

Join the crew

Teamwork makes the dream work for these dedicated unsung heroes of the showjumping world, discovers *Catherine Welton*

WHETHER you have a keen eye for a floral arrangement, the strength and agility to rebuild a fence faster than a Formula One pitstop or the calm authority to keep an unruly collecting ring in check – there's a role within the showjumping arena crew for you.

“Primarily the role of showjumping crew is assisting the course-designers all day, moving jumps, helping measure distances and renumbering the course,” explains Wiktoria Wietronek, who has worked at the Scottish National Equestrian Centre since 2022.

“You are also responsible for letting the competitors in and out of the arena, as well as picking up any poles they may have knocked down, quickly and efficiently before the next competitor so you can get out of their way. And poo picking to keep the arena as tidy as possible.”

Wiktoria works in the warm-up and the main ring but there's no doubting her favourite place to be. “I love the main ring action. I do also love the busy environment of the warm-up, seeing how people warm their horses up, and the bond between the riders, horses and grooms. But it can be a stressful place.”

Beccy Miller started volunteering at the London International with her mother, Karen, a couple of years ago, and was immediately drawn to the team of people who were dressing the arena.

“I met the flower team and I was invited to join them for Royal Windsor in 2024. I've never looked back,” says Beccy. “We're in charge of all the flowers in the main arena, which includes dressing all the jumps, designing islands and dressing any sponsors' decorations.”

“We have to fix any flowers that get knocked over, which is especially difficult at outdoor shows like Windsor where you have wind and rain to contend with.”

Karen admits to feeling nervous the first time she joined an arena crew. “It was about four years ago at the London International Horse Show at Excel. We arrived on the first morning, wondering what we had committed ourselves to, but once we met the other volunteers for training, everyone was so friendly.”

Wiktoria remembers feeling similarly reassured by the other volunteers.

“I was handed a clipboard and put on the start gate. I was terrified but the rest of the team jumped straight in, showing me the ropes and pointing me in the right direction. Looking back, getting stuck in like that was probably the best thing to do, although I may not have thought that at the time.”

NICK FINNEY volunteers at the Global Champions Tour among other events. He agrees that getting stuck in is important: “You need to be prepared to muck in. Especially at the larger events, you need to be outgoing as you'll be interacting with the public and the competitors.”

Nick is often allocated the horse crossings to marshal and says safety is paramount.

“You have to remember that the horses can get spooked at the slightest thing,” he says. “You have to make sure you give clear instructions to the riders and the general public, so they know exactly what's required of them. You're trying to keep horses away from humans, especially at the crossing, you don't want the two to meet.”

Illustration by Sophie Cheeseman