



THE MILLERTON NEWS

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Spectators gather at last year's Millbrook Horse Trials at Coole Park Farm in Amenia.



Tara Kelly tells us about horse country

Sport for Horses, Riders, Spectators, Too

Horse country. That's Millbrook in New York. Bucolic. Lovely. If you drive the winding roads lined with split-rail horse fencing and take note of all the horses grazing in the fields, you might almost think they were there for your scenic enjoyment. But many of these animals are talented athletes and can be found competing in any number of local horse shows with national appeal. The sport of eventing in which the same horse and rider team must excel in three different disciplines — dressage, cross-country jumping and stadium jumping — tests the horse and rider in a unique way, but also provides incredible sport for spectators. And July and August in Millbrook is a prime time for eventing.

Fitch's Corner Horse Trials takes place July 24 and 25, followed by the Millbrook Horse Trials on Aug. 5, 6, 7, and 8. While both events are horse trials, from the spectator's point of view, they couldn't be more different. Fitch's Corner takes place at the farm of Fernanda Kellogg. She is a long-time equestrian; fox hunting with the Millbrook Hunt and eventing at the novice level for years. But she never rides at her own event. There is simply too much to do. Fitch's Corner runs over two days and in that time more than 250 riders will take on the challenging course, competing at different levels.

But that is hardly all. Fitch's Corner is a big society event; photographer Bill Cunningham from The New York Times is always on hand to document the swells who show up for the Spectator Luncheon on Sunday. There is Fitch's Marketplace, where 40 vendors will set up under the big-top tent. A rider can find a replacement for a bit of gear they broke or forgot to pack, but spectators love to shop in the Millbrook countryside. There is a classic car show, which invariably entertains the sons and husbands who've been dragged along for the afternoon. And The Blue Jean Ball finds people of many different generations kicking up their heels on Saturday night. But all this fabulousness has another benefit too. Fitch's Corner Horse Trials is a fund-

raiser for the Millbrook Volunteer Fire Department. Kellogg said, "It was a simple idea at the beginning. If I fell off my horse, who do we call? The Millbrook squad." Fitch's Corner started 17 years ago when Kellogg's daughter, 16 years old at the time, was begging her mom to let her spend the summer in Millbrook. Kellogg was working in the city — she is the president of Tiffany & Co. Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the famed jewelry house — so she made a deal with her daughter. If she found a job, mom would allow it. Fernanda the younger proposed running a horse trials and she would be the show secretary. That year they ran one division, novice, and had 60 horses competing.

But from the very start, they have had some of the biggest names in the business working with them. Brian O'Connor (Olympian David O'Connor's brother) was the announcer and still is. Eric Bull, an internationally known course designer and builder, has been in charge of the course since the start. Kellogg is astute, and savvy, a marketing genius and her event has a caché that elevates it beyond the sporting world, but the one thing she cannot control is the weather. And that has often added an interest-

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Photos: Tara Kelly



A competitor takes a turn around the show jumps at the Fitch's Corner Horse Trials in 2009.

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... Nothing Interferes With These Horse Trials



*New York
Times
photographer
Bill Cunningham
captures
the action at
the Fitch's
Corner Horse
Trials.*

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ing element. The first year a huge rainstorm in the afternoon wiped out the event. Just two years ago, the weather afflicted one of the electric transformers which blew up in a firestorm of sparks, and the big-top tent threatened to collapse right next to the stadium jumping. But Kellogg is imperturbable in the face of disaster and though the weather has gotten a little dicey the show always goes on.

Though there are some high-profile men competing at the upper levels, women seem to dominate both the ranks of competitors and definitely the organizational teams behind the events. The Millbrook Horse Trials, which has run on and off for two decades, is celebrating its 10th year at Coole Park Farm, organized by Louise Meryman and Nancy Hathaway. Meryman is a world-class competitor (she was short-listed for the Olympic team for a number of years), and Hathaway is a foxhunter turned eventer, who "dabbled in a little bit of show-jumping."