

John Deere a Natural Partner for Leading Contractor

For the Kiser family, John Deere and horses is a match made in heaven, and one that has been life changing – taking them from a farm in Illinois to being an official arena contractor for the World Equestrian Games in Lexington, Kentucky in 2010, at which John Deere is a major sponsor.

In the 1980s, Bob Kiser farmed 1600 acres and John Deere was very much part of his working life. He was a third generation farmer and son Jim vividly remembers his pride at being able to ‘step up’ to John Deere.

“I was about four years old and it was a great occasion when the first Deeres arrived on the farm. Now we are proud to have two of the biggest tracklayers and a combine among the fleet.”

But Bob was also very interested in horses, and the sport of reining in particular – a western riding discipline based on the skills and techniques traditionally used to handle cattle. So when in 1987 he was asked to help the sport’s governing body the National Reining Horse Association (NRHA) to solve some issues with the artificial riding surface at its prestigious Futurity event, he naturally chose his favourite tractor to partner the arena maintenance equipment he came to develop.

Jim Kiser explains: “There was no specialist equipment available for preparing riding arenas, so my father went home and built the first version of his Dragmaster arena leveller and then improved it as he went along.”

The current Dragmaster uses a series of hydraulically adjustable levelling blades, tines and a scarifier bar to lift, decompact and level the arena material, incorporating jets to spray water from a frame mounted tank, and can be set up to condition the riding surface to a precise specification.

Jim himself was training horses in Europe but quickly realised that his father was flat out building machines in the winter and fulfilling arena maintenance contracts throughout the rest of the year.

“I remember the moment well – I suggested to my father that we work together and he said ‘As much as I’d like to work with you, I doubt we can make a living out of this.’ ”

In 2009, Jim spent 270 days at horse shows, proving that father does not always know best!

Kiser Equipment Inc is now based in Gainesville, Texas, where Bob spends much of his time on private contracts, offering horse owners and trainers consultation on the ideal arena materials for their needs, supervising the installation of the facility and advising on maintenance.

Jim meanwhile, is busy with his shows, which include the most valuable events for the NRHA and the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA), the latter including a 14 day World Championship Show in Oklahoma City, featuring events as diverse as cattle cutting and show jumping. Each surface has to be individually prepared – for example tonnes of sand is brought in to add to the regular sand/soil mix for cattle cutting classes, and then painstakingly removed before the next event.

Jim Bret Campbell, Senior Director of Marketing and Publications for AQHA says: “It is a tremendous advantage being able to rely on Kiser for the ideal arena surface for each discipline in such a busy

and varied show. We schedule the classes to ensure that the perfect footing can be offered and it is highly appreciated by the competitors.”

Kiser Inc has also prepared the arenas for the reining competitions at the World Equestrian Games in Jerez, Spain and Aachen, Germany and is now making plans for this year’s event in Lexington, Kentucky.

Jim admits to feeling the pressure of expectation, having the event on his home territory, but at least has the peace of mind from having machinery he knows inside out to work with.

The Kiser Dragmaster continues to evolve – the latest innovation is a patented profile blade, which runs below the surface of the sand, planning it off to give a level finish. Of course, having the right horsepower up front is crucial.

“We like the 5M series – it is very manoeuvrable in the arena and with models up to 105hp is plenty powerful enough, it is one gritty tractor. This latest M specification gives us 16 speeds and the gearing suits the Dragmaster better,” Jim comments, “The hydraulics are also better, giving a lot more feel when using this type of equipment.”

“It also comes with an excellent loader which is invaluable when we are setting up the arenas. The 6230 also comes in handy for events such as the reining Futurity where we use a larger Dragmaster.”

Not one to mince his words, Jim laughs: “I do two events a year where their sponsorship agreements mean that I have to use another brand of tractor – it is a powerful reminder of how bad life could be!”

He also praises the way that John Deere has continued to improve its equipment, much as his own company strives to do. “Small touches such as moving the pto lever to the right hand side make a huge difference. And to see how much the tractors have moved on in general I only have to go home to the farm and sit on the tracklayer!”

With the hopes of some 2000 competitors at the AQHA World Championship Show, not to mention those of the next World Champion at WEG, waiting on him, reliability and back up are crucial to Jim Kiser.

“We can’t afford to have a tractor go down in the arena, but I don’t remember the last time one broke down,” he says simply.

Kiser Inc now has an ongoing partnership with John Deere for the supply of three tractors, and these will clock up 2000 hours per year each on shows alone. For bigger events, he cannot always rely on show managers to provide sufficient additional horsepower when competitions start to line up, but a call to John Deere means that he has a tractor at his disposal the next day.

“The level of customer service is superb – John Deere makes it happen, and then gets back to me to ensure that I’ve got exactly what I want. You can’t put a price on that.”