

# Taking the Reins in Rio

**You're the driver of a huge semitrailer loaded with tons of horse feed. About 100 feet in front of you are the stables where horses will wake up tomorrow morning, whinnying their hunger. In between your truck and the barns is a tall chain-link fence. The gate is locked, and the security guard indicates the last loads for that day have been accepted. What do you do?**

The 2007 Pan American Games were held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in July. Beginning in 1951, this competition has been held every four years for athletes from any nation in the Americas. Among this year's 5500 participating athletes from 42 countries were 16 equestrian competitors representing the United States in three disciplines: dressage, eventing, and jumping.

Just as human athletes prepare for a competition by following a careful program of exercise, rest, and diet, so too must an equine athlete adhere to a strict management scheme in the months leading up to an event. A schedule of hoof trimming and shoeing, dental care, vaccinations, and the selection and fitting of tack must be planned and carried out well before the competition date. Riders also need to establish an exercise regimen that will keep their



Mark Llewellyn

horses in fit body condition without overstressing muscles and bones to the point of injury or extreme fatigue.

One of the most important aspects of a horse's care is his diet. Horses are extremely sensitive to variations in the types or amounts of hay and grain they are given. Sudden changes greatly increase the risk of problems such as colic, gastric ulcers, and laminitis. Ideally, any change should be made gradually over a period of several days so that the horse's digestive system can adapt to the new feed. Given the fact that elite equine athletes are often under some amount of stress due to stalling, travel, and excitement, it is imperative to minimize the impact of dietary fluctuations. This usually involves making changes, if any are necessary, as far before the competition as possible, allowing the horse to finish his period of fitting and preparation and carrying an unvaried dietary plan into and through the event. However, this simple concept can be frustratingly difficult to follow!

### **KER Lends a Hand**

Beginning with the summer Olympic Games in 1996, Kentucky Equine Research (KER) has held the contract for supplying all horse feed and hay to a range of top-level international events, with the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen, Germany being one of the most recent. For the Pan American Games, the organizing committee set in place a regulation that all feed supplied to the competitors had to have been manufac-

tured in Brazil, so it looked as though KER's extensive experience at this level would not be utilized.

The official feed supplier, a French firm with a plant in Brazil, offered a range of feed and hay, but the selection did not include products closely aligned with what some riders wanted. Several members of the American and Canadian equestrian teams realized that no feed available under this rule would be comparable to the feed products on which their horses had been training. Because they would not be able to take familiar feeds with them to Brazil, they approached KER to ask for assistance. Mike Lennox, KER's formulation specialist and international business facilitator, had a ready answer: "Of course we can help!"

Lennox immediately began to plan and implement the complicated logistics of providing the teams with Brazilian-manufactured products. First, he looked at the types of hay and concentrates the horses were already eating. Then he contacted Fernando Simoes of Equimix, the KER Team Member company in Sao Paulo, to discuss obtaining hay and designing a line of concentrates that would closely mimic those familiar dietary components.

### **Suitable Hay and Concentrates Discovered**

Obtaining top-quality hay, an important staple of the equine diet, was the initial priority. Although Equimix is not normally in the hay business, the company's Vanesa Silva de Mesquita assumed responsibility for this task. Importation of hay was not allowed, and many forages that are popular in North America—timothy, orchard grass, and brome grass, for example—cannot be grown in Brazil's tropical climate. Nevertheless, a promising hay made from coast-cross grass was located, and a sample was sent for nutrient analysis. The report showed an extremely high protein level, raising questions and prompting a visit from Lennox. He found that the hay fields had been irrigated with slurry made from hog manure, a powerful fertilizer but also a potential disease risk for horses consuming the hay. A further search turned up the same type of hay grown on flood-irrigated fields, and the purchase of an adequate supply was negotiated.

With hay on order, Lennox and Simoes turned their attention to concentrated feeds. The intent was to design several new feeds that would meet the needs of, and closely resemble the accustomed diet for, each horse. In addition, these new feeds had to make use of available ingredients.

As in many other countries, grains and other feed components are in short supply in Brazil because of the increasing interest in biofuel production. Beet pulp, a popular feed ingredient in North America, was not available at all due to climatic limitations on sugar beet cultivation, although sugar cane is widely grown for the



Mike Lennox

*KER Team Member Equimix was instrumental in providing concentrates to the equine athletes competing in the Pan American Games. Strict quality-control measures are used year-round at Equimix and all KER Team Members.*

ethanol market. Using available ingredients, Lennox was able to formulate three new feeds for Simoes to manufacture. From among these choices, one of which was quite similar to a feed already produced by Equimix, every horse was matched with a product very similar in nutrient profile to its “home” ration.

### Preparation Complete, Competition Begins

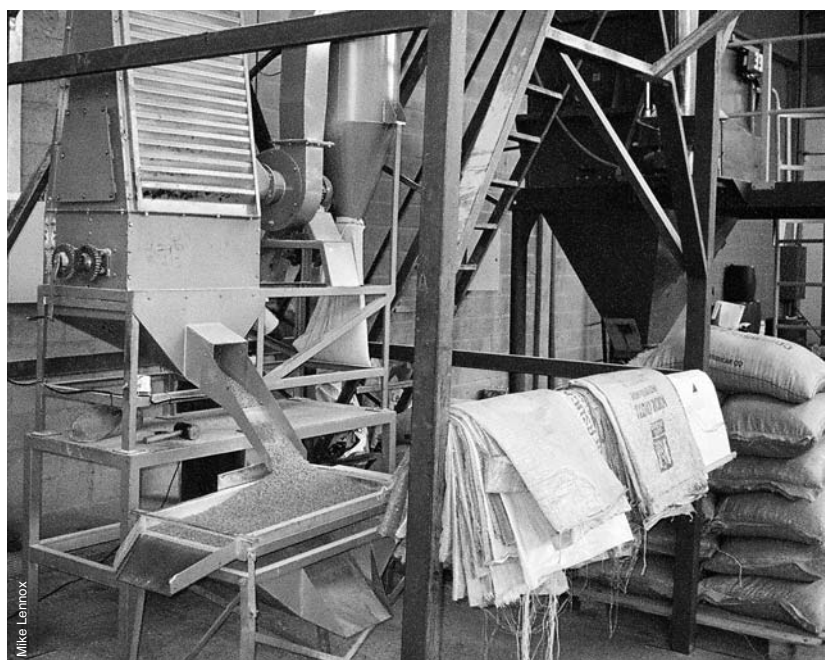
Well over 100 horses were slated to compete in one of three disciplines—dressage, eventing, and jumping—at this year’s Pan American Games. The venue for equestrian competition was the Deodoro Military Club, a facility that also hosted field hockey, sport shooting, archery, and modern pentathlon. Barns were arranged in a three-sided “U” configuration, with stalls flanking narrow aisles, and grassy courtyards in the middle. Because animal health regulations are somewhat different for each nation, horses from the various participating countries in North America, Central America, and South America were housed in separate barns.

All feed and hay had to be inspected and approved by the Brazilian agricultural authorities before it could be brought into the venue, and virtually the entire supply needed to be stored on-site at least a week before the competition began. Simoes and Silva de Mesquita ably handled the countless details involved in the manufacture, inspection, and shipping of feed within this time frame. By the time the horses arrived from the U.S. and Canada, all supplies were in place. Equimix grain and hay were available for those riders who chose to use them, and distribution went smoothly during the settling-in period and throughout the event.

### KER-Fed Horses Rally in Rio

So, how did the competitors fare during the games? The U.S. team of Karen O’Connor, Phillip Dutton, Stephen Bradley, and Gina Miles won the gold medal in eventing. Kyle Carter, Mike Winter, Sandra Donnelly, and Waylon Roberts won the team silver medal for Canada. Riding as individuals, O’Connor, Dutton, and Miles took home the individual gold, silver, and bronze medals. American rider Darren Chiacchia finished in fourth place individually, and Canadian riders filled three of the next four spots. Brazil finished in third place for the team bronze medal, and that country’s individual riders also claimed three of the top ten places.


**...back to the stranded semitrailer of feed (which was not affiliated in any way with Kentucky Equine Research or Equimix): knowing that his delivery was essential to moving the competition forward, the driver did what everyone secretly dreams of doing. First, a section of fence was taken down. Then, in full “thriller-movie” style, the driver gunned his vehicle through the gap, supervised the unloading and storage of his cargo, turned around, and disappeared into the Brazilian night. Who says you can’t have fun at a horse show?**



*Attention to cleanliness in the mill is a hallmark of all KER Team Member feed manufacturers, regardless of their whereabouts in the world. This is an interior view of the mill at Equimix.*

Team medals in dressage went in the same order as in eventing: gold for the U.S., silver for Canada, and bronze for Brazil. The U.S. and Canada each had three riders in the top eight individually, with gold and silver claimed by U.S. riders.

The individual gold medal in jumping was won by Jill Henselwood of Canada, with fellow countryman Eric Lamaze claiming the bronze. Brazil’s top international rider Rodrigo Pessoa won the individual silver medal for his host country, also assisting the Brazilians to a team gold-medal finish. Canada won the team silver and the U.S. took the team bronze.

All riders who used feed and hay provided by KER and Equimix were fully satisfied with the choices offered. O’Connor and Dutton are sponsored by KER and Pennfield Feeds, a KER Team Member, and their horses regularly train and compete on KER-formulated products. When he’s at home in Canada, Lamaze uses products manufactured by KER Team Member Tottenham Feeds. The Equimix feeds were formulated to parallel feed products with which the horses were familiar, and the results of competition show that the change in feeds had no adverse effects on performance. 



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