

Olympic Energy

Providing horse feed for more than 200 horses at the 2004 summer Olympics in Athens presented unique challenges.

Article courtesy of Ruth Bishop, equine technical director, Spillers UK

As the popular saying goes, an army can't march on an empty stomach, and in preparing to commence battle for medals, providing the 20 or so pounds of feed and forage the horses required per day in Athens has had its own unique challenges, especially in the U.S. rider Chris Kappler and his mount, Royal Kaliber, received the individual bronze medal in show jumping at the 2004 Olympics. 105 °F Greek summer heat.

Equine athletes were mostly flown into Athens, but payloads on the planes were limited. This meant the feed and forage had to be shipped or rail-freighted into Athens and the Markopoulo Olympic Equestrian Center well in advance, to avoid the last-minute congestion as the final infrastructure of the Games (computers, televisions, food, etc.) was installed.

Horse feed, then, was shipped to the Games in early July, four weeks ahead of the horses. With more than 200 horses on site for both the Olympics and Paralympics, for periods of up to 20 days per horse, significant amounts of forage feed, and supplements were required, and stored.

With forages sourced from the USA and Canada, feed and bedding from the UK and USA, and with individual teams making their own arrangements, planning a mix of feedstuffs was a logistical nightmare. The British team and team veterinarians worked closely with Spillers, official suppliers of nutrition to the British teams, to ensure the right supply for our teams.

We are all aware that feed should be stored in a cool, dry environment. Athens certainly offers dry storage, but in the high heat of summer, cool it is not! Special manufacturing procedures were essential to prevent the feeds from drying out unduly during their stay.

Minimizing Dietary Changes

Because the largest part of a horse's diet is forage, it was also conceivable that team members moving from the hay or haylage used at home, to that available in Athens, could in fact make a significant dietary change in the week before the big competition if the forages weren't matched. This, in turn, could affect the health and performance of the horses. To make a smoother transition, Spillers analyzed both the forages available in Athens and those used by the riders to ensure the necessary changes to diet were made well ahead of the competition. This certified

that the horses were on their competition diets in July, and any dietary changes were minimized. Ruth Bishop

Ruth Bishop is the official nutritionist for the British Equestrian Team, as well as the technical director for SPILLERS horse feeds in England. Each week, Ruth also writes the weekly "Dr Ruth" column in Horse & Hound, England's premier equestrian magazine. For more information about SPILLERS horse feeds, email editor@ecmagazine.net.

Nibbles: What would you find in the 2004 Olympic feed store?

- 50 tons of feed and forage
- Forages: timothy hay, alfalfa hay, grass hay and haylage.
- Feeds available: most teams take their own feed to minimize dietary change
- Leading brands of competition feed makers from the UK and USA
- Straights US-Sourced Bran, sugar beet pulp, oats, maize, barley, linseed
- Supplements: electrolytes, oil, Vitamin E, joint support (Most competitors take their own supplements on the plane.)
- Succulents: Carrots, apples and bananas. (Yes, even bananas!)