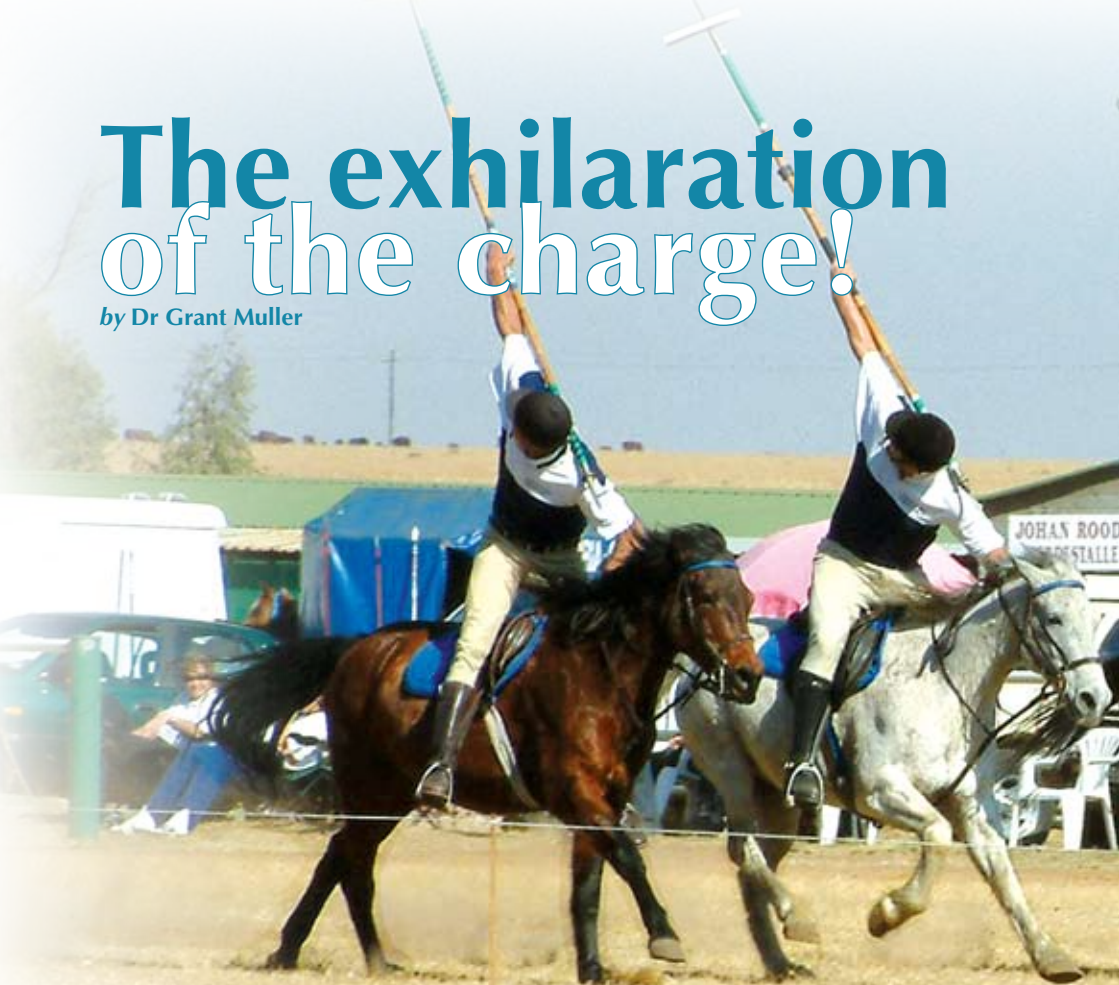


The exhilaration of the charge!

by Dr Grant Muller



Tent-pegging is perhaps the only modern day equestrian discipline that almost matches the adrenalin and exhilaration of charging horses in cavalry battles. Although there is still speculation regarding the exact origin of the sport, most experts are certain that tent-pegging originated in Asia.

Rumour has it that the sport dates back to the invasion of India by Alexander the Great in 326 BC. Here the cavalry soldiers of Alexander the Great were believed to have used lances as their main battle tactic against the enemy's elephants in battle. The story goes that the only way to demobilise the elephant, was to attack the elephant's toenails with sharp spears from

the back of the galloping horses. In order to perfect this technique, the cavalry practiced the art of striking wooden tent-pegs on horseback. A second theory is that the sport originated from cavalry soldiers charging enemy camps at the crack of dawn and by removing the tent pegs with the tips of their sharp spears, caused pandemonium and havoc in the campsite.

In South Africa, the sport was previously known as gymkhana. However, since it has been recognised as a regional sport by the independent body of horse sports, the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI), the name "tent-pegging" has been adopted as the agreed international name of the sport. Presently, the countries actively involved in tent-pegging are India, Australia, Israel, Pakistan, South Africa, the



United Kingdom, Namibia and the United States of America. In 1994, the International Equestrian Tent-pegging Association was formed to administer and govern tent-pegging worldwide.

In the modern sport of tent-pegging, the rider uses either a lance or a sword and charges at full gallop across the arena to pick up a wooden or card board peg stuck into the ground. The rules today require that the riders ride as an individual, as a team of two (half section) or four (full section) abreast from each other. Presentation and precision of the horsemen are measured as additional style points.

Tent-pegging also comprises “overhead” events where lemons or rings are hung on gallows and must be sliced or lanced by the rider. Even more exciting is the event of “skill at arms” which

involves jumping obstacles, shooting balloons with blanks from a revolver, attacking dummies with a sword, and lancing rings suspended from gallows with a traditional lance.

What makes the sport of tent-pegging unique, is that it is both a team and an individual sport where male and female, young and old can actively compete against each other. The sport recognises the best junior, woman, veteran and merit rider in the country. There is also very little handicap on the breed or type of horse that the rider uses. However, having said this, the most suitable horses for tent-pegging are those that are supple, well-balanced, bold and not easily frightened.

An article published in *The London Illustrated News* in 1875, described the first tent-pegging

The author, Dr Grant Muller, in action on his SA Boerperd



Today, a tent-pegging competition takes place over a whole day, with the full competition comprising the following ten items:

Item	Runs	Points
Lance – individual	2	18
Lance – half-section	2	12
Lance – section	2	12
Sword – individual	2	18
Sword – half-section	2	12
Sword – section	2	12
Lance – Indian file	2	12
Lance – gallows (rings) & peg	2	42
Sword – gallows (lemons) & peg	2	42
Skill at arms	1	42
Total score		222

exhibition in the grounds of the Gun Club at Hurlingham as a very fashionable affair. The Prince and Princess of Wales as well as the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh were present to witness this first demonstration of the sport imported from Asia by the fifth Royal Regiment of Irish Lancers. Provided below is an extract from the newspaper article which made record of the events on that particular day. SAH

In description the thing sounds simple enough; you have only to lower the lance at the right moment, and the trick is done. Nor is the difficulty more apparent as one watches the graceful motion and easy precision of a skilful practitioner; but if those who doubt that there is any art in it will only mount a horse and try for themselves, they will soon confess that there are more qualities needed than a good seat and a quick eye for the distance to transform them into accomplished tent peggers. The hand must be light as a feather, the grip close as steel, the eye true and the aim unerring.