

The Audi Polo Awards



In its 3rd year celebrating the great and the good of polo, the Polo Awards supported by Audi were once again a resounding success. The glitterati of the polo circuit were out in force at the Inter Continental Park Lane, London and celebrated the stars of the sport.

Although some players are notoriously difficult to get out of their whites and off the pitches, players turned out in black-tie looking suitably suited and booted.

Over 400 guests enjoyed the Pommery Champagne reception, 3-Course dinner, auction in aid of Tusk, not forgetting the all-important awards.

A highlights of the evening were the awards for the High Goal:

The Indigo Real Estate Most Outstanding High Goal Team Award went to Loro Piana who had a triumphant 2007 British season. They had powered through Guards in June and won the Vivari Queen's Cup, beating Ellerston White and put up a serious battle against Lechuza Caracas in the final of the Gold Cup. The team consisted of Martin Espain, David Stirling Jr, Juan Martin Nero and patron Alfio Marchini, another winner from the evening.

Alfio, who plays off 2 goals also won the Cartier Most Outstanding High Goal Patron and was presented with a watch from Cartier's Arnaud Bamberger. Second member of the team, Juan Martin Nero was also a winner, receiving the Audi Most Outstanding High Handicapped Player. Reportedly nicknamed Juanma, the 9 goaler won the Queen's Cup and the Copa de Plato in Sotogrande with Loro Piana and was a US Open finalist.

We catch up with some of the other winners of the evening to see what the awards mean to them and their future plans for the season ahead.



Julian and Howard Hipwood



Howard Hipwood

Caballus Lifetime Achievement Award Julian and Howard Hipwood

We ask Howard a few questions:

How did you feel receiving the award? It was a very humbling and amazing experience. To see the enormous reaction from everyone in the room was surreal.

What is it about the game that has kept you for so long? The game just becomes such an integral part of your life; at times, it's the only thing you think about. One of the most wonderful parts is the pure magic of the ponies. Every now and then an unbelievable one will come along and all you can do is marvel at what they can do...

Proudest moment? I am so lucky to have had many polo-related proud moments; I am honoured to have won the Westchester on Smiths Lawn, played in the Argentine Open and winning the Gold Cup ranks pretty highly!

Biggest regret? Not joining the army. It's something I really wanted to do and I don't think it would have interfered with my polo career. For me and at that time in my life, it would have been a good thing to do. I have a son of 19 and I don't think I'd encourage him to join now – it would have to be his choice.

We also feature Julian Hipwood and his achievements on page 93.



Julian Hipwood



The Kerry Packer Most Outstanding High Goal Pony Music – Ellerston

Vital Statistics:

Age: 13, Colour: Chestnut, Height: 15.2hh, Sex: Mare

Music's response at winning:

"I am verrrry pleased to win the prize fore bestest ponee. I playd verrrry hard last season and was even in the Argy Open. Facundo [Pieres] lookes afta me wen he plays me but sometimes I know bestest. I wasn't in the Queen's Cup final in 2007 but was in the ponee lines – If I had beene playing, we wood have won!"

An embryo foal out of Tango by Monty, Music's recent accolade goes not only to herself but also to the vast breeding programme set up at Ellerston. Started over 20 years ago by the late Kerry Packer, intense embryo breeding from the best polo mares in the world has enabled players to continue to play their winning string whilst assured that the offspring can be produced for the future. Jim Gilmore (the back-bone behind much of the Ellerston operation) added: "Although I don't see embryo ponies necessarily performing better than ones from natural birth, the development of embryo foals has been a great help to players."





Longdole Most Outstanding Arena Team Asprey London

When others are flying to Argentina to win Latino gold and silver, one team fought off home, arena competition to raise the RCBPC's Gold Cup and to take this prestigious award.

Chris Hyde and Peter Webb, aided by patron Simon Holley had a very successful campaign that left the final scores in the final of the Gold Cup at 22-18 – highlighting the team's deserved win of an award.

Simon enthuses: "I am chuffed to bits to win such an award. Equally I am happy to have won the Gold Cup, especially with our new sponsor Asprey London. The combination of Chris and Peter in the 15 goal just proves how we were playing up to and above our handicap and I am very pleased with our success."

Longdole Most Outstanding Arena Player Chris Hyde

In a season where he and his fellow team-mates, Asprey London, won the RCBPC Arena Gold Cup (his sixth success in the tournament), receiving the award for the Most Outstanding Player has rounded off a winter of professional success for 9-goaler, Chris Hyde.

"Winning the award was a great honour, especially as there is such tough competition from guys like Seb Dawnay, Jonny Good and Nacho (Gonzalez). It was my first arena season for three years and I have to say I think it went to the right person!"

Chris has proven just as formidable out of the arena and playing in the summer season – last year reaching the finals of the Eduardo Moore 15 goal and the 12 goal John Prestwich at the RCBPC with the Asprey team.



New Alphabet Most Outstanding contribution to Umpiring Julian Appleby

"I felt very flattered receiving the award, especially as it is voted for by players. Obviously it's great to have been chosen." Julian comments.

Although still actively playing back home in New Zealand, Jules has taken a step back from playing in the UK and now plays mainly as a substitute when he isn't blowing fouls as an A grade umpire.

"Basically it got to the stage where I was going to have to replace my string, so I made the conscious decision to sell my ponies and concentrate on umpiring, which I really enjoy." Concludes Julian.



Imagine Homes Most Outstanding Medium Handicapped Player Rob Archibald

Scorching through last season, playing in the winning the 12, 15 and 18 goal Victor Ludorum teams from the '07 season, it is no wonder that Rob Arch was recognized and awarded the accolade of Imagine Homes Most Outstanding Medium Handicapped Player.

"It was great to win those tournaments and to be awarded the Audi Award. What I love about the game is its speed and the horses; although that invariably means that I'm constantly looking for faster and better ones to keep my string improving."

So far this season, Rob is continuing his success in the 12, 15 and 18 goal level and has already played in Jerome Wirth's winning team Enigma in the Hurtwood £50,000 Challenge alongside Malcolm Borwick and fellow award winner James Beim, (Most Outstanding British Professional).

Winner of the Polo Agency Most Outstanding Low Handicapped Player Ollie Cudmore

At only 18 and having just finished taking his A levels at Cheltenham College, Ollie is making serious waves in polo. Already playing off 2-goals, he has a full season ahead playing lots of 12 and 15 goal.

"Obviously, I was so pleased to win the award but it was a real shock. I love polo for the ponies and the fact that I get to play both with, and against some top blokes and friends. However, the downside is I know mum is on the side-lines panicking that I might get injured!"

After the '08 British season, Ollie will be based in Argentina for his 'gap year' to further improve his game... a 'ringer' to watch out for in 2009... you have been warned!



Winners of the Katie Barker Agency Most Outstanding Ladies' Team: Nina Clarkin (also winner of the Pommery Most Outstanding Lady Player for the third year running), Tamara Vestey, Emma Tomlinson and Lucy Taylor. See our feature on Nina and Tamara on page 66



Winner of the Apes Hill Most Outstanding British Professional: James Beim pictured with Sir Charles 'Cow' Williams of Apes Hill. See our feature on page 100