



FEATURE

# Behind the scenes at Herning

The World Championships wouldn't be possible without thousands of people working behind the scenes, and **JESSICA MORTON** was one of them.

Without being there, it's hard to imagine the complexities of organising an event the size of the FEI World Championships. I was one of the many volunteers who worked behind the scenes in Herning, Denmark, and was transformed by the experience.

**Jutland is horse country**  
Herning is located in Jutland, a peninsular bordering Germany that's famous for horse breeding. The Blu Hors stud, one of Europe's leading sporthorse breeding facilities, is located nearby, and the annual Danish Warmblood Stallion

Show, held at the same venue as the World Championships, is considered the biggest of its kind in Northern Europe.  
After I arrived on site, I met my colleagues at the accreditation desk. I was a member of the team issuing passes to 500 athletes and the 11,500 partners, vets, grooms, officials, volunteers, and media visiting the games.

**Volunteer perks**  
Volunteer accommodation turned out to be fairly basic, the food was definitely not! Volunteers and staff were provided with a lavish buffet breakfast, and a three course lunch and dinner every day. I think most of us probably left a few kilos heavier - I certainly did!

However, the main perk for volunteers was free access to the field of play, which meant we could watch the world's best equestrian athletes warm up, train and compete whenever we weren't working.

**Clean and green**  
As the biggest equestrian event ever to be held on Danish soil, Herning Council pulled out all the stops to

make the experience unique. The MCH Messecenter is the largest entertainment facility in Scandinavia, and the multitude of warmup and stabling facilities (there was even a horse wellness spa) were much admired and well-used.

As part of a sustainability pledge, the event organising committee and Herning Council agreed to plant 60,000 trees when the games ended, a permanent legacy for future generations to enjoy. And while remaining respectful of the

environment, the Equipark, the Jyske Bank Boxen and BB Horse arenas, and the Stutteri Ask Stadium were decorated with stunning purple floral creations and live plants.

Other eco-friendly initiatives included a free shuttle bus between the accommodation village and venue, liaison with the catering team to ensure efficient waste management and the use of compostable plates and utensils, and digital schedules instead of printed. Even the Stutteri Ask Stadium's special footing was repurposed at the end of the games and will be used by local riding centers for years to come.



**FACING PAGE:** After five faultless rounds, Sweden's Henrik von Eckermann and King Edward had earned their individual win (Image © FEI/Leanjo de Koster).  
**ABOVE:** A jubilant Danish dressage team celebrate before an equally ecstatic home crowd (Image © FEI/Leanjo de Koster).  
**LEFT:** The accreditation desk team issued passes to 500 athletes and 11,500 vets, grooms, officials, volunteers, media and other guests (Image by Jessica Morton).



Charlotte Fry (GBR) and Giamourdale won individual dressage gold with a sensational Grand Prix Special freestyle test (Image © FEI/Leanjo de Koster).

### Groom gratitude

Groom gratitude was a big deal at Herring. Each groom was mentioned by name on the arena information screen and formally included in prize-giving ceremonies. The grooms also had their own lounge within the heavily guarded stable area, where they could relax and enjoy a meal.

### Front desk reflections

I worked with a wonderful team of Danes and Swedes, who tirelessly translated Danish into English for me. The job itself was great fun, and I had a wonderful time assisting guests, athletes, officials, and wide-eyed new arrivals. There were occasional dramas, mostly caused by flight cancellations, COVID, or missing

luggage – but everyone was always ready to find a solution.

Many of the most interesting people I met were fellow volunteers, some of whom came from as far afield as New Zealand and Argentina. Many were equestrian athletes themselves, or worked as stewards and officials back home. There were vets and animal behavioralists, as well as many locals who wanted to do their bit to ensure the event was a success.

### The highs and lows

I was delighted to be able to cheer on the dressage team from New Zealand (my home country) and then the vaulting, show jumping and para dressage teams from Italy, my adopted country.

And there were plenty of highs: Henrik von Eckermann with his fantastic King Edward was one of only two combinations to make it through all five rounds without dropping a pole; Latvia's Rihards Snikus snared the country's first ever equestrian gold medal; and Lottie Fry's freestyle test left everyone in awe. But for me, nothing beat the collective euphoria of Denmark winning team gold on home soil.

Sadly, there were also some gut-wrenching lows: André Thieme's show jumping fall robbed his team of a medal; and the elimination of Gaylene Lennard and Jax Johnson, who had worked so hard to get to Denmark, marked the end of New Zealand's hopes of qualifying a team for the 2024 Olympics. Both Frederic Wandres and Mary Hanna had to withdraw their horses due to injury, and Japanese rider Akane Kuroki made a last-minute COVID withdrawal.

### Stage two is coming

I was so grateful to be part of this exciting and exceptionally well organised event. Next up, stage two of the World Championships (eventing and driving) at Pratoni del Vivaro near Rome. Stay tuned for the details next month.

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