

4 / 24 / 2023

Robe Ramps Up the Horsepower for Equitana Spectacle

Products Involved

ESPRITE® MegaPointe® RoboSpot™

Equitana is a four-day equine extravaganza staged every two years at Melbourne Showground in Australia celebrating the spirit and passion of Australian equestrians and the integral place that horses play in Australian hearts, minds, history, culture, and society. The last such event was in 2018 as the 2020 one was canned due to Covid, so this year, organisers GTR Events brought it back bigger, better, and more brilliant than before!

Lighting designer and technical producer for the event Marcus Pugh specified Robe ESPRITES and MegaPointes as primary moving lights on his lighting scheme for the 2022 'Mane Event', a jaw-dropping entertainment spectacle staged on the Mane Stage of the Grand Pavilion venue.

This all-action night for all horse lovers showcased multiple horse-based and related skills and featured numerous breeds and equine performers!

The Mane Event was presented by Australian horseman Guy McLean, known for his magnetic wit and charismatic personality as well as his almost supernatural connection with horses which delighted the 4,260-capacity sold-out audience for Mane Event.

Marcus also lit this show in 2018 but in a different venue. The Grand Pavilion is a large 89ft high 6-pole 'big top' style tensile membrane structure which is the Showgrounds' centrepiece. In this case, a 70 x 30 metre sand arena was created inside to accommodate all the horse activities.

Rigging - with 6 poles - is a major challenge and creativity is a must, so Marcus and the team from Melbourne based rental specialist Harry the Hirer Productions, who provided all the lighting, audio, vision, staging and rigging equipment, responded with great enthusiasm.

They designed a custom bridling system which has been engineered to take enormous horizontal loads off the King and Queen poles which enabled the installation of trusses spanning the 36 metres between the poles, plus a large central four-sided LED which looked like it was suspended in space!

A diversity of lighting hardware was used including around 150 moving lights of which the 24 x Robe ESPRITES and 18 x MegaPointes were the 'workhorse' fixtures.

ESPRITES have become a "go-to" profile moving light for Marcus who thinks that MegaPointes are a perfect combination with them, and both sets of fixtures were rigged prominently in the side trusses between the king and queen poles.

The ESPRITES were used for highlighting and texturing parts of the arena and for throwing projections onto the tent skins which looked impressive.

Marcus thinks the output is "best in class," with a great balance between output and beam quality. The gobo set is usable in almost any application and the animation wheel design with the 'wave edge' is a stroke of genius and offers a unique look when half inserted. All of these very cool effects were used to transform the roof of the venue into a sea of patterns and colours. He mentions that they are great for lighting and keying faces and producing fantastic skin tones.

Harry the Hirer Productions first bought ESPRITES in 2019, and at the time were one of the first rental companies in Australia to invest in Robe's next generation LED moving light technology. Marcus has been using them solidly ever since.

Four additional ESPRITES were deployed on the two RoboSpot systems - two per BaseStation - offering scope to follow what were often extremely fast-moving targets with horses galloping around the arena. Marcus appreciates the ease of use and flexibility that RoboSpot brings to a show, "You don't have to rig any follow spot towers, so that also saves time on the build," he noted.

The RoboSpot ESPRITES were rigged on special trusses attached to the main tent poles, and when not being used for following, were repurposed for other tasks while lighting the main show - another very handy feature of running a RoboSpot system. The operators were located backstage.

RoboSpots have been another great value purchase for Harry the Hirer Productions, equipment also acquired in 2019 and supplied by Robe's Australian distributor, Jands. They now rarely use conventional follow spots.

MegaPointes are Marcus's first choice of beam moving light and have been for some time. "They're fantastic for all the big accents and WOW moments!" he enthused, adding that 24 x MegaPointes is enough to create serious visual impact!

They were all on the side trusses rigged between the big top's king and queen poles.

In addition to rigging, other galvanising aspects of the event included creating a nice even white wash over the whole performance space for the competition segments of the show so all could see what they were doing clearly, and everything looked good on camera.

Care had to be taken in directional lighting so as not to spook the horses, and the same went for sudden movements and flashing which had to be judiciously introduced at exactly the right moments to work as a theatrical effect whilst ensuring the horses were comfortable.

Marcus was extremely mindful of all these demands during programming, plus the positioning of lights not to catch any of the priceless equine stars in the eyes.

Mane Event's technical planning also allowed time for the horses to be introduced and acclimatised to the show arena, complete with lighting, sound, and video. Some of the animals were experienced ceremony veterans and a lot more used to this, while for others it was their first time being part of an epic entertainment show.

Dust from the floor was another issue, both for the lighting aesthetics and the physical toll this took on the moving lights! Only the toughest would survive including the Robes which Marcus thinks are robustly engineered with care applied to the design related to how they will be used.

On top of all these challenges was the exacting task of delivering a massive show with all the drama, spectacle and theatre that thrilled the audience which involved a huge amount of teamwork from many departments and disciplines.

Marcus designed and managed the lighting, audio and video systems with Grand MA 3 programming by Cam McKaige and Chad Spenser.

Photo Credit: Katelyn Nash







