores its sport and is not afraid to express that adoration. For the normally reserved equestrian community this was something of a revelation.

Don explains the plan to capitalise on this in Lexington: "We want reining to have even more of a presence so we have set up a sponsorship package that will see the sport shown live on network television for the first time – the team final will air on NBC, while the individual final will be recorded and shown later."

This would not have been possible without the support of AQHA's longstanding partner, John Deere.

"We have a strong relationship with John Deere and it is one that makes absolute sense," says Don. "Equestrian operations need the best machinery, and we have worked to bring John Deere and our members together."

He continues: "The special offers on machinery available to members through our Members Plus programme have been well received and John Deere has seen the impressive results. We all recognize that 2009 was a difficult year, but sales of machinery to our members held up well against 2008, which saw record orders. Exclusive discounts on John Deere equipment are a direct benefit of AQHA membership and our members have shown how much they appreciate this even in financially tight times."

The relationship extends to the provision of John Deere equipment for all major AQHA events, including the prestigious annual World Show, which attracts 2100 horses from all over the globe to compete in an extensive schedule of classes.

"This partnership is vital for the running of the show but also showcases John Deere's equipment so it is of mutual benefit," comments Don.

Promotion of the World Equestrian Games has seen the partnership come into its own, from the tractors taking on a very practical role setting up an elaborate demonstration of the games' varied disciplines at the 2009 AQHA World Show to a live reining arena which will take centre stage on John Deere's booth in Lexington this September.

"There has been a lot of interest in the games and tickets are selling well, but we have the challenge of stirring up interest in equestrian sport, particularly on television. We want to make stars of our reiners – leading dressage riders such as Anky Van Grunsven are highly regarded but the American public is a little blasé about horses in general. Our top competitors are always amazed that they get mobbed in Europe when they are ignored at home!"

He has one clear goal for Kentucky, and intends to use all the joint resources of AQHA, NRHA and John Deere to make it a reality.

"I just want people to fall in love with the American Quarter Horse through reining, and then when they get to know the breed they will discover all the other amazing things that are possible with this unique breed."