

British Minister and Scottish Charity Commission urged to investigate Mongolian horse race

What is being labelled as the world's longest horse race, has been denounced by an unprecedented alliance of equestrian, endurance, exploration leaders and UK based equestrian website Voices for Horses.

At a thousand kilometers, the Mongol Derby would be the largest non-sanctioned endurance race ever attempted. Set to be run this summer in Mongolia, nearly a thousand semi-wild under-sized native horses have been drafted into an effort which deliberately flaunts international endurance racing rules.

"There's no carefully marked course, no catering tent and no support; this is horse racing on a whole new scale. You will change steeds every 40 km so the horses will be fresh. Bleeding kidneys, broken limbs, open sores, moon stroke and a list of dangers longer than your arm stand between you and victory," warns the official race website.

The horse race is being promoted by Tom Morgan, a native of Great Britain whose company, The Adventurists, previously specialized in enticing adventure-hungry tourists into signing up to race junk cars to distant national capitals.

"We don't make any safety arrangements. Our adventures are designed to be just that, so organising a support crew would rather take the edge off things. People are made painfully aware that what they're entering into can be extremely dangerous," Morgan's website cautioned.

Connie Caudill, President of the American Endurance Ride Conference, is one of the many equestrian leaders who have warned that Morgan's Mongol Derby will severely damage the sport and may well lead to horses being ridden to death.

"This will set endurance racing back 50 years," Caudill said, then added, "This isn't an endurance race, it's entertainment that will undermine endurance racing all over the world."

Morgan's company sought advice from The Long Riders' Guild, the world's first international association of equestrian explorers. The Guild warned the tour company against encouraging the twenty-five foreign competitors, all of whom had paid nearly \$5,000 for a chance to ride, to attempt the journey, as the Guild's mounted explorers had recently encountered wolf attacks, bubonic plague, rabies, flash floods, foul water, poisoned food, horse theft and personal assault.

"The Adventurists is preparing to embark on an ill-advised equestrian misadventure, one in which your company does not appreciate the many

equestrian hardships and dangers being presented to the horses and riders,” The Guild informed the tour company.

Regardless of the danger, Morgan is busy promoting what he calls “biggest, baddest equine affair on the planet.” He is being assisted by Richard Dunwoody, a former British champion jockey turned equestrian tour guide. Originally hired to present a lecture on racing to the amateur riders, Dunwoody has announced that he will be riding as a contestant in the event.

Because he plans on drafting nearly one thousand native horses into his non-sanctioned race, Morgan sought tactical and equestrian assistance from an unlikely source, the international charity, Mercy Corps.

Operating in more than a hundred countries, with offices in Scotland and Mongolia, the wealthy charity agreed to accept a guaranteed £25,000 in donations from Morgan’s riders in exchange for providing the tour operator with access to twenty-five Mongolian herder families and their horses.

“Mercy Corps are delighted to be a part of the first ever Mongol Derby,” said Jennifer Adams, the Event Development Coordinator at Mercy Corps, European Headquarters in Edinburgh, Scotland. When asked if this partnership of participation meant that Mercy Corps was in the horse racing business, Adams answered, “I guess you could say that.”

During an eight month investigation into the race, Long Riders in New Zealand, Canada, Switzerland, Great Britain, Mongolia and the United States confirmed that neither the Mongolian government, nor the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI), the international body assigned to protect endurance racing from exploitation, was involved in organizing the race.

“This is going to be all about the endurance of the rider, as opposed to the horse,” said a spokesperson for Morgan’s company.

When it was learned that Morgan’s race appears to violate the three primary principles of endurance racing, namely no commercial exploitation of the horse, a marked route and confirmed sources of water, the world’s largest coalition of riders, explorers and editors launched an international petition asking the Mongolian president to halt the race and urging Princess Haya, President of the FEI, to ban the competitors for life.

Additionally, Britain’s Minister for the Horse, Jim Fitzpatrick, has been urged to scrutinize Morgan’s non-sanctioned race, and the Charity Commissions in England and Scotland received a complaint asking them to investigate the possibility that Mercy Corps participated in unacceptable behaviour.

Regardless of what happens out on the steppe in August, it is already plain to see that thousands of horse riders, equestrian explorers and endurance riders have banded together in an unprecedented act of solidarity designed to halt Morgan’s spectacle.

For more information about the race, and to sign the petition, please visit
Voices for Horses (www.voicesforhorses.co.uk) the full link is -
http://www.voicesforhorses.co.uk/news/read-archive_967_Racing-into-Trouble-by-CuChullaine-O%27Reilly-FRGS.html and the Long Riders' Guild
Mongolian Investigation & Open Letters (www.thelongridersguild.com/mongolia.htm)