



An amateur's *dream*

For ambitious amateur event riders, The Mitsubishi Motors Cup is a fantastic opportunity to ride at one of the world's most prestigious locations. *Photos Adam*

Fanthorpe and Kit Houghton Photography

Until six years ago, riding in front of the majestic stately home nestled in the heart of the Badminton estate, was a mere dream for most amateur riders. But in 2010, the most prestigious horse trials in the world opened its doors to Britain's amateur eventers, and the Mitsubishi Motors Cup was born.

Held over two days, the event is made

up of two levels – BE90 and BE100 – with the cross-country courses running not only in front of Badminton House, but also through the infamous Badminton Lake, giving riders a taste of what it must be like to ride over the famous international track.

“Everybody involved in British Eventing (BE) believes that the championships

are a real incentive for amateur-level riders to join BE and qualify for this caliber of competition,” explains Hugh Thomas, event director of the Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials.

“Our aim has always been to give the amateur ride a real flavour of what it's like to compete at the most famous venue in the world.” ▶

Tips from the top

Mitsubishi Motors Cup Ambassador and Your Horse & Country Magazine-sponsored rider Emily King offers her advice for riders heading to this year's event:

- 1 Being a championship event, the course is likely to be more technical and slightly longer, so bear that in mind during your preparations
- 2 You want to finish the cross-country with a good feeling, so make sure you walk the course thoroughly, and put in place a plan for each fence
- 3 Prepare your horse as well as you can and ensure he is fit enough
- 4 Above all, enjoy the experience and try your hardest – you've done exceptionally well just getting to the Mitsubishi Motors Cup, so enjoy every moment



▲ Emily King riding Brookleigh. Photo: Liz Knowler

“It is fantastic how the Mitsubishi Motors Cup has grown over the years to become the pinnacle of amateur-event riders’ ambitions, giving them the opportunity to compete at the prestigious, world-famous Badminton estate”

So how has the event developed over the last six years? “We felt our way a little bit in the beginning, and tried to integrate the event into the existing timetable of the four-star event, so the first year we ran it with the cross-country and showjumping on the Thursday – the first day of the four-star dressage,” explains Hugh.

“While it worked in many ways, there were some international riders who thought that horses thundering around the cross-country affected their dressage tests, so we decided to open the event for an extra day and hold the championships on the Tuesday and Wednesday.

“I was reluctant to have a full extra day because the costs of opening Badminton for an extra day are substantial, and for the first three years, it cost us a lot of money to run the competition.

“But in the last two years, the event has found its niche, and it fits in really well with the overall event. It has a lovely atmosphere and I love the extraordinary age range – from teenagers aged 14 to more senior riders aged 60+!”

During the design process, it was always high on Hugh’s priorities to allow the amateur riders to experience as much of the four-star competition as possible.

“There were a few things that we had to implement if we were ever going to make a real feature of it, and one of those was that we had to run the cross-country course around the park, through the lake and past the house, because that is what Badminton is all about.

“I asked James Willis to design the course – the Willis Brothers build the international course for use here – and James knew what was appropriate for fences at this level. He’s always tried to echo some of the themes that are in that year’s four-star course and it seems to work very well.”



▲ Photo: Adam Fanthorpe

A change of title

Last year, Mitsubishi Motors celebrated its 25th year of sponsorship of Badminton Horse Trials, and it prompted Mitsubishi Motors’ managing director Lance Bradley to come up with a new name for the Grassroots Championships.

“Renaming the Badminton Grassroots Championships the Mitsubishi Motors Cup was a great idea,” adds Hugh. “It was important to give more recognition to the enormous input that Mitsubishi have had to the event as a whole.”

Lance responds: “It is fantastic how the Mitsubishi Motors Cup has grown over the years to become the pinnacle of amateur-event riders’ ambitions, giving them the opportunity to compete at the prestigious, world-famous Badminton estate, which is steeped in eventing history.

“As always, we are really looking forward to welcoming these competitors and their supporters to Badminton for what promises to be two truly memorable days of exciting competition.”

Mitsubishi Motors Brand Ambassador and Olympic event rider Mary King MBE has competed on the hallowed four-star turf on a number of occasions, and believes The Mitsubishi Motors Cup is a



▲ Mitsubishi Motors managing director Lance Bradley and Hugh Thomas, event director at Badminton Horse Trials, in front of the famous lake. Photo: Kit Houghton Photography

great incentive for lower-level event riders.

“As a competition, it’s given a lot of amateur riders a real focus in their competition year,” says Mary. “I give a lot of clinics throughout the year aimed at amateur event riders, and it’s great for them to have such a prestigious competition to aim towards. So many of them have ambitions to get to the finals, and already in six years, it’s become a very established event.”

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2016 BE90 winner, Sophie Walker



▲ Lance Bradley presents the Mitsubishi Motors Cup to Sophie Walker riding Rhapsody.
Photo: Adam Fanthorpe

“I purchased Rhapsody RFW in 2013,” says Sophie. “She is an 11-year-old mare by Woodlander Rockstar and had only done dressage, so I taught her how to jump, and for the last two years we’ve concentrated on eventing.”

“I qualified for the Mitsubishi Motors Cup at Bold Heath BE where I was fourth, and then had two good preparatory runs in the run-up to the event.”

“We arrived at Badminton on the Tuesday, which was very surreal.”

“In the dressage, she gave it her all and did a great test. Just before I went into the showjumping ring, I found out that I was in the lead on 24.8, which made the nerves even worse. Thankfully, she jumped a fantastic clear.”

“It was a really tight turnaround getting ready for the cross-country but it was the best experience ever; she really listened and was keen all the way around, even though it was a tough track.”

“Jumping through the water with all the crowds around you was amazing, and to think the bigger boys were going to be riding around that track a few days

later was just surreal. It was an absolutely incredible feeling and having all my family there to cheer me on made it even more special.”

“It was also the most fabulous prize – as well as a trophy and prize money, Mitsubishi Motors allowed me the opportunity to drive one of their cars for a year which has been incredible. I chose the ASX 5, which I love. I don’t know how I’ll cope when it’s gone!” ▶

How to qualify

There are two levels of the Mitsubishi Motors Cup – BE90 and BE100 – and each has slightly different criteria for qualifying:

BE100

Eligible combinations who finish in the top 20% in BE100 or BE100 Open sections held at BE events from 1st July 2016 to 30th June 2017, will qualify to compete at a BE100 Mitsubishi Motors Regional Final. During August to October 2017 BE100 Regional Finals are held for qualified horses, and are conducted in accordance with the rules for BE100 classes.

BE90

Eligible combinations who finish in the top 10% in BE90 or BE90 Open sections held at BE events from 1st July 2016 and 30th June 2017, will qualify to compete at a BE90 Mitsubishi Motors Regional Final. During August to October 2017, BE90 Regional Finals are held for qualified horses, and are conducted in accordance with the rules for BE90 classes.

■ For more information, visit:
www.mitsubishimotorscup.badminton-horse.co.uk

▼ Sophie Walker in the BE90 Cross Country.
Photo: Kit Houghton Photography



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▲ Katie Hancock riding Kilcandra Rambo Ray receives the Mitsubishi Motors Cup from Lance Bradley. Photo: Kit Houghton Photography

2016 BE100 winner, Katie Hancock

“We bought Riley as a four-year-old from Ireland,” says Katie. “He is a full Irish Draught and a true all-rounder, turning his hoof to a bit of everything.”

“I started eventing him for fun and we qualified for the Mitsubishi Motors Cup the year before, attending the finals in 2015, but it didn’t go quite to plan because I put too much pressure on myself.”

“When we qualified again at Brickly BE the following year, I was determined to go to the Mitsubishi Motors Cup and enjoy it.”

“I came out of the dressage test feeling like I’d done well, but I didn’t want to know the score. I wanted to concentrate on the showjumping without the pressure, but as I cantered round to the first fence, they introduced me over the tannoy and

announced my score of 24 – I nearly fell off. The pressure was on then to jump clear, which thankfully he did.”

“We set off cross-country, got into a good rhythm and he jumped like a superstar. I finished with a seven-point lead, which was just amazing.”

“It’s every girl’s dream to ride at Badminton – you’ve got the big house behind you, the crowds and the big atmosphere, it’s just phenomenal. I don’t think I’ll ever experience anything like it again.”

“The prizes were amazing, and I opted for a Mitsubishi Outlander. It’s truly beautiful and really suits my lifestyle of cruising up the motorway or crossing fields when in the countryside if I’ve swapped four legs for four wheels. I really don’t want to give it back!”



Visit www.mitsubishimotorscup.badminton-horse.co.uk

Catch the *action*

Badminton Horse Trials 2017 Provisional Timetable

The Mitsubishi Motors Cup

Tuesday, May 2

- 9am-5pm – Dressage

Wednesday, May 3

- 9am-5pm – Dressage, show jumping, cross country
- 6pm (approx.) – Presentation of prizes

Main event

Wednesday, May 3

- Gates open 8am – (Tradestands open 10am) (Admission free after 4pm)
- 9am-4.15pm (approx.) – Dubarry
- Burghley Young Event Horse Class (Badminton Park)
- 4.30pm – First Horse Inspection (North Front Badminton House)

Thursday, May 4

- Gates open 8am – (Tradestands open 9am)
- 9am-5pm (approx.) – Dressage
- 12.30pm (approx.) – Dressage display

Friday, May 5

- Gates open 8am – (Tradestands open 9am)
- 9am-5pm (approx.) – Dressage
- 12.30 pm (approx.) – Dressage display
- Approx 5pm to follow Dressage – Stallion display

Saturday, May 6

- Gates open 7am – (Tradestands open 9am)
- 10.45am – Shetland Pony Grand National Display
- World Horse Welfare Display
- 11.30am-5pm – Cross country test

Sunday, May 7

- Gates open 7.30am – Tradestands open 9am)
- 8.30am – Final horse inspection (North Front Badminton House)
- 10am Church Service – Badminton Church
- 11.30am (approx.) – Jumping test (First Part)
- 1.50pm – Band Display
- 2.30pm – Parade of competitors (from Morning Jumping)
- 2.45 pm – Jumping test (Top 20)
- 3.45 pm – Parade of Duke of Beaufort’s Hounds
- Parade of top 20 competitors
- 4pm – Presentation of prizes

Tickets, from daily admission to five-day passes, are available now at www.badminton-horse.co.uk or on 01454 218375