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Essex Horse Trials returns in June



After a nearly 20-year absence, the Essex Horse Trials will be returning to Somerset County in June (file photo)

FAR HILLS - After a 19-year absence, the Mars Essex Horse Trials, one of the nation's top equestrian competitions, will return to Somerset County on June 24 and 25 with a full weekend of outdoor family-oriented events at Moorland Farm.

The Mars Essex Horse Trials features “eventing,” often referred to as an “equestrian triathlon,” a competition that combines the elegance of dressage, the thrill of cross-country and the precision of show jumping.

“I am thrilled by the community’s positive reception and excitement of having Essex return,” said Guy Torsilieri, chairman of Far Hills Race Meeting Association, past chairman of the Essex Horse Trials and current board member of the new Essex Horse Trials. “This is the next step in growing high-level equestrian events in this area.”

Other features of the weekend will be a classic car show; The Farmstand, offering fresh farm-to-table food from local markets and specialties from artisan vendors; and The Essex Market, which will offer wide range of shopping from saddles and riding boots to jewelry and artwork.

There will also be a Children’s Activity Center, sponsored by The Willow School of Bedminster.

General admission is \$10 in advance and includes admission for both days. Other options include The Hoopstick Club, a VIP experience with ringside seating next to the show jumping arena and overlooking the water complex on the cross-country course; a continental breakfast, lunch or brunch with a full open bar; and a cocktail party with wine, beer, a Hoopstick specialty cocktail and light hors d’oeuvres.

The event will be at Moorland Farm, the home of the annual Far Hills Race Meeting in October, an afternoon of nationally prestigious steeplechase races attended by thousands.

"We are excited to bring back this iconic event, not just for horse enthusiasts, but for anyone who enjoys a day out in the country," said Ralph Jones, president of Essex Horse Trials. "Morgan Rowell has designed a beautiful course for the equestrian competition which allows spectators to view the horses up close. And we'll have great vendors and activities that will provide families with plenty to do as they enjoy the spectacular beauty of Moorland Farm."

The hillside area at Moorland Farm, the most popular spot during the Far Hills Race Meeting, will also provide tailgaters panoramic views of the entire Essex Horse Trials. Attendees may bring a picnic lunch or purchase all the fixings at The Farmstand. Tailgating packages include one reserved hillside parking space and four admission tickets each day.

Proceeds from the event will benefit the Greater Newark LifeCamp, a day camp for approximately 300 Newark-area youths per day for six weeks during July and August.

Mars Inc., the original sponsor of the Essex Horse Trials, is returning as the event's title sponsor.

Presenting sponsors are Open Road Auto Group, Peapack-Gladstone Bank, RWJ Barnabas Health, and Running 'S' Equine Veterinary Services.

For three decades, the Essex Horse Trials was one of the highlights of the equestrian calendar, attracting top American and international competitors as well as thousands of fans who enjoyed its social aspects as well. The trials were originally conceived in 1968 as a competition for less experienced riders and horses.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the event continued to grow. It expanded to a three-day format and eventually moved to the United States Equestrian Team headquarters at Hamilton Farm in Gladstone, where riders competed for positions at both the Olympic Games and World Championships. The event ended on its 30th anniversary in 1998 when some of the USET land was developed.

The 2017 Mars Essex Horse Trials will offer competition at the beginner novice through preliminary levels with riders vying for \$25,000 in prize money.

Eventing provides a rare opportunity for spectators of all ages and interests, not just in equestrian sports, to witness the unique relationship between horse and rider over three different areas of competition.

Tickets are available at all Peapack-Gladstone Bank locations and online at www.essexhorsetrials.org.

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