

60 seconds with Commentator, Henry Symington

International commentator, Henry Symington's dulcet tones are a familiar sound on the eventing circuit, from BE80(T) to International three day events. A BHSI and a former competitor himself, Henry gives us an insight into the life of a commentator.

How did you get started in commentating?

I have been involved in theatre and entertaining since my school days. I then trained for my professional teaching exams at Windmill Riding Academy, which hosted the Stratford Horse Trials. My boss, Peter Roberts said one day, "Symington, you have a bit too much lip, get up into that tower and commentate on the cross-country!"

What is the job of a commentator?

In my opinion, it is to inform, to educate and to entertain the audience, which will vary dependent on the level of competition and venue.

What is the best aspect of commentating?

Being in the commentary box is the second most exciting place to be at an event other than being on a horse. The camaraderie amongst the eventing community is fantastic.

What is the most difficult aspect of commentating?

When there has been a fatality or accident and there is a hold on course; that's a real test for the commentator. You have to be able to maintain your composure, often for quite a long time, and remain professional for the sake of the supporters, family and friends, competitors and spectators, not forgetting your colleagues.

What is your favourite event or venue?

That's a difficult question - I count myself very lucky that I go to a variety of events in different settings to see top horses and riders eventing.

What is the best thing about eventing?

It's the only sport where two lives, that of the horse and rider, depend on each other and on trust. Horses are great levellers!

What has been the highlight of your career, so far?

There have been several: presenting on Burghley Radio, commentating at the Asian Games in 2006 and the Greenwich Olympic test event this year.

Have you had any on-air clangers? *You may want to pick one that you think is most appropriate*

- a. Clea Phillips was riding round one course and came to a 4-effort complex. She jumped the first element and was tipped to the left, over the second element she tipped to the right, by

the fourth she was just about hanging on and I was heard to say “I don’t know what you have in your jods, Clea, but it must be mighty sticky!”

- b. A horse was being particularly nappy on course, and I was heard to say “That horse needs to go hunting *in* hounds rather than behind them!”
- c. Whilst on air at Burghley Radio, my fellow commentator announced to the crowd that we were just indulging in a spot of self-gratification, having reached the end of a long week. I replied, “I think you actually mean ‘self-*congratulation*’, which is something completely different and I’d like to reassure all our lovely listeners out there that my hands have remained above the table for the last 5 days!”

Do you have a commentating hero?

Yes – it has to be Dorian Williams.

What do you do “out of season”?

Shut-up and give everyone a rest from my voice! Planning and organising the next season starts in the winter, I also paint animal portraits on commission and still do a spot of teaching.

What do you think of the EHOA?

It’s a fantastic organisation because it offers support to some of the most important people in the sport – the owners – without whom, our professional riders wouldn’t be able to develop and become some of the top riders in the world. Owners are the unsung heroes.