

John Aizlewood watches former glamour girl Jordan collide with equestrianism

It's not how Wayne Rooney or Andrew Flintoff begin their press conferences, but in so many ways Wayne Rooney and Andrew Flintoff are not Katie Price, the force of nature formerly but somehow always known as the "glamour" model Jordan. The photographers were shushed, the journalists silenced and a troupe of cosmetic alchemists were rushed in. Although our heroine was hardly au naturel, even more slap was trowelled on. Then, and only then, did she acknowledge her inquisitors.

Moments earlier, Price had spent her Friday lunchtime taking part in a threesome. Sandwiched between her riding coach, Andrew Gould, and international competitor Henry Boswell, she had performed a dressage "masterclass" at the 60th Horse of the



'2012 Olympics? Why not?'

Year Show. As masterclasses go, it wasn't especially masterful; then again, Price took up dressage only three months ago. Her horse, Glamour Girl, attempted to gambol her own way across the ring—a points catastrophe in a discipline where poise and control and, yes, discipline are everything.

Still, as Price argued afterwards, "at least I didn't fall off". Beneath her glittering riding hat and glittering riding jacket, she was in typically feisty form. "I enjoyed it," she announced. To the disappointment of those seeking her views on the Icelandic economy, she explained that she would only discuss dressage and her about-to-be-

launched range of equestrian outfits. As has often been noted, Price has her knockers. "A lot of people knock me, but until I started this, nobody had read about dressage," she mused, not wholly correctly. "I'm bringing glamour into the world of equestrianism."

In turn, if the delighted crowd at Birmingham's NEC are any yardstick, the world of equestrianism has welcomed her. Even experts such as Andy Austin, former international showjumper and now Sky summariser, believes the Price is right: "How she performed technically is irrelevant. To say she wasn't very good is missing the point entirely. What she brings to the sport is only positive. She's very determined, she's very bright and she's a great addition."

Next-stop, Price hopes, is the Olympic dressage competition at London 2012. "Why ever not?" she asked, eyelids a-fluttering. "I'm not mad enough to do eventing, but myself and Andrew think dressage is possible. Never, ever underestimate the Price."

Price's arrival is not the only evidence that this unashamedly traditional world cannot hold back change. Once the domain of the BBC, which paid £300 to broadcast the first show in 1949 from Harringay Arena, north London, the Horse of the Year Show has belonged to Sky for four years. They're coy on viewing figures but the contract was recently extended until 2010. Wembley Arena (nee Empire Pool), the venue for more than four decades, has been replaced by the NEC for six years. More regrettably, the Timed Touch And Out (unlimited obstacles, whichever horse jumps the most before a fault wins) that so thrilled the crowds of 1949 is no more. No matter. Some of the old ways remain. There are stern warnings that competitors walking the course before they ride must be "correctly" dressed. Even the drivers of the tractors who roll the course between events wear shirts and ties.

"The Horse of the Year Show is the daddy of equestrianism," explains Austin. "It's the original brand from which showjumping has built, and qualifying is the big dream for British and many international riders. It still has the magic and the cachet. The standards are far higher than when I was competing at the top level: the jumps are harder, the turns are tighter and riders and horses are fitter."

The organisers estimate that the five-day show attracts more than 50,000 spectators and



Riding high: Katie Price 'bringing glamour to the world of equestrianism' during her well-received dressage masterclass in Birmingham, inset



“PEOPLE KNOCK ME, BUT I ENJOYED IT. AT LEAST I DIDN'T FALL OFF”

Ranger defeating Laura Robinson on Orlando XI by 0.72sec after both went clear in a jump-off to the 138cm pony championship. It was the best moment of Crosby's life; Robinson burst into tears.

The Bob Hurford Memorial Cup lived up to its billing as Saturday's most prestigious event. In the gripping eight-horse jump-off, for which the United States' Beijing gold medalist Laura Kraut missed the cut, Dutchman Jurgen Stenfernt on BMC Naomie finished 0.33sec ahead of fellow clear-rounder Robert Smith on Vangelis S.

The show climaxes this evening with the Supreme Horse of the Year, in which the smart money is being waged on Out Of Sight, judges' choice in the Working Hunter category and the Leading Show Jumper of the Year. "I'd suggest Michael Whitaker if the course is big and gutsy, or Billy Twomey if it's fast and small," predicts Austin. And, never one to look a gift horse in the mouth, La Price will return for the grand finale.

ON TV TODAY
Horse of the Year Show
8pm Sky Sports 2

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

1949

The year the first Horse of the Year Show was staged. It was held in Harringay and attracted 400 competitors. The show moved to Wembley Arena in 1959 and then to the NEC in Birmingham in 2002

pumps £11m into the Midlands economy. The retail village is an orgy of commercialism where the credit crunch means thousands of cards being bunged into chip and pin machines. It sells everything

from tabards (£9.95) and spats (£6.95) to a three-jump course (£999), a fabulously well-appointed horsebox (£112,500 plus VAT) and an unnamed foal by Movistar (£6,000, ono). And if you have long desired a farm-

house-sized Oakamoor kitchen table (£1,580), you've come to the right place.

And there are opportunities to meet Katie Price — her KP Equestrian stall is festooned with pink and white balloons, a

gaudy Barbie world in a rather pastel solar system — and some horses. Appositely, the Icelandic Horse Society of Great Britain's Unnasta looks especially mournful. Although the entire prize pot

is a parsimonious £108,160, competition in a sport in which men and women and old and young compete on equal terms is fierce but always courtly. Yesterday's events included Jessica Crosby on Fountain