

WILLIAM FOX-PITT SADDLE UP

He credits his horses for bringing him success, but William Fox-Pitt is the man who gets them in shape. *Sport* spoke to him ahead of this weekend's Badminton Horse Trials



THREE'S A CHARM

"At the moment, I've got three horses to choose from for Badminton – Seacoke, Cool Mountain and Navigator. I just won it in 2006 on Tamarillo, so I'd very much like to win it again. I know it's not a European or World Championships, but it is a championship in its own right, in a different sort of way. So I certainly head to Badminton every year with a fair amount of excitement and apprehension."

OLYMPIC HORSE

"Preparation for London 2012 is going well, but there's still plenty of time for things to go wrong. I'm lucky to have a strong team of horses in contention for the Games, because the pressure of going to an Olympics is enormous enough without piling all your hopes on just one horse. We'll see who comes out on top this season; who puts their nose in front and looks like they will be my best chance."

NO GOLDS, NO GLORY

"It would matter to me enormously if I was to finish my career without an Olympic gold medal. I've been fortunate to compete at three Olympic Games, but so far without individual success – and even the team success we've had has not been what we hoped for. At the last Games in 2008 we underperformed, just didn't do well enough. So I'm excited about entering the London Olympics, and hopefully being able to put the record straight."

HOW MANY HORSES DOES IT TAKE...

"...to find an Olympic champion? Well, in order to have one good horse you need to have several coming through, so you end up with a stable of horses. I manage around 20 on a daily basis, as well as a team of people who work with them. So there's a lot of organising, and a lot of riding. I spend time training and educating the horses that maybe aren't at the top level yet. So I'll often ride for eight hours a day, on between eight and 12 different horses."

THE END IS NEIGH

"I'm 42 now and riding a number of horses, which is very much all-consuming. Depending on how it goes in London – if I get to go to London – I would imagine that I'll cut back on numbers after the Games. I don't think I'll give up them, just focus more on the top horses I have. But it'll hinge on how London goes and how exciting my team of horses is looking. I'd say it's unlikely that I'll carry on to 2016, but who knows?"

EVENTING BASICS

Testing rider and horse across three disciplines – dressage, cross country and show jumping – eventing is said to be the ultimate equestrian test.

DRESSAGE

The dressage test is usually flat. A French term, it translates roughly to 'training' and is primarily about illustrating harmony between horse and rider. At Badminton, riders must complete a test of 20 movements between markers in a dressage area. Judges sit at different sides of the arena, awarding marks and implementing penalties.

CROSS COUNTRY

Essentially an endurance test, the Badminton cross-country course contains 45 'jumping efforts' that must be completed as quickly and accurately as possible. The rules of Badminton dictate that an average speed of 570 metres per minute must be maintained, and a maximum time limit is imposed. Exceeding it leads to automatic elimination. No messing.

SHOWJUMPING

Jumps at Badminton are up to 1.25m high and as wide as 1.30m, with riders required to clear them cleanly and swiftly. Displacing one of the delicately balanced fences incurs a penalty, as does jumping over fences in the wrong order. They're incredibly busy, these judges.

Badminton is the first leg of this year's HGBG FEI Classics. For details on this and live info from Badminton, download the free Badminton App.

