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INSIDE THE MARYLAND 5 STAR

PHILLIP DUTTON: Master a Drop Fence

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5 STAR PREVIEW

One of just seven CCI5 events worldwide, competitors and spectators are looking forward to the inaugural Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill this October.*

BY JULIA MURPHY



Lauren Nicholson and Vermiculus tackle cross country at the Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill Test Event in August 2020.



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▶ Phillip Dutton and Fernhill Singapore test the new show-jumping arena at the Fair Hill Special Event Zone.

A

newly designed cross-country course, the ability to shop while being right next to the competition, three tailgating fields and a food festival. Those are just a few of the highlights that will greet visitors at the inaugural Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill in Elkton, Maryland, this fall.

To be held at the newly constructed Fair Hill Special

entertainment will take place in the heart of the competition, so spectators won't miss a beat.

"Certainly, there will be equine specific tack shops, but there will also be retail vendors for anyone who just wants to come out and see some really unique retail offerings," Newman said. "What will make it really special, too, is the new Fair Hill Special Event Zone has created an infield opportunity where we'll have a horseshoe of retail vendors for people to be able to shop at while also being right next to the competition."

As for the competition, exhibitors will be able to watch Olympians coming from Tokyo to participate in the five-star. Newman pointed out, "It's a great chance to see some amazing role models and Olympic level competitors right here in America."

"We've got something special here in Maryland, and we hope that the Maryland 5 Star becomes a platform to showcase that."

— Jeff Newman

Event Zone, the event will feature riders competing at the top of the sport to challenge the prestigious CCI5* event from October 14-17. "It's going to be a breath of fresh air coming off a very difficult 2020," said Jeff Newman, president and CEO of the Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill. "In addition to that, there are only seven of these five-star level events in the world. So spectators are going to see something that only seven places in the world can witness,

and that's the very best in the sport of eventing."

A Three-Day Event for Everyone

In addition to hosting a full weekend of five-star competition, the event will also offer a variety of activities and services for visitors including a Beer, Wine and Spirits Showcase; the Maryland Fresh Food Fest; and a dog daycare area from Kong Equine. The family-friendly

The Second of Its Kind

Until now, eventers had only one opportunity to compete at the five-star level in the United States at the Land Rover Kentucky Three-Day Event each spring. With the addition of the Maryland 5 Star



▲ A rendering of the Fair Hill Special Event Zone.

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at Fair Hill, riders will have the chance to compete at the top level without having to travel overseas. “It gives a better opportunity for the training schedules and qualification schedules of our U.S. horses that aren’t quite ready to do the five-star in the spring. Now, they have five-star in the fall,” said Mary Coldren, competition director of the Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill.

And the riders have a brand new, state-of-the-art facility to do so. The Fair Hill Special Event Zone is comparable to some of the best equestrian facilities in the world. In addition to being named a designated CCI5* eventing venue, the 5,656-acre property includes a new Ian Stark-designed cross-country course, new dressage and show-jumping arenas, as well as upgrades to Fair Hill’s historic turf course.

“The facility there is unbelievable,”

said Olympian Boyd Martin, who will be competing at the Maryland 5 Star. “The topography for the cross-country is beautiful, and the new rings for the dressage and stadium are as good as anywhere in the world.”

Furthermore, riders believe that having two five-star events in the United

“... the new rings for the dressage and stadium are as good as anywhere in the world.”

— Boyd Martin

States will boost the country to the forefront of eventing competition. “It really makes America one of the horse centers of three-day eventing. To have two five-stars here in the States really puts America on the map as being one of the leading countries for eventing,” Martin said.

A Rich History

The state of Maryland has a rich equine history. According to Newman, the horse industry in Maryland has a \$2.1 billion economic impact for the state and provides jobs for 28,000 people. “Maryland has the most horses per square mile than any other state. We’ve

heard that 52% of Marylanders consider themselves horse enthusiasts,” remarked Newman. “The event is something that provides another opportunity for Maryland to celebrate its rich history.”

Fair Hill International and now the Maryland 5 Star, are just two examples of major equine events in the state of Maryland. It’s also home to the Preakness Stakes, the Maryland Million and the Fair Hill Races.

“To have the event in Maryland, which is really the center of many horse



▲ An aerial photo of the Fair Hill Special Event Zone, showing the dressage and jumping competition and warm-up arenas.

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sports—not only eventing but racing and jumping and dressage—and to have a world-class facility built there, is going to make this region even stronger in horse sports,” Martin said.

Moreover, these events garner tremendous volunteer support and attract thousands of spectators, which stimulates the state economy. “We hope the event will be a stimulus for Northeast Maryland and going into Delaware. The event provides guests for hotels, it provides local businesses the opportunity to be at the event, and we encourage people to visit Cecil County and all that it has to offer,” Newman said.

Old Traditions, New Memories

How will the Maryland 5 Star differ from its antecedent, the Fair Hill International? Some aspects will be the same, but others will be brand new. The competition itself at the Maryland 5 Star will be a caliber that surpasses previous Fair Hill International three-day events. And the freshly minted cross-country course will pose challenges that

competitors have never seen before, and the layout of the facility has changed.

“Exhibitors are going to see a little bit different look overall with it being in the Special Event Zone in the infield,” Coldren said. “All of the vendors, the retail, everything’s been expanded and there will be lots more to look at and see and do.”

But the parts of Fair Hill that competitors and spectators alike have loved for three decades haven’t changed. “The cross-country course itself, at the five-star level, is going to be a more difficult and challenging course,” Coldren acknowledged. “But at the same time, you’re going to see a lot of the same faces who have been around for 30 years running the Fair Hill International.”

Newman added, “What people have seen for 30 years of Fair Hill International is great competition and a great family event that will continue.”

One of the most treasured traditions that will not be changed but improved is the tailgating on cross-country day. Martin commented that he thinks the

slight change in venue from Fair Hill will make cross-country “more spectator friendly.”

At the Maryland 5 Star, there will be tailgating options in each of the three different fields of the cross-country course. One field will have the start and finish, the second will have some of the most technical jobs for horse and rider combinations and the third will have the water complexes.

“Tailgating is a huge part of cross country, and we can’t wait to be able to have people experience that for the first time on this new course,” Newman said.

Looking Forward to October

The stage is set for the inaugural year for the Maryland 5 Star. Competitors and spectators alike will experience the beginning of a new dynasty of eventing competition in America at the pinnacle level of the sport.

“We’ve got something special here in Maryland, and we hope that the Maryland 5 Star becomes a platform to showcase that,” Newman concluded. 🏆

For more information about the Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill and to purchase tickets, visit maryland5star.us. Follow Practical Horseman’s coverage of the inaugural Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill on Facebook and Instagram with *Mane ‘n Tail*, *Cowboy Magic* and *Exhibitor’s* and at practicalhorsemanmag.com/competitions/2021-maryland-5-star-at-fair-hill.



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Fresh Food Fest & Show Jumping



Master the Drop With A Bending Line to a Narrow Fence

Two-time Olympic gold medalist Phillip Dutton talks you through every step of this common—but tricky—cross-country question.

Most cross-country courses these days ask us to take jumps off turns. A typical version of such a question, one you may encounter from Novice level on up, is a drop—where your horse has to jump down from one level to a lower one—followed by a fairly short, bending line to a narrow fence. This means you have only a few seconds after the drop to reestablish your position, focus your horse on where he’s going and make sure he keeps his energy forward through the turn.

In this article, I’ll walk you through the steps to ride such a combination successfully.

Who Can Do It

You want to be skilled at slipping your reins through your fingers so your horse can lower his head and neck off the drop. And then be sure you can smoothly gather them up again on landing. You also need to be able to brace yourself against the forward pull of gravity so you’re set up for a good, instantly effective position on landing. A strong lower leg is essential, as is the ability to lean back as he drops forward and down.

Also, before attempting this exercise make sure your horse knows the following:

- **How to take the correct lead on landing.** It will make the bending line ride much smoother. School this skill by doing something as simple as riding a figure-eight at the canter over a low jump and asking your horse to land on the correct lead. Don’t panic if your horse lands off the drop on the wrong lead. He may not be quite as balanced going to the narrow fence, but it doesn’t mean he won’t clear it. Let’s face it, there’s a certain percentage of every course that isn’t going to come up ideally. Adapting to the cards you’ve been dealt is a big part of being a cross-country rider.
- **How to come forward through a turn.** A basic and simple flat exercise for teaching this skill is to ride hundreds of turns using the time-honored “inside leg to

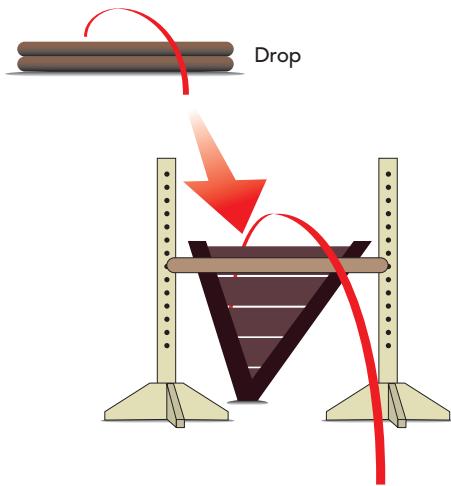
outside rein” concept. Rather than trying to pull your horse around the turn with the inside rein—which will make him “freeze up” in his mouth, meaning he’ll fight or resist you, or bulge into his outside shoulder—you want to push him out with your inside leg to your outside rein, which will act as a wall that holds his shoulder underneath him and pushes it around so he turns in balance.

- **How to jump a narrow fence.** Set up a fence that is 4 to 6 feet wide in your

Sit back, get your eye on the fence, keep a short, collected, bouncy canter and allow him to jump the fence quietly.

arena. If you have a green horse, you can use poles set in a “v” to help him understand the question, with one end of each pole sitting on top of the jump rail and angled out to the sides so it makes a v-shape. This will help funnel the horse to the narrow end and over the jump. As you school it, remember that an open, or longer, stride will

Seven-time Olympian Phillip Dutton grew up with horses on his family’s sheep and wheat farm in New South Wales, Australia. He moved to the United States in 1991 to pursue an eventing career and to prepare for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, where he rode on Australia’s gold medal-winning team. In total, Dutton represented Australia in three Olympics and four World Championships, and after becoming a U.S. citizen in 2006, Dutton competed in two Pan American Games, four World Championships and four Olympics, including earning an individual bronze medal with Mighty Nice in the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Dutton, who has won the U.S. Eventing Association Leading Rider of the Year 13 times, dedicates much of his time to coaching other riders. He and his wife, Evie, own, manage and train out of True Prospect Farm in West Grove, Pennsylvania, and Red Oak Farm in Aiken, South Carolina.



reduce adjustability and increase the likelihood of your horse running past the obstacle. Sit back, get your eye on the fence, keep a short, collected, bouncy canter and allow him to jump the fence quietly.

Tips for Success

- **Collect the canter coming to the drop.** If you're going too fast, your horse will feel rushed. He'll land flat-footed—unbalanced and lacking impulsion—and get scared. Yes, he has to be brave, but raw speed won't teach him that. A short, bouncy canter will give him confidence by providing time to read the drop, analyze the situation and make a nice, soft, easy jump and landing.
- **Reorganize quickly.** As soon as you land, you almost have to reflexively rebalance and have your eye—and your horse's—on the narrow fence.
- **Get your horse balanced and correctly bent so you can guide him smoothly through the turn.** It's never a positive situation when you land and try to pull or haul a horse around. He'll just freeze up in his mouth and that resistance will make him lose so much power and energy coming to the jump that he could run out or stop.
- **Steer accurately to the fence.** Most narrow jumps are inverted triangles

about 3 feet wide at the top. It's not very tall, so it won't take a lot of power or jumping effort, but because it's narrow and has no ground line, your horse won't know he has to zero in on it. A big piece of your riding and communication will be to help him see it as an obstacle to be jumped. That's the only way he'll focus on it and start working out how to get to the other side. Again, at least part of doing that involves a short, bouncy canter stride instead of a long, aggressive one.

Setup

Set a narrow fence five strides (about 70 feet) on a left bending line from the drop. The height of the narrow fence will depend on the level of you and your horse. If you're riding at Novice or Training level, set it to 2-foot-6. If you are riding Preliminary or above, 3-foot or 3-foot-6 will work.

How to Ride the Exercise

The Drop

1 Approach the drop at the canter, keeping your horse engaged and energetic so he has confidence-building time to analyze the picture and the job he has to do. Keep your leg at the girth and a light contact to encourage him to stay in a nice package by saying, "Keep coming forward to the drop without going faster." Prepare yourself for the drop by staying back with your upper body and sitting a bit heavy in your seat.

2 At the edge of the drop, start slipping the reins to give your horse freedom to use his head and neck. Sit a little defensively because this is the point when a horse may suddenly say, "Oh my gosh, I can't do this." If you are sitting too far forward, he could wheel left or right. Instead, keep him in front of you with your position back, leg on and spur resting on his side to catch any hint of resistance.

3 Stay centered as your horse starts to jump down. If you were to lean one way or another to compensate for a slightly unbalanced jump, you would lose precious seconds recovering your position after landing. Tell him what's coming next by looking at the middle of the top edge of the narrow fence, which also allows you to plan a bending line and keep your horse on it.

4 As your horse's feet are about to touch down, give him as much freedom with the reins as you can while still maintaining contact. Keep your eye ahead and to the left where you need to go. Your lower leg should be quite forward at this point, ready to brace against the force of the landing.

5 As your horse's front legs land and his head and shoulders are quite down in front of you, continue to stay back and allow him as much as rein through your hand as he needs to reach and stretch. From this position, you'll be ready to turn and focus him on the upcoming narrow fence as soon as his hind legs touch down.

The Recovery

6 As you start the left turn to the narrow fence, your priority is to get your horse packaged into a balanced canter without having him freeze up and resist in his mouth. Make sure your horse is balanced and focused on the jump.

The Narrow Fence

7 In the last stride before the narrow fence, your horse should be straight, balanced, relaxed and confident in what he's doing.

8 If you were successful in keeping him balanced and collected and focused on the jump, he should rock back and jump it neatly and correctly.

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