



I am writing these lines after reading the letter from Ms. Annika Axelsson ([Annex 1](#)), which has caused me deep sadness. Anyone who has been to Montenmedio knows perfectly well that both I personally, and my entire team are dedicated to ensure that all of our clients, many of whom are friends, including riders, grooms and owners, all feel at home. With this in mind, I reply to the above letter out of a sense of responsibility and because I believe that it is my obligation as director of the Sunshine Tour to do so, since Ms. Axelsson's claims are false from the start and allude to unconfirmed data that leads people to question our work here. First of all, it is important to state that Ms. Axelsson actually left the facilities here at Montenmedio before most of the events that she recounts in detail in her statement, actually took place. In fact for this reason I will not include my personal opinions of what happened, but rather provide the facts that disprove the information she provided in her letter.

It all began on February 26th, when our Treatment Veterinarian, Dr. Turrero called me at 20:00 to inform me that Dr. Frank van Hoek, who was accredited with a Dutch rider at the Tour, had reported a case of a horse with a fever. We proceeded to search the computer for said horse, to find out who it was with and where it was in the stables, since Ms. Axelsson, who was the person responsible for the horse during the competition, did not contact the OC to inform us of its condition. At that moment, the Treatment Veterinarian, the Sports Director and the Stable Manager all went to the stables where the mare "A" was and when they confirmed that she had a fever (39.5), the mare was sent to the isolation area.

Therefore, on that day February 26th, "A" was transferred to the isolation area, which is located 2km away from the competition area. This isolation area has 250 fixed stables available for use. At that moment there were 17 horses in the isolation area that had all come from Valencia, none of them had symptoms of EHV-1. From 1,900 horses that were at the Sunshine Tour, only one Spanish rider had a horse isolated due to a cough but without any signs of fever. It is not until Sunday, February 28th, that the FEI warned us not to allow any other horses to enter the facilities, thus creating the "bubble effect" to protect the horses that were already present in the installations.

From this day, February 26th until March 4th, the mare "A" was treated by the organisers's Veterinary Team. The mare's temperature rose to 40.5 degrees during the night of Feb 26th, but at 22:00, it dropped back to 38.4 degrees, after the necessary treatment had been given by the organisation's veterinary services. This is clearly stated in the document attached ([Annex 2](#)).

At this point, I wish to state clearly that the statement Ms. Axelsson makes, regarding the lack of veterinary resources that the organisers had at their disposal, is false. During the Tour we have a fully stocked veterinary clinic, with all the necessary supplies (including catheters, probes, medications, etc ...) in order to meet any needs that may arise. In actual fact, it was our Veterinary Service Manager who provided medication to



the mare's, "A"s, own veterinarian. This was provided while he waited for a medication that according to this vet was necessary and had been ordered by the owner of the mare, from Belgium. I confirmed this fact by phone with the owner of the mare. Invoices from the mare's veterinarian that were sent to her owner are attached to verify this statement ([Annex 3](#)).

Based on the knowledge and experience of the veterinarians here who were monitoring "A"s symptoms develop, it was considered that she could possibly be exhibiting signs indicative of Piroplasmosis and other diseases that cause similar neurological manifestations. In order to be sure of a correct diagnosis, and not to make the assumption that the mare had EHV-1, the decision was made to test her blood for Piroplasmosis as well as doing a PCR test analysis for EHV-1. It should be noted that at no point did Ms Axelsson speak directly to the veterinarian on this matter nor did she ask the vet to take any samples from the mare.

February the 26th was a Friday night and the following Monday, March 1st was a bank holiday here in Andalucia. With the intention of speeding up the results from the tests that had been taken, the blood samples for the Piroplasmosis tests were taken for analysis directly to the laboratory in Madrid by car, by the FEI Veterinary Delegate who had finished her work here at the Tour. This meant that the results for the test were received this same afternoon, on March 1st. The swabs for the EHV-1 samples were sent, by the same veterinarian, to the laboratory in Zaragoza, the results were obtained on March 2nd, but as we did not have the mare's passport in our possession the lab issued a first 'validated results report' without the microchip number on March the 2nd and then a second report on March 4th which included her microchip number.

As you can see in the attached documents ([Annex 4](#)), both results were negative for EHV-1. This urgent shipment of the samples was completely and exclusively organised by the OC and the Veterinary Service Manager contrary to the wrongly stated claims made by Ms. Axelsson in her statement.

On the 27th of February "A" was constantly monitored and was treated by the competition's Veterinary Team, who were the vets approved in the schedule details published by the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI). The mare's temperature was taken 10 times throughout this day. From then on the schedule of the vets attending the mare in the isolation zone was as follows; twice a day, once in the morning between 9:00 and 9:30 and once in the afternoon between 18:00 and 18:30. All the people responsible for the horses in the isolation area were informed that it was recommended that all the horses there had their temperature taken every two hours. This same afternoon "A"s fever rose and after Ms. Axelsson contacted the vets at 22.30, who returned to the isolation area to provide the treatment necessary to lower her fever. The relevant WhatsApp conversation is attached below ([Annex 5](#)).



On the 28th of February it was our vet who wrote to Ms. Axelsson on two occasions, as when she arrived at the isolation zone to treat the de “A” at 9:00 there was no one in attendance. After waiting there for an hour to check the mare, Ms. Axelsson replied to the vet saying that she was jumping, and that at 11:00, after a two hour wait, someone would come to the stable to assist the vet in treating the mare, this conversation is also attached [\(Annex 6\)](#).

On the 4th of March at 7:24 “A”'s groom sent a video of the mare trotting up in the sand arena [\(Annex 7\)](#), and at 9:00 the Veterinary Service Manager repeated the treatment of the mare with anti-inflammatories and antibiotics. This is the same groom who, in an audio message sent to the vet doubting that the mare has neurological symptoms. The vet does however notice some symptoms of weakness in the hindquarters that morning, however the symptoms are not very obvious and it is agreed that if the mare’s symptoms get worse the vet will be notified immediately. Once again Ms. Axelsson does not tell the truth in her letter, the mare was observed and a revision was made by the Veterinary Service Manager that morning at 9:00 the same as every other morning and did the mare was not presenting a fever (37.1 degrees) [\(Annex 8\)](#).

This same day at around 13:30, whilst I am in a meeting in my office with my team, the Sporting Director of the Sunshine Tour, Sr. Trapote, received a call from “A”'s owner asking us for help as the mare’s symptoms had deteriorated over the past few hours. I immediately contacted the vets who confirmed that the mare had started to demonstrate more obvious neurological symptoms.

Therefore on this day the 4th of March, a blood sample (10/10ml) was taken again from the mare “A” and was sent to another laboratory, at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid. The result was obtained the following day and was once again negative, however the laboratory added that the result was “inconclusive due to the quality of blood analysed”. This observation is difficult to understand as this is the standard quantity of blood taken for any samples and if the laboratory considered that this was an insufficient amount and required more than is normally required for their test, they could have notified us in advance. I include this document with a copy of the results [\(Annex 9\)](#).

After observing that the mare was displaying neurological symptoms, Dr. Frederik Bruyninx notified both the Veterinary Service Manager and the additional FEI Veterinary Delegate that he is the owner’s vet for “A”, and that he will be the person in charge of her care. At no point did the Veterinary Service Manager refuse to treat the mare for EHV-1, indeed she was the person who bought the required medicine from a Pharmacy in Conil, to treat the mare. It was also this vet who phoned the vet in charge of the outbreak of EHV-1 in Valencia and asked for any advice about the application of the most effective treatment for the virus. Below I attach the invoices for the purchase of the medicine required by the mare’s vet [\(Annex 10\)](#) which was later given to Dr. Bruyninx after the WhatsApp conversation [\(Annex 11\)](#).



I would like to reiterate that at no time does the person responsible for “A” during the competition, Ms. Axelsson, directly address the OC, neither that morning nor at any time before or after this date. The owner of the mare “A” is the person who is in contact with us. I am personally in contact with the owner, informing her about the purchase of medicines and the condition of the mare during her stay at our facilities and also after her departure. It is also to her that I send the results of the analyses, this can be seen in the document attached with a record of our conversations on WhatsApp ([Annex 12](#)).

That same afternoon of March 4th, while my concern for “A”'s condition grew, I called Dr. Miguel Valdés, the Director of La Equina de Manilva, Reference Hospital as member of the Circuit's veterinary team. I asked him about the possibility of moving the mare to his clinic. Dr. Valdés replied that due to sanitary health reasons the hospital couldn't take “A” into its facilities, but that we would design an immediate care plan which would enable us to offer ICU care adapted for use in our isolation area, for any patients demonstrating neurological problems, both for “A” and any other horse on the Circuit that might need it.

In the conversation attached, ([Annex 13](#)) you can see how Dr. Valdés informed me and, by using photographs, showed me the type of installation that they were to install that same night in one of the isolation boxes. Dr. Valdés contacted our Stable Manager to organise everything. That same afternoon, in a gesture of great generosity on his part, Dr. Valdés and his team installed with the help of the Circuit's staff, a crane, harness and a head protector in a 3x6 meter box in the isolation area. Therefore from March 4th at 21:30, the ICU for horses displaying neurological symptoms, was at the disposal of any horse that should need it.

Dr. Valdés also contacted all the private Veterinary clinics near the Tour and the Veterinary Faculty of Córdoba who agreed to take the mare in a weeks time. Therefore, from the 4th of March the Tour had in place a functioning neurological ICU, set up and ready to treat any horse with neurological symptoms.

Dr. Valdés also examined the mare “A”, with Dr. Bruyninx and both veterinarians agreed on her condition. This was the night of the 4th of March and they agreed that she was stable and without serious neurological symptoms, she was only presenting a slight alteration in the movement of the right hind leg and intermittently dragging the hoof. Dr. Bruyninx thanked Dr. Valdés for this assistance and Dr Valdés left him with materials to catheterise the bladder and showed him how to use the equipment, in the case that the mare developed bladder paralysis or Cauda Equina syndrome. Which fortunately was not the case.

On the other hand Dr. Valdés recommended that “A” was moved to the UCI box that evening, however her carers, decided not to do so. Dr. Valdés gave clear instructions that the mare should be moved immediately at the least sign of her symptoms worsening,



which was agreed to by Dr. Bruyninx. Since the mare “A” did not worsen and her symptoms remained stable overnight, 4th March, she was never moved to the ICU.

On the same note, Dr. Valdés gave me Dr. Bruyninx’s phone number so that I might call him and “convince” him to move the mare to the ICU box if not immediately, then at the minimum sign if there was the slightest deterioration in her symptoms. Once again Ms. Axelsson is not telling the truth in her letter as I personally called Dr. Bruyninx this night to insist that he moved the mare immediately to the ICU box, and he told me that he would move her the next day.

I am surprised and very much saddened by the statement that Mrs. Axelsson makes in her letter, and that the ICU box was prepared without valuing the effort that this meant for the OC and especially for the veterinary team. We were able to prepare an ICU in 4 hours, the same facility as, for example, the University of Córdoba took 12 days to make available.

I would also like to point out that when the FEI cancelled the competition on Friday March 5th, the FEI Veterinarian Delegate, the FEI Veterinary Service Manager and the FEI Treating Veterinarian were allowed access to the premises, this being approved in advance by the FEI in order to reduce the number of people able to access the area to a minimum. At this moment there were only 6 horses in the isolation zone one being “A”, who was under the care of her own veterinarian. The isolation zone’s stables was under the supervision of one security guard who was in control of access to the zone on a 24 hour basis and the biosecurity protocols, with disinfection and PPI suits provided by the OC. I attach a photograph of the material [\(Annex 14\)](#). I took this photograph myself on my mobile phone, just in case someone might later claim that this material was not available at the time as has been the case. I was accompanied by the FEI Veterinary Delegate at this moment and I asked him why the material was on the ground, to which he replied that it was there by order of one of the Additional FEI Delegates.

On the 6th of March I went to the isolation zone boxes to see “A” and saw Dr. Bruyninx was checking the condition of the horses in his care without using the necessary PPE clothing in compliance with the biosecurity protocol. I would like to mention here that Dr. Frank van Hoek was not in charge of the care of “A” from the 26th of February, which once again shows the lack of truth in the statement made by Ms. Axelsson.

As of the night of Friday, March 5th, the Ministry of Agriculture was directly in charge of the horses’ health certificates needed before each horse left the facilities. The Ministry was also in charge of carrying out a third blood test on “A”, this time not only for EHV-1 but also for the West Nile virus. These samples were taken before “A” left the facilities on the 6th of March, with both the mare’s owner’s and veterinarian’s consent. On leaving the facilities the mare was transported by two assistants and Dr. Bruyninx. The Ministry sent the samples from the mare on Sunday, March 7th, with a driver to the official laboratory in Madrid (Algete). On Tuesday 9th of March both test results return negative



and I myself send the results to the mare's owner, once again asking how the mare was which I also did again at a later date ([Annex 15](#)). Therefore, we can confirm that during her stay, "A" had three EHV-1 tests, in three different laboratories, one from nasal swabs for a PCR test and two from blood samples, all of which came back with negative results and from which, the first and last tests were considered to be conclusively negative ([Annex 16](#)).

I would like to make a special note of the assistance that our veterinary services gave to Dr. Bruyninx and to the staff of the owner of "A". This assistance was continued during the transportation of the mare from the Sunshine Tour to Belgium. As soon as Dr. Valdés received a call from Dr. Bruyninx requesting assistance during the trip, he was active in providing addresses and contacts of veterinarians and veterinary hospitals on the way to up to Belgium. Here in Spain, the owner had at her disposal an ICU place open at the Complutense University of Madrid. Dr. Bruyninx estimated that "A" was sufficiently stable and that she could manage 2 full days of travel.

For me and for this OC the welfare of the horses has been, and always will our most important priority. In these turbulent times, we must unite and fight together so that everything that has happened does not reoccur. We, as well as the FEI and all the officials who represent it, have tried to do what is best for the horses and the sport, and letters like that of Ms. Axelsson's, only help to confuse, discredit and cause harm.

Finally, considering all that has been said before and with the understanding that the statement that Ms. Axelsson has published, due to its inaccuracies and complete untruths, has caused irreparable damage to the OC that I represent and who has more than proven its professionalism after twenty-seven years of experience, we really hope that the OC will be redeemed and the facts corrected in the same media outlets in which the letter was published.

Best wishes

Teresa Blázquez  
General Manager