

John Whitaker Celebrates 60th Birthday and Confirms Attendance at Longines Masters of Los Angeles

Today, August 5th, one of the greatest riders of all time, Great Britain's John Whitaker, celebrates his 60th birthday, a milestone which does not signal retirement for the indefatigable champion – far from it. In February this year, Whitaker returned to his winning ways, clinching a 5-star Longines Grand Prix victory in the Longines Masters of Hong Kong with Argento, a horse that he has trained himself since he was young. This victory was the first step toward a Masters Grand Slam for the British rider, who has just been confirmed to participate in the American leg of the Longines Masters from October 1st to 4th in hopes of winning the Los Angeles Longines Grand Prix and the €500,000 bonus it would earn him. **Happy Birthday from the Longines Masters!**

But is it really money that drives this exceptional rider? We're not so sure: John is, above all, a player, a sportsman. His goal at sixty? "My main aim is to take pleasure in my sport. It's great to climb back up the world rankings like this (he re-entered the top 20 in July), and I want to continue on that path, try to go even further and last a few more years. Instead of focusing on a specific victory, besides Los Angeles in October, I would rather be consistent from week to week. I don't aim to win at all costs: above all, I want to remain at this level and continue to progress. It's so difficult today because there are lots of very good riders and very good horses; the level is very high. I'm just happy that I can still compete against those very good riders... and sometimes, I even beat them. I love doing what I do, and winning is a bonus. But so long as I can pay my bills and stay at this level, I'm happy."

When asked, the great riders of today often name John Whitaker as an inspiration for his natural riding, his instinct, his feel for victory and his relationship with horses. European Champion in 1989 and two-time winner of the World Cup in 1990 and 1991 with Milton, John Whitaker was the center of the equestrian world in the 90s, and World no.1 for many months. One reason for this can be attributed to Milton. You could spot the horse a mile away by his remarkable charisma, attitude and beauty. Every one of his performances was a moment of grace.

"Milton was exceptional – the horse of a lifetime," remembers John. "Milton was a dream horse, beyond his jumping style, his coat, his temperament... He had everything, and he was generous, you never needed to force him. He was always responsive to his rider and tried to help."

Today, Whitaker has Argento, a horse that he trained himself and has brought gradually to a high level. "An endearing stallion who always thinks he can do whatever he likes... he really does have bad manners. But he's a real personality. At work and at home, he gets lazy quickly and after a couple of minutes, it's hard to get him to move. But in competitions, he's like a different horse, very involved. In the ring,

he does his job without holding back. He's focused and alert, and he wants to do well. The rest of the time, I must admit, he makes things tough!"

It was with Argento that John burst back onto the world stage, and it was on the Asian leg of the Longines Masters, in Hong Kong, that he sealed his comeback with a first Longines Grand Prix win, paving the way towards the million-euro Masters Grand Slam bonus. Next stop, Los Angeles: "Of course I'm going! That's the first thing to do, actually: if I want to win the L.A. Longines Grand Prix, I'll need to be there, at the very least."

True to form: humor is one of this singular, good-natured, authentic man's best qualities.

Longines Masters of Los Angeles: a high-level sport program

All eyes will be on Whitaker at the Los Angeles Longines Grand Prix on Sunday, October 4th. Last year, the class was won by Jos Verlooy, one of the circuit's youngest riders at age 18. In the build-up to the Longines Grand Prix in Hong Kong, Whitaker also won the Gucci Gold Cup. In Los Angeles once again, 30 of the world's best riders will gather for this prestigious class, which will be held on Saturday, October 3rd, before another famous class, the Charity Pro-Am Style & Competition: an evening of great sport, glamour and fun, all for a good cause.

Speed is another of Whitaker's fortes, demonstrated by his results in 2015 alone: six podium finishes, including two wins, and 15 top-eight placings with his mare Ornellaia (named after a great Italian wine... That's John for you). The combination will also be a serious contender at the Longines Speed Challenge, the spotlight competition on Friday, October 2nd. This speed class, a Longines Masters exclusive, is even faster and more exciting than a classic speed class because faults on the obstacles are penalized by two seconds (compared to the usual four), giving riders a shot at victory even if they have a rail down... provided they can pick up the pace, that is. Los Angeles will see the inauguration of a new Longines Speed Challenge course for the 2015/2016 series. After Los Angeles, Belgian course designer Luc Musette's exacting track will be faithfully reproduced in Paris and then in Hong Kong, providing riders with a chance to beat the record over the course of the series' three legs.

Still, Los Angeles will have a special sparkle. Like in 2014, the red carpet will welcome a handful of Hollywood notables in addition to famous sportsmen and women. Spectators at the Los Angeles Convention Center will enjoy an exciting moment from another Olympic discipline—dressage—with a demonstration by the United States' best rider, Steffen Peters, the recent double gold medallist at the Pan American Games and former FEI World Cup champion. After an educational presentation of the discipline, the American champion will perform a freestyle set to music with his horse, Legolas 92: another thrilling occasion from the equestrian world to look forward to.

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DETAILS

The Longines Masters of Los Angeles

October 1st to 4th 2015

WEBSITE: http://www.mastersgrandslam.com/en/longines_masters_los_angeles

TICKETING: Tickets are available at <http://www.mastersgrandslam.com/en/ticketing>

ABOUT THE LONGINES MASTERS

Established in three of the biggest cities - Los Angeles, Paris and Hong Kong - the unique Longines Masters series is recognized by the Fédération Equestre Internationale and is one of the most prestigious equestrian competitions worldwide. Created by EEM, the concept of the Masters was born in 2009 with the first edition of the Gucci Paris Masters, now renamed the Longines Masters of Paris. Inspired by the Grand Slam tournaments in tennis, the circuit rapidly developed abroad, with the Longines Masters of Hong Kong in 2013 and the Longines Masters of Los Angeles in 2014. In 2015, the circuit was renamed the Longines Masters, this term covers all legs of the series.

The world's best riders and horses will compete for one million dollars in prize money at each leg of the series. In addition, any rider who consecutively wins the Longines Masters Grands Prix in Paris, Hong Kong and Los Angeles will be rewarded with one million euros Masters Grand Slam bonus. For two successive victories, the rider will be awarded €500,000, and winners of two non-successive victories within a series of three Longines Masters Grand Prix will receive a €250,000 bonus.

These events are broadcast in more than 120 countries and reach almost 550 million viewers. Every edition of the Longines Masters is must-attend event that brings together sports enthusiasts, amateurs, celebrities and corporate decision-makers from around the world, who come to enjoy a unique experience, boasting exceptional sport, entertainment, glamour, gastronomy and contemporary art.

- Longines Masters of Los Angeles October 1st to 4th 2015
- Longines Masters of Paris December 3rd to 6th 2015
- Longines Masters of Hong Kong February 19th to 21st 2016

ABOUT LONGINES

Longines has been based in Saint-Imier in Switzerland since 1832. Its watchmaking expertise reflects a strong devotion to tradition, elegance and performance. Longines has generations of experience as the official timekeeper of world championships and as a partner of international sporting federations. Over the years, Longines has established solid, long-term relationships with the sporting world. Renowned for the elegance of its timepieces, Longines is a member of the Swatch

Group Ltd., the world's leading manufacturer of horological products. Using the winged hourglass as its emblem, the brand has outlets in over 140 countries.
www.longines.com

ABOUT EEM

To reinvent Show Jumping! What an ambitious goal EEM CEO and Founder Christophe Ameeuw and his team have set for themselves! For over ten years they have been dedicated to bringing equestrian sports to the international front stage. Inspired by the Grand Slam in tennis and its legendary tournaments, EEM gathers under one roof the best of the sport, entertainment and glamour.

2009 was a crucial milestone for EEM with the revival of the Jumping de Paris and the creation of the Gucci Paris Masters, as it marked the beginning of their international development. EEM then set off to conquer new continents. An Asian edition took place in Hong Kong in 2013, followed in 2014 by the first American stage of the Longines Masters in Los Angeles. This first edition on the American continent was welcomed by renowned sports channel ESPN with the headline "The Next Big USA Sport".

In 2015 the intercontinental trilogy becomes the Longines Masters, presented by EEM.

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