

the inaccessibility of the sport and the extreme difficulty in attracting media coverage are the main reasons why, from the bottom up, organisers struggle to run viable events that can finance large prize pots.

The same applies for the riders. Financially lucrative sponsorship and product endorsements are hard to come by. Where global luxury brands and TV networks such as Longines and Eurosport sponsor show jumping, as one official comments, eventing's main sponsors are four-wheel drive manufacturers Land Rover and Mitsubishi.

Even the FEI initiatives in eventing designed to bring in sponsorship money are struggling. The Rolex Grand Slam has caught the imagination but HSBC has dropped its sponsorship of the FEI Classics. The latter had a prize fund of US\$333,000, with US\$150,000 to the winner. The series is now financed directly by the FEI with a reduced fund of US\$120,000. The FEI Nations Cup is another initiative that seeks to attract money into the sport but this ran in its inaugural year without a sponsor.

Eventing, it could be argued, has more in common with yacht racing than the likes of



Show jumping boasts leading sponsors like Longines whose prize contributions make eventing's 'look like chicken feed'

cycling, tennis and golf. Says one rider who also races yachts: "Sailing is totally dependent on wealthy yacht owners. Our 36ft racing yacht cost £250,000 and a season's racing costs in the region of £90,000. That includes a dry mooring — she is craned out after each race to keep the hull clean — new sails and repairs, crew accommodation during Cowes week, maintenance and race fees, etc."

And there is no prize-money at all. Even the teams that spent upwards of US\$200m to win the America's Cup were racing solely for the right to have their name on the trophy and to hold it for four years.

The analogy with sailing highlights one benefit that professional event riders should not take for granted: they too have owners

who pick up the costs associated with their horses, including the cost of competing.

When the dust settles, rider Tom Rowland's contribution to the @EPrizemoney debate is to the point. He has suggested that riders should be helping the sport to find a solution.

"A serious campaign needs a plan all the way through, otherwise a lot of dissatisfaction but no productivity."

Francis Whittington, the current chair of the Event Riders Association, agrees.

"The sport needs a clear plan on how it can start to attract corporate sponsorship and television coverage and build that over time. Just as importantly, it needs a clear idea of how it can deliver that plan."



Comment Paul Tapner

'The ability to bounce back is the mark of a true great'

Great event riders stay at the top because they can brush off disappointment. PAUL TAPNER looks back on a season when many competitors' resilience was tested to the limit

EVENTERS are an optimistic bunch. To remain in the sport for any length of time we have to be that way. Eventing provides the most amazing rollercoaster of highs and lows — more probably than in any other walk of life.

The most public rollercoaster ride is still happening for Jock Paget. With his success and superstar status increasing throughout 2013, he suddenly hit a brick wall and now he may find himself with a battle to prove that he is not a cheat.

Pippa Funnell said to me that the riders who make it to the top are not always the most talented ones but they are usually the most resilient. Jock is certainly about to have his resilience tested to the extreme.

We often look at the success of other high profile riders with envy, thinking that they are not having the same disappointments as we may be experiencing. But it doesn't take much

scratching of the surface to reveal that all riders enjoy the same highs and lows.

Andrew Nicholson continues to break so many records having just become BE rankings leader for an amazing 15th time. One of Andrew's first great successes of 2013 was winning Kentucky with Quimbo who made the tough cross-country course look easy. Yet a quick analysis of Quimbo's 2013 results reveals that of his nine competitions this year he was clear in three — that's six moments of disappointment to offset against the moments of elation he provided to his rider and owner Deborah Sellar. It would be a safe bet to say that Andrew and Quimbo will prove their resilience to the lows and be back out with renewed success in 2014.

As eventing followers we tend to mostly remember the good news and high moments of the superstar riders. Michael Jung continued to stamp his superiority with dual gold at the European Championships but

how devastating it must have been for him to have his top horse, La Biosthetique Sam FBW, injured in the run up to that contest and then unable to compete for the remainder of the year.

William Fox-Pitt has won more than most this season — nothing new there then — and he has ended the year second in the BE rankings and with a current second world ranking but there were lows for his team, too, with eliminations, retirements and falls at three-day events.

The ability to bounce back from any setbacks or low times and achieve great success again is the mark of a truly great sportsman. Throughout this season, while wandering through the lorry park or warming up, I've lost count of how many times I've witnessed riders having emotional meltdowns over a poor performance. If you are one of those people who allows the lows of eventing to consume you, you are unlikely to ever reach the dizzy heights of the star riders I've already mentioned — or, for that matter, even truly enjoy the rare highs.

Enjoying eventing when it's going right and not getting depressed when it's not perfect is a skill that can be developed. It is certainly one that needs to be practised.

Away from eventing competitions the sport has further embraced social media. Twitter and Facebook usage among riders, owners, organisers, administrators, sponsors, equestrian media and volunteers has created a massive interaction between all groups. I hope this increased opportunity for communication will only serve to improve the sport throughout 2014.

Pictures by Alamy, Trevor Meeke, Stephen Sparkes, Lucy Merritt, Anthony Jones & Stefano Grassio