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**AN EVENTS VIABILITY
WORKING GROUP**

is currently being set up.
There'll be more information
in the next issue of *British
Eventing Life* magazine



BE AFFILIATION FEE

The BE Affiliation Fee is a contribution BE organisers pay towards the cost of a variety of services provided by BE, including the BE technical adviser, BE scorer, BE steward and a comprehensive event insurance package



A sport run on

passion



William Buck works full time as a commercial barrister, fitting in management of Frickley Park Horse Trials in his spare time. He does not draw any income for organising the event. Visit the website for more about the event: www.frickleypark.co.uk



Helen West works full time as arena manager for Bicton Arena, which holds three BE fixtures per year – two international and one national. www.bicton-arena.co.uk



Enthusiasm from event organisers mixed with closely managed hidden costs of running events mean that competitors and spectators can enjoy memorable experiences at stunning British venues like Houghton Hall

Entry fees can seem expensive, but what are the realities for organisers and are events even that profitable? *Stephanie Bateman* investigates

“**know competitors don't believe** it, but there aren't many organisers who make a lot of money,” surmises event organiser and equestrian consultant Alec Lochore. “Before I even begin to offset the running costs against any income, 20 per cent of your entry goes straight to George Osborne as VAT, 12 per cent is abandonment insurance and then we have the BE [Affiliation] Fee, plus FEI events require 4.7 per cent of the total prize fund.”

THE TRUE COSTS OF EVENTS

Helen West, who manages Bicton Arena, details the cost of running her April event, which caters to BE90 up to Intermediate and two star level:

Course builders' costs, which include greenery and birch for dressing the cross country fences and also our show jumping course designer
£11,500

Ground jury, dressage and show jumping judges
£3,000

Secretaries
£1,000

Veterinary cover
£3,000

Prize money
£5,800

First aid ambulance cover
£3,200

Horse ambulance
£540

Doctors (two required on all three days)
£200 each per day

Catering
£10,500

Communications
£4,100

Hire of equipment, such as the telehandler and ground aggrigator
£3,000

Toilet hire
£850

Sundry expenses, which included AA signs, flower pots from the garden centre, advertisement stickers
£2,000

Affiliation fees
£5,300

Contractors for extra labour
£6,000

“Our total outgoings came to £64,500, and we brought in £75,000, but that doesn't take into account my time and the overheads of running the operation.”

HOW DOES THE EXPENDITURE COMPARE TO THE EARNINGS?

“We brought in £49,000 from entries, £8,500 from start fees, a further £5,200 from stabling and £10,500 from sponsorships,” Helen explains. “Plus we earn from tradestands, programmes and public entry fees.”

Of course, not every event turns over the same figures. Frickley Park in Yorkshire is a parkland setting event, which runs two events a year.

“One is a two day national event, but the other is now a championship event, so the cost of that is higher,” explains William Buck, joint organiser of Frickley Park. “The championship event costs around £100,000 and the other about £40,000. We aim to break even with the lower level event and only make marginal profits with the championship event.”

Rent of venues is another factor, as Stuart Buntine, who heads up BEDE Events Ltd and organises events around the country, including Oasby (one day event), Hopetoun, Belton and Osberton, explains: “There are a huge number of variations in costs since some events have all their own facilities yet they will have a huge rate bill to cover, while greenfield sites have more infrastructure costs however do not have rateable structures. Some events have a very good rent structure; other higher-profile events have a much bigger rent. These can range from as little as £3,000 to more than £30,000, depending on the event and size. I often look at running events like producing young horses – we often work for a very long time on the belief that they will grow into money; one often does not look at the costs as lots of these are written off into other parts of a business.”

HIDDEN COSTS

Stuart also confirms that introducing fresh ideas also carries huge and hidden costs: “Real-time scoring was vital to adding to the sport. We took the initiative to research this, so a group of us has invested in the region of £100,000 in the development of it – a cost that is not seen by riders,” says Stuart. “Just a small example of a hidden cost that I believe is vital for the future. CCTV and streaming are another example of keys to our future success, but the costs



Equestrian centres such as Bicton have permanent courses and facilities, which saves a huge amount

for this are in excess of £15,000 per event.”

“People attending also do not see the other many hidden costs of security and car parking that can run into tens of thousands for bigger one day events,” he adds.

Unforeseen costs can also affect numbers.

“Weather can affect events or crowds at the bigger events by as much as 50 per cent, and the repair costs spiral out of control. In the past, a wet Oasby can increase my costs in the region of £6,000 to £10,000 by the time you take into account the extra stone, tractors and men for towing, ground repair, re-seeding and compensation for lack of grass for tenant farmers,” explains Stuart.

At the other end of the spectrum, lack of wet weather also carries cost implications, as Helen explains: “If it’s a very dry period, I’ll order in sand for take-offs and landings and irrigate, which also all adds up.”

HOW DO COSTS DIFFER ACROSS EVENTS?

Certain variables can affect the financial potential of events, as Alec explains: “An event’s viability depends a lot on its location, dates and classes. An event with lower level classes in the middle of the country has a good catchment area for entries and similarly an established event like Burnham Market has made money for quite a number of years. Houghton Hall, however, doesn’t make money and is held up by the other profitable events.”

Dates of events can also affect entry numbers.

“Dates can clash, both nationally and internationally, and that can affect numbers,” adds Alec. “But having an open market wouldn’t

be good for the sport because we’d lose peripheral events.”

Parkland settings can be more expensive to run than equestrian centres, as William explains: “Equestrian centres have permanent courses and facilities, which saves a huge amount. Parkland settings are at an automatic disadvantage because of the additional costs we incur and also a lack of income stream – an equestrian centre can run events all year round. BE has to address this because we’re at risk of losing parkland settings due to increasing costs. Events cannot be treated as being equal when they are not.”

HOW DO ORGANISERS KEEP COSTS IN CHECK?

In order to try to save money, Helen took the necessary steps to become a course designer and can now design courses up to two star FEI level.

“It saves us about £2,000 per event,” she says.

“Our builder, Matt Lynch, is able to build up to Novice and then we contract a builder to do the



People attending do not see the many hidden costs





Stuart Buntine,
BEDE Events Ltd




HOW DOES BE HELP?

“BE is well aware of how much it costs to set up an event from scratch,” says BE’s Chief Executive David Holmes. “While some equestrian venues may have facilities already in place, many greenfield sites do not. We have a number of funding options that are available to both new and established events:

 **BE loan** – this is up to £7,000 and for a period of three years with very favourable interest rates.

 **BE development grant** – a grant available to all events, new and established, for up to a maximum of £3,000.

 **Events in their first year** do not get charged the BE Affiliation Fee.

 **Event support fund** – used for when an event has incurred additional costs, such as weather related costs. We have supported events with the repair and re-seeding of a lorry park, adding a stone access to parts of the event site, etc. In 2015 we paid £60,000 to events for development grants and event support.

“BE also has a large stock of ground care machinery, including aerovators and equivators, which are available for hire to BE affiliated events for a very small charge. Plus, BE has three event equipment trailers that include a variety of items that are free to new events in their first two years.

“In terms of abandonment, this is an insurance premium paid per entry that enables competitors to get their entry fee returned. This enables the event to retain the entry fees as they will have substantial costs to still pay having set up the event in the first place.”





Stuart Buntine heads up BEDE Events Ltd, who are the organising team behind Osberton, Hopetoun and Belton Internationals, as well as Oasby Horse Trials. www.bede-events.co.uk



Alec Lochore, event organiser and equestrian consultant, and his event management company Musketeer Events organise International fixtures at Houghton Hall, Burnham Market and Blair Castle, as well as Whitfield. www.musketeer.co.uk



We spend £1,000 per event on simply dressing the fences and putting flowers on them



William Buck,
Frickley Park

Intermediate and FEI classes.”

Volunteers also play a huge part in helping to limit outgoings.

“We work hard to keep our volunteers happy and offer passes to use the facilities here,” says Helen.

Alec agrees: “The whole sport relies on a huge number of volunteers, who give their time for nothing. The sport runs on passion and we’d all do well not to forget that.

“Location also plays a massive part. An event that is central, like Whitfield, means we don’t have to put stables up because people can travel in a day, we don’t have to put up judges in accommodation and have much reduced transport costs of getting our equipment there. The cost of a portacabin is the same at Whitfield, Burnham and Blair, but delivery for the same cabin is £80, £160 and £245, respectively.”

Having multiple events helps gain economy of scale, as explained by Stuart: “We are lucky in that we can share costs across a number of events. Jumps, flags, dressage arenas, etc. are all shared across our events. Also, we have a degree of ‘buying’ power as we negotiate. However, we find that most suppliers are very competitive and work hard to deliver at an affordable price. I am constantly weighing up what I want and what I can afford.”

HOW DO ORGANISERS RETAIN COMPETITORS?

Keeping competitors coming back year on year is key, so what are organisers doing to make this happen?

“Although we don’t offer the highest level of prize money, our CIC classes are significantly better than some other events, and we offer good prizes,” says Helen. “I’m conscious that we are further down the country, so I keep my stabling very cheap at £20 and I am quite particular about the tracks and fence dressing so riders feel they’ve come somewhere a bit special.

“Our dressage arenas are purpose levelled and I make an effort with irrigating.”

William also believes prize money and investing in course design is essential.

“We offer good prize money and invest in the courses constantly so they are as good as they can be,” he says. “We spend £1,000 per event on simply dressing the fences and putting flowers on them just to make the courses look special. This level of investment should be easy for centrally located, popular events, but events in peripheral locations or with high set-up costs cannot afford this and easily lose competitors before spiralling downhill as income evaporates.”

Prize money isn’t the only factor in keeping an event popular for riders, says Stuart: “As an organiser I too want to increase prize money.

It is a key part of the long-term strategy.

However, we must have a strong business to be able to do so and we also have to manage a heap of other expectations. At Belton I spend in excess of £3,750 on an owners’ facility – I could put this into prize money, but then owners, who pay the bills, would be short changed. In order for the sport to be able to offer increased prize money we have to develop a broader base of support and wider following. It is very interesting that at Belton, when the world’s best riders were running across country at the end of the Lycetts Grantham Cup, most of our crowd was on the way home. We have a ‘new’ audience at Belton – in the region of 30 per cent of the crowd are new to the sport and they are there for the complete day out, not just to watch top riders.”

Feedback is key: “We must always understand that riders are our customers. While not always right, they must be listened to as they have very valid issues that we sometimes do not fully understand. I am continually asking riders for feedback and ways we can make their ‘on event’ experience better. At the grassroots level events, good ground, educational courses and efficient events are important, as is friendliness. At the bigger events, like Belton, riders like to be able to perform on a ‘stage’ and we are trying to deliver that in terms of setting, image and crowd size,” adds Stuart. 🐾



A rainy event can increase costs vastly by the time organisers take into account the extra stone, tractors for towing, ground repair, re-seeding and compensation for lack of grass for tenant farmers