

## Latest James Bond Film Under Attack by Animal Rights Activists

**Thursday's filming set to take place against the backdrop of the controversial Palio horse race.**

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Film crews working in Italy on the latest 007 thriller are ready to roll, but not if animal rights activists have their way. A chase scene, set against the centuries-old Palio, is on tap for Thursday's scheduled filming of the upcoming James Bond movie. The controversial Palio horse race is an Italian tradition, where jockeys ride bareback and careen through the tight cobblestone streets of Siena, Italy, while throngs of onlookers cheer on their favorites. Over the many hundreds of years this race has been run, horse fatalities are the norm.

Animal rights campaigners are protesting the filming, citing that the James Bond film will glamorize a race that was "a relic of medieval brutality." They say that 50 horses have been killed since 1970, with many others injured.

The next Bond movie, the 22nd in the 007 series, has yet to be given a title and is referred to simply as Bond 22. Directed by Marc Forster, it again stars Daniel Craig as Bond, with Judi Dench as M.

The town council at Siena has given permission for the filming, which supposedly has Bond chasing a villain through the steep and narrow streets, then across rooftops and through the underground medieval aqueducts, while the horses thunder round the Campo, which is the town's main square.

The filmmakers have agreed to "strict conditions" obliging them to treat the race with "full respect," according to reports. They are forbidden from showing any violence "involving either people or animals" that may occur. This week's filming will focus on the race, with scenes involving actors inserted later. There will be 14 cameras placed at strategic positions around the arena but helicopters have been banned.

The Palio is a part of the Sieneese way of life dating back to the 11th century. It is preceded by weeks of anticipation and pageantry, with each horse representing one of the 17 contrade, or city guilds.

Three years ago, animal welfare activists called for it to be banned when an 8-year-old horse died of a broken neck after it collided with another horse. Television viewers witnessed the horse being dragged away by its hind legs.

Eleonora di Giuseppe, spokeswoman for the Italian Federation of Equestrian Sport, said yesterday that using the Palio in a Bond film would glamorize a race "in which horses are exposed to unacceptable risks." She said that Italy's historic traditions were to be valued "but the problem is that the Palio, like other local festivals, is not subject to central state controls. We want a national law that will guarantee standards of animal safety. We are not living in the Middle Ages, we are living in 2007." She said that in former times heavy horses more suited to the course were used, but now they use Thoroughbreds. Margherita D'Amico, an animal rights campaigner, said the race is barbaric. "I have nothing against traditions but some are outdated. There was a time when young men were castrated to preserve their soprano voices--but we don't do that any more," she said.

The Palio is held twice a year, on festivals dedicated to the Virgin Mary: July 2, the Feast of the Visitation, and August 16, the day after the Feast of the Assumption (Ferragosto), the Italian August bank holiday. The Campo is always packed with thousands of spectators in an atmosphere bordering on hysteria. In the morning, the horses are blessed in their contrada's churches. The race runs for three laps of the Campo and the winner is awarded a palio, a banner of painted silk. Palio races are also run in other Italian cities such as Ferrara, where last year three horses had to be destroyed and police used tear gas to control rioting. The race was annulled.

When British Prime Minister Tony Blair attended the Siena Palio in 1999, Andrew Tyler, director of the UK animal rights group, Animal Aid, commented: "It is a primitive spectacle that appeals to the worst instincts in human nature."

Bond 22, made by EON Productions, was originally due for release in May next year--the centenary of Ian Fleming's birth--but has been delayed until November 2008.