

## Touchdown! First Olympic Horses Arrive in Rio de Janeiro

**30 July 2016, Rio de Janeiro ~ The first Olympic horses are settling into their athletes' village today – the new-build stables at the Olympic Equestrian Centre in Deodoro – with Team New Zealand's Ringwood Skyboy winning the opening heat of the Rio 2016 Games to be the first to set foot on Brazilian soil.**

It's not just the human athletes that are **flying into Brazil for Rio 2016**. The Olympic horses touched down at Rio de Janeiro Galeão International Airport just before midnight last night after a near-12 hour flight from London (GBR).

The **34 Eventing horses may have been on a cargo plane**, but it was a specially designed **Emirates Boeing SkyCargo 777-F**, and they all flew business class! And there's no need for flat beds as horses sleep standing up, but that doesn't stop some of them asking for extra legroom!

Just like the human athletes, they had to go through passport control (and a health check) at London Stansted Airport before boarding with their carry-on luggage and check-in bags.

**Sporting the equine equivalent of flight socks (leg bandages), they received the full business class treatment**, with special meals delivered by flight attendants (actually grooms), a drinks trolley (buckets) offering water (not fizzy) with a choice of mixers. Apple or carrot sir?

**Vets are also on board to ensure the precious equine cargo arrived in tip-top form.** Which is important, as these four-legged athletes mean business!

**Nathan Anthony**, team vet for the Australian Eventing squad, was one of the six vets that flew with the horses. *"Flying is actually easier on the horses than going by truck", he said. "The only slightly difficult bit is the take-off, after that there are no bumps in the air! And we had a great captain on board who made the landing nice and smooth, and then the transfer to the Olympic stables with a police escort was really easy."*

**Welcomed into Rio in the early hours of the morning, the horses were driven in specially kitted out trucks**, complete with a full Federal highway police escort, under the watchful eye of Christ the Redeemer en route to the stables at the Olympic Equestrian Centre, where they rolled out the equine equivalent of a red carpet – black rubber matting!

Some of the equine stars clearly thought they were on a catwalk, with **Zimbabwean horse Sam The Man** strutting his stuff in a very fetching compression suit, colourfully emblazoned with his national flag. And **Chilli Morning**, the stallion that Britain's London 2012 team silver medalist

William Fox-Pitt will ride in Rio, **was sporting an equine baseball cap, complete with sheepskin lining.**

One that let his natural beauty shine without any adornments was **Leonidas II**, the horse that **legendary Kiwi Mark Todd will ride.** The 60-year-old Todd, who took individual gold at Seoul 1984 and Los Angeles 1988, is contesting his seventh Olympics and also training the Brazilian team on the side.

**This in-bound flight, the first of nine during the Olympic period, transported horses from Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Japan, Italy and China. And over the next couple of weeks, more than 200 horses from 43 nations will be arriving in Deodoro, ready to put in their bid for gold with their human partners in the three Olympic equestrian disciplines of Eventing, Dressage and Jumping.**

Photo caption: Touchdown! The first Olympic horses flew into Rio de Janeiro just before midnight on 30 July before being transferred, complete with Federal Highway police escort, to their athletes' village, the new-build stables at the Olympic Equestrian Venue in the Deodoro Olympic Park. (Rio 2016 / Gabriel Nascimento)

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