

## Gearing up for 2012

Parklane Hawk, William Fox-Pitt's 2011 Burghley winner, sizes up his audience with genuine fascination. Having just been put through his paces in front of the gathered media, the 12-year-old gelding now stands at the side of the arena, transfixed by the clicking camera shutters.

"He's wondering what on earth all these people are doing pointing cameras at him in his own back garden," laughs William, who has opened up his yard, Wood Lane Stables, for a BEF media day.

Catherine Witt's Parklane Hawk was brought back into work at the end of November, along with several of his stablemates.

"Although it's important to treat this season like any other, we are starting work a bit earlier than usual," explains William. "We don't normally bring the more established horses back until Christmas time, and I usually use the first couple of competitions as schooling outings and still will, but this year we've got to get down to business sooner rather than later."

With London just five months away, William is in an enviable position. Not only does he have a clutch of talented horses qualified to take part in the Games, but any one of them could be a real medal contender.

Aside from Parklane Hawk, he is also earmarking the Fox-Pitt Eventing Partnership's Oslo and Judy and Jeremy Skinner's Lionheart, who →

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With the London Olympics just around the corner, *Ellie Hughes* visits **William Fox-Pitt's** Dorset yard to find out how he is gearing up for the great Event



William and Parklane Hawk

finished first and third at Pau last year, as his potential 'A-list' partners.

"In the back of my mind, I thought that London might have come a year too soon for the three of them," he admits, "but they all came out at the end of last season, proved they are four-star horses and went incredibly well. They are going to have to do that again."

William confirmed that he will be without his 'banker' horse, Cool Mountain, this year. Teresa Stopford Sackville's Individual Silver and Team Gold Medal winner from the Kentucky World Equestrian Games in 2010 is currently sidelined with a tendon injury, sustained while competing at the European Championships in Luhmühlen last autumn.

"It is particularly sad to have Cool Mountain off this year," he says. "He has done incredibly well and he was the horse I thought I'd be riding."

William, in common with many riders, predicts that Greenwich will require a very special horse.

"A lot of people feel that riders who ran their potential Olympic horses in the Test Event last year may be at an advantage as they were able to get a better feel for how that horse handled the terrain," he says. "They might be right."

Finding suitable preparation runs in the lead-up to the Games will be the key, William believes.

"I think it's important to target specific Events for preparation – those with similarly testing conditions to Greenwich of which there aren't many."

All being well, William is planning to run two horses at Badminton and two at Kentucky this spring.

William credits much of his success to the huge support from his team, in particular Jackie Potts (below) who is now in her twentieth year of working with William. Jackie is not only an invaluable member of William's team but is highly regarded by the British squad due to her experience and reliability.

“Riders who ran their potential Olympic horses in the Test Event may be at an advantage”

Below: William's long standing groom, Jackie Potts; Below left: William's impressive rosette and medal collection



Behind the scenes Hannah Vowles (left) and Alice Plunkett, the Fox-Pitt team get organised



William and his wife, racing journalist Alice Plunkett



### Team Fox-Pitt essentials



**A tailor-made stable block** William's yard is arranged in blocks of six or so stables: "Every horse is placed in a box depending on his individual preferences, whether he likes company, an outside view, etc."

**Chickens** Wood Lane Stables has a resident flock: "they're very therapeutic for humans and horses – and good for the youngsters to get used to".

**The Cub Cadet** This all-terrain vehicle is used all day every day: "we use it for poo-picking, carting hay to the fields, moving jumps and everything in between".

**The office** The large, purpose-built office and lounge, overlooking the outdoor arena, has multiple uses: "it's a luxury rather than a necessity, but we use it for all sorts of things – from hosting parties to playing ping pong".

**Musto and Ariat gear** Staple parts of William's wardrobe: "warm and wet weather gear is essential and I couldn't do without my Musto and Ariat kit".

“It’s very important that we make a plan for each horse that suits them,” says William. “Our first task is to do a good enough job in the spring to be selected.”

Musing over the selection process, William believes that having five members in a team with the best three scores to count (rather than four and counting three, as is the case at other championship Events) is likely to add a different dynamic to the competition.

“We’re going to need five horses that are very good in all three phases,” he says. “We need to be up there with the Germans after the dressage. I would like to think that all the combinations chosen for the team will have a chance of winning an Individual Medal.”

All being well, this man will be Greenwich-bound to show the world exactly what he – and his team-mates – are capable of. 🐾



William and his colourful array of rosettes

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William practising dressage for the local and national media

William and Parklane Hawk





### Around the yard

**Clockwise from top:**  
 All William's horses spend about 40 minutes a day on the horsewalker; you can never have too many shoes: the tack room contains dozens of spare sets for emergencies; William's impressive bit collection; each horse has its weekly work schedule mapped out on a wall chart; getting Parklane Hawk ready for exercise

