

February 26, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PREVIEW STORY FOR THE 2008 KELT CAPITAL HORSE OF THE YEAR SHOW

The countdown is on to one of the biggest sporting celebrations in the Southern Hemisphere.

In less than two weeks, the first jumps will have been jumped and horses paraded at the 2008 Kelt Capital Horse of the Year Show, which is having its official launch in Hawke's Bay tomorrow evening (Wednesday).

Hawke's Bay becomes equestrian central as more than 2500 horses, ponies, riders and handlers head to Hastings for the five day show which starts on March 5.

Not only is there record prize money on offer – with a \$500,000 prize purse for the Bell Tea Olympic Cup for the Horse of the Year – but returning Olympian Mark Todd will be riding against an invitational field, two of the United Kingdom's top riders in John Whitaker and his niece Ellen Whitaker will be competing, there is a Tri Nations Challenge in showjumping and dressage, and the 2008 Olympic showjumping course builder Leopoldo Palacios is returning to the show.

And that's just a snippet of what is planned.

This is a \$2.2 million show that is a year in the planning.

The show may not start until March 5, but work at the Hawke's Bay Showgrounds is well underway weeks before as the grounds are manicured, surfaces prepared and marquees erected in readiness.

A world class all weather Euro Ride dressage arena is again being put in, similar to that used for Olympics and other 5* events.

It has been used at the European Championships in Germany and the German Olympic training centre has them in too.

With the rising status of the show comes interest from all over the world from people other than riders, including judges.

This year there judges coming from Hong Kong, Canada, Australia, England and South Africa to add their expertise across the 16 disciplines.

Included in the special visitors is the first vice president of the International FEI Sven Holmberg.

“He’s here to see what all the fuss is about and we are rapt to be hosting him,” says show director Kevin Hansen.

“It is absolutely fabulous to have him here and to have that level of interest from the FEI.”

There will be a decidedly regal lilt presiding over the premier ring thanks to long-time BBC commentator Michael Tucker who is making his seventh trip to New Zealand – much to his delight.

Entries from horses and ponies remain at 2500 simply because organizers cannot fit any more in, but Hansen is confident the caliber of entries continues to rise throughout the levels.

Corporate hospitality at the show is now up there with the Rugby World Cup, NZI Sevens and Formula One car racing with a double story emporium. The emporium is being used in Hastings for the show and then taken to Hamilton for the V8 streetcars before being shipped back to Australia.

The emporium arrived in nine big shipping containers and took a crane and 12 very fit men an entire week to put it up.

Trade is another area of growing interest with 7500 square metres of marquees in and a roaring trade done through the 150 sites.

“We’ve not got a spare five centimetres anywhere,” says Hansen.

The demand continues to mushroom for trade space at the show – up nearly 30% on last year.

Both the premier showjumping ring and the dressage arena are completely surrounded by trade sites.

“We estimate the turn-over through the trade sites at HoY to be around \$8 million.”