

Interview with Hugh Thomas
Director and Course Designer
Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials

Interviewer: Melvin H. Cox – SportsQuest International
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00:23:34:12

Melvin Cox:

I'd like to congratulate you on an absolutely superb 2003
Badminton, Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials.

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Hugh Thomas:

Thank you!

00:23:42:08

Melvin Cox:

Besides the obvious, the rain and the mud, etc. What were the
biggest challenges in staging this year's event?

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Hugh Thomas:

Well, actually the biggest challenges this year have been the
weather because we had this incredibly dry, arid almost, run-up to
the competition, no rain for six weeks, then about a week, ten days
ago now, it started to rain. We had quite a lot of rain. We wanted
it, but then eventually we got too much. I mean, this is Britain, this

is April and May and its all very unpredictable. But, to be honest, that has been the biggest problem, because uh, trying in this sort of outdoor natural sport, we, we want to have decent conditions. We actually had quite reasonable conditions for the horses in the end...

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Melvin Cox:

Yes!

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Hugh Thomas:

...but not so good for the spectators, certainly by yesterday afternoon. That, that's been the big problem, I mean overall, we'll look back on it as, probably I'll look back in a few year's time at the 2003 Badminton, you know, as the driest and wettest all put together.

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Melvin Cox:

Now, there were several major changes made to the course this year. What worked, and what did not work?

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Hugh Thomas:

This was the first time we'd been around the course in this direction with the arena start, so in that sense it was quite new and I think the first, the first half of the course worked really well as far as I was concerned. All the new Huntsman's Close stuff was very interesting. I think that worked well, down through the Sunken Road, down to the, uh, the Hunt Kennels. Very interesting, caused much less trouble than last year, with virtually the same fence. The

boys and girls had learned how to do it, and that's, that's how good they are now days...

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Melvin Cox:

It's a tricky corner...

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Hugh Thomas:

...and one of the fences, actually, I was very pleased about was the Vicarage Vee, new fence in front of it, big corner. Um, I thought that jumped quite well. A lot of them went on, um, on four strides, we built it for five, that doesn't matter, that's what it's for. I was interested at the Bank that quite a few horses stopped, where we haven't had many problems for a few years, it's the fifth or sixth year that I've used it. I think that's because there was no alternative, and I don't regret that.

My new Puzzle Fence, worked very well for half or two thirds of the day. Ah, they mostly jumped it one way, but they'd all thought it was very difficult, and a lot of people jumped it very well, then of, then the weather and having to deal with the ground certainly conspired against us, and we had to take it out. I'm sure that's the right decision.

Um, I think the bounce into the lake was a little bit longer than I would build it next time. I think if you watch a lot of horses jump that, I would, I think it would have ridden better if it was a couple of feet shorter. I think it would have rewarded the agile horses, but we'd have seen one or two less trying to put a stride in and not jumping it as well as I would like to see.

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Melvin Cox:

Ummm!

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Hugh Thomas:

Um, and I've got to say that I was really pleased with the Staircase Fence. I think that worked very well. What I liked, what I from a course designer's point of view, late on the course I wanted them to take a decision that they could only go left over a difficult fence, if they were trying to do the time, but only if they had a really fit fresh horse. I think that worked quite well actually. Essentially, the people who went the longer route, didn't get inside the time, and the ones who went the short route did. But it was a bit of a gamble, so yeah... Overall, I was quite pleased it. As I say, the, the Lake Fence I would do differently again, and I would redesign the Puzzle. I would redesign, not, not, not the question, but I would redesign the ditch, and the way I presented it to the horses.

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Melvin Cox:

Very good! What can we expect next year?

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Hugh Thomas:

Well, next year, we'll, it will be interesting. I will change the direction again, as far as the cross-country course is concerned. So, but that won't be unfamiliar, so we will go back onto the track, to the line that we had in 2002. I haven't given it too much thought, but sort of last year, 2002, is fairly fresh in my memory. Ah, rode quite easily last year. So you can look for 2002, just smartened up a bit!

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Melvin Cox:

One final question. Obviously, the Olympic Games format has changed. Uuh, Badminton, Lexington and the other four stars have held the, what we've known as the traditional Three-Day Event. Is the Three-Day Event in any danger of going away? I know there's been quite a bit of controversy about this.

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Hugh Thomas:

I think it's under discussion. I don't yet know whether it's controversial, but it's certainly under discussion. Though, I have to tell you that virtually everybody I meet, who's seriously involved in the sport wants the traditional Three-Day Event to carry on. And we, we will certainly carry on for the foreseeable future. I hope that there will continue to be major international challenges at the traditional format, with the steeplechase format. If the Olympic Games is different, I don't mind that. I actually support the FEI decision to do that. I think that is the right thing to do when the sport goes to places that aren't really set up for equestrian sports. It's a lot cheaper to run, and I think that's really good. But when we go for World Championships and so on, to places that are set

up for equestrian sports, let's have the thing that is still the real test
of horse and rider.

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Melvin Cox:

Thank you again. And, Hugh, congratulations on a really truly outstanding event.

00:28:53:17

Hugh Thomas:

Thanks a lot.

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Melvin Cox:

Thank you for taking time to visit with us.

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Hugh Thomas:

OK!

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