



DAVID GOLDMAN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

EQUUS EQUATIONS

There is one place among the venues of the Olympic Games where the human athletes take a back seat and their horses take the limelight. **Chen Xiangfeng** files this report from London.

At Bryan Elliott's Equine World at Greenwich Park, horses are top priority, and the deputy manager for the equestrian events at the Olympic Games makes sure all his charges are in tip-top condition. "Horses come first. That's our priority. Whether rider, coach or stable hand — we are all working for the animals." The equestrian competition may be unique in the entire Games, given that it combines teamwork between human and animal athletes.

According to Elliott, the horse is like that crucial pair of running shoes for a track-and-field star, only it is "far more complicated than the spikes Usain Bolt wears."

Preparing the horse for competition takes a much deeper, stronger commitment.

Elliott, who has more than 10 years' experience of stable management at international horse events and 14 years in the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery, feels he must be one of the busiest persons during the London Games. He's on duty 12 hours a day to make sure the horses are properly taken care of.

Two hundred stables house up to 145 horses at any one time.

"It is our aim to look after the horses and the grooms in a relaxed, quiet environment. If they are happy, the riders are happy, the crowds are happy and then the event is a success."

Elliott and his team operate

facilities that amount to a five-star equine hotel.

Every aspect of comfort and security has been addressed, from dust-free bedding to non-slip rubber flooring throughout the complex.

More than 3,000 bales of shavings and 500 bales of straw were brought in to give the horses comfortable beds, and another 22 tons of hay to feed the horses.

And the equine dinners will cater to an international diet. There is British meadow hay, American Timothy hay and American alfalfa hay. For variety, the horses will also eat up to two kilos of carrots each day.

"Every horse is treated the way Olympic athletes are treated. We make them relaxed, quiet and comfortable and then they will perform better. We must run a special diet plan to keep their correct weights, fuel their power of performance through their diets so they can deliver."

Vitamin supplements are added to the feed or administered through injections.

Specific requirements are also catered for. For example, end-of-block stalls and "sniffer boards" prevent stallions from getting too friendly with their female neighbors.

The current hot and sunny weather in London also merits extra care for the horses. Fans cool down the stables and keep them at ideal temperatures, and there are wash-down and hand-grazing areas, an equine laundry and a state-of-the-art forge on site.

Elliott knows he is shouldering much responsibility in looking after these expensive "athletes", and all of them, no matter their material worth, are priceless to him.

Contact the writer at chenxiangfeng@chinadaily.com.cn.



DAVID GOLDMAN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Participation of celebrity athletes such as Zara Phillips, granddaughter of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, makes equestrian an eye-catching event at the London Olympics.

GLANCE

STATE-OF-THE-ART CLINIC:

A high-tech vet clinic has been set up at Greenwich Park to provide 24-hour care and monitoring for horses competing at the Games. The clinic, built in just three weeks, will have 164 veterinarian staff offering specialist care and access to experts worldwide.

HIGH-TECH HORSE AMBULANCE:

The equestrian center also boasts a specially made ambulance — one of only three in the world. It is the first time this vehicle will be used at an Olympic Games. The only two others are used by the racing industry in Ireland and Dubai.

At a cost of 94,000 pounds (about \$145,800), it's air-conditioned and includes closed-circuit television and cushion-ride suspension.

72,150

carrots to be eaten by competing horses during the 2012 Games. They weigh about as much as two London double-decker buses.

4,000

height-adjustable columns to support the 'floating platform' for the equestrian dressage and jumping field of play at Greenwich Park.

200

horses taking part at the Games

200

tons of horse manure produced (and disposed of) at Greenwich Park

Preserving the fine art of needling

By TANG ZHE
tangzhe@chinadaily.com.cn

Despite the growing popularity of acupuncture in western veterinary treatment, most practitioners are not fully maximizing this ancient Chinese healing art, according to Wang Qinglan, a former deputy dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine at the China Agricultural University.

Wang says veterinarians in the West are just following the practical use acupuncture to address the problems, instead of really understanding the principles of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine, which is far more complex.

"When they find the treatment is working, they continue to use it in the same way, and they are still using Western methods for diagnosis. I think the effect is not satisfying," the 75-year-old veteran says.

Wang explained that traditional needles, which are short and fine, are used on humans, but those used on animals are much longer and thicker. Most foreign countries are using traditional needles on horses because animal protection organizations in Europe protest that it is not humane to use the larger needles on animals.

"Acupuncture is mostly used for daily nursing, to ease pain, enhance immunity and alleviate the stress of competition on the horses," Wang says. "There are about 70 to 80 acupressure points that are frequently used and different problems should be cured with using different combinations of these points."

"For example, a newly acquired flu and the fever that comes after must be treated in different ways."

According to Wang, Western veterinary medicine is better at curing acute diseases, while traditional Chinese medicine on animals, including acupuncture, treats chronic conditions. He believes the animals benefit most from a combination of both Western and Chinese traditional medication.

Acupuncture has been used on farm horses in China for a long time, but the traditional Chinese treatment was recognized by Western countries only from the 1970s, and started being used on horses in sports even later.

When US President Richard Nixon visited China in 1972, Wang had demonstrated the use of electro-acupuncture on a horse, and performed an operation without using anesthetics — all in front of the president.

After this was reported in world news, many foreign veterinarians came to China to learn more about acupuncture in the following years. Wang also went on the lecture circuit to Europe, the US and Australia.

He also has many Chinese students teaching traditional Chinese veterinary medicine abroad. One of his students, Xie Huiheng, is based at the University of Florida in the US and has trained more than 2,000 students since the 1990s.

But sadly, veterinary acupuncture is fading in its country of origin and is on the brink of disappearing altogether.

In contrast, Western practitioners are thriving. According to Chinese national rider, Huang Zuping, it has become so profitable in Europe that he once had to pay 400 euros (\$490) to a Belgian veterinarian for treating two of his horses in Germany.

Some foreign veterinary training institutes have built a complete curriculum around acupuncture on horses. In contrast, there is very limited teaching material in China, and some Western vets are even coming to China to give classes to the Chinese, according to Zhou Yuan, a graduate of the China Agricultural University currently working at the Irish Jockey Club.

"These veterinarians from other countries still believe the best acupuncture practices are in China, but people in Europe and US are doing so much better in popularizing the treatment," Wang says.

Acupuncture: Chan gets straight to the point

FROM PAGE 1

"Lame horses or those with back pain are difficult to treat," he says. "Once we stop their medication, the pain returns. Medicine only masks the pain, so I thought I'd try acupuncture."

He took a night course at Hong Kong School of Continuing Education in human clinical acupuncture and received a diploma on the subject in 2003. He continued learning acupuncture specifically for horses at The University of Florida, studying under Beijing acupuncturist Huiheng Xie, who was a senior lecturer at the school.

After returning to Hong Kong, he started using acupuncture on HKJC's horses in 2004.

Today, he is one of two equine acupuncturists in Hong Kong; the other is Austrian Suzanne Lam, who is in private practice.

"The biggest difference between human and equine acupuncture is that with people, when you tell them not to move, they don't move," Chan says.

"Horses are not going to listen to you, so we administer a mild tranquilizer beforehand. The other difference is that acupuncture in people can be enhanced with moxibustion, while we don't do with horses. In humans, needles are typically left in for an hour while the tranquilizer that we use on horses only lasts for half an hour, so that's how long the session is. Since the tranquilizer is a prohibitive substance, we

have to stop treatment four days before a race."

After practicing acupuncture on HKJC's horses for eight years, Chan has a deft technique that maximizes the time the horses receive treatment. He applied the technique to his most recent experience at the 2010 Asian Games' equestrian events, when he was the veterinary services manager and responsible for the well-being of all the horses racing in Guangzhou.

"For the Asian Games, I lived in Guangzhou for a month," he recalls. He also worked with Riggs at the 2008 Olympic Games' equestrian events in Hong Kong.

As neither Hong Kong nor China is represented at the Olympic Games in London,

there will not be any vets from HKJC going to England this year.

However, equine acupuncture is popular in the United States and Great Britain.

"We do have one horse participating in the Paralympic Games in London," Chan notes. "The horse is based in London and the rider is Natasha Cheng, a 15-year-old girl from Hong Kong."

"Some horses are more receptive to acupuncture than others," says Chan. "Plus, it doesn't work for every ailment. If I think that its origin is somewhere other than a horse's back, I'll use other treatment methods. Back pain does not necessarily stem from the back of an animal."

Contact the writer at sundayed@chinadaily.com.cn.



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lawrence Chan prepares before he does a horse acupuncture.