



Main Event  
Photography

## **NEVER CHANGE YOUR GEAR BEFORE A RIDE**

My first attempt at Shahzada was last year and we got to Friday lunch time before we vetted out. I don't like things to beat me so I wanted another go.

My lead up this year included Freemantle 80 km where I tested out some new sponge pads for my eziride stirrups as the old ones were looking a little worn and uneven and I thought that some new ones would be more comfortable for Shahzada. During the first leg of Freemantle my ankles went and felt like I was spraining them every trot step. What have I done? The old pads had been thrown out. By Monday I could hardly walk. How on earth could I attempt 400 kms.

Trying to cover all angles I invest in some new lace up ariat riding boots to try and support my dodgy ankles and buy some strapping in case and head off to Shahzada with great trepidation and fear of pain..

We arrived on Saturday and camp with Roy Barsby who is strapping for Deanna Trevena also riding the 400, Chris and Ralph Turnbull are riding the mini marathon and are not arriving till Monday and Jenny and Frank Flissinger and their friend Ronnie are also riding the mini marathon. Pre ride vetting goes well and I talk to my riding partners for the week Keith Nagle and Sunny and arrange to ride out at 4.15 am. All organised and the butterflies arrive en mass.

Monday morning and off we go. 50 km leg out the common road, up Johnny's Hill, along Transmission and down Blue Hill and my nightmares have become a reality. The ankles are not happy. I keep trotting but all is not well.

2<sup>nd</sup> leg saw a change to the track due to the high level of water in the river so we lead our horses over the bridge, and head up Jack's Track, to a turn around and back down Jack's and home. I had tried to strap my ankles but they are not improving, and pain killers are not helping. Not much you can do when the horse is travelling so well. Keep remembering that he is the important one. Bogart and Sunny just go so well together and I really enjoy Keith's company and he is very patient in putting up with my problems.

Tuesday morning we head out to go up Shepherd's Gully. Horses are powering along and all I can think about is what I can do to relieve my pain. I come up with some very strange ideas. I need someone who knows what they are doing with strapping my ankles and I need to chock the outside edge of the pads to angle my foot in and raise the outside of my foot. Keith offers to lend me a spare pair of stirrups he has back at camp but I explain to my strapper/husband/saviour of my idea and while I am resting between legs he gaff tapes some cardboard and Masonite that he finds somewhere into my stirrups and I get my ankles professionally strapped by Roz Ryan who takes time out before she too saddles up for the

next leg of the 400 km. Off we go on the 2<sup>nd</sup> leg and amazing.... No pain. We need to do some minor adjustments but I am so happy to be pain free finally. As we are heading to Careflight Hill Keith is told that he is missing a shoe as it was seen way back on the tar kms back. Luckily he was just past the checkpoint so back he went to call for a farrier and I had to continue on without him. Not much fun after travelling so well together. Riding alone has its bonuses though as you get to ride a little with a lot of people that you meet along the way. I end up riding in with Deanna and am happy to hear that Keith did get the shoe replaced and was on his way. Almost end up with a represent this afternoon so I get massage guru Geoff Cribb to have another look at Bogart and iron out any possible problem areas.

Wednesday is the big day and it started at 1.30 am when Chris got up so that he could run up Boyd's setting the flares so that we riders could find our way up. He was back by 3.30am to help me saddle up. The 1<sup>st</sup> leg includes up Boyd's in the dark, down McKechnie's, along Branch road and up Bloody Preston's. I thought I was going to have a heart attack. Part way up Keith who knows the track as he helped clear it remarked that we were "almost halfway". My face must have crumpled as he quickly laughed and said "no, almost there really". Very funny. Not. On the way back in on the common road Keith loses another front shoe. He can't believe it and asks that I go ahead and find the farrier and send him out again. No problem. Off I go and at Joe's crossing the mini marathon riders are all coming out and heading home and I end up riding with Shahzada queen Karen Rhodes and Steve Barlow. Good company and I'm soon back and vetting again. Keith not too far behind.

We ride out again for the 2<sup>ng</sup> leg and before we get off the 3 kms of tar, Keith has lost another shoe. He is in total disbelief at his bad luck, 3 shoes in 3 legs, and so he turns back to camp but thinks that he doesn't have the time to get it replaced and still make it out to complete the leg. Sunny vets through with all A's and Keith withdraws. Bugger. Bogart and I trot on and catch up to Mel Anderson and Tiki and end up riding the rest of the leg with her and my niece Kim Hagon and Boss catch up and the three of us finish together.

After losing my riding buddy in Keith, I ask if Mel would mind if I ride with her for the rest of the ride as Tiki and Bogart travel well and Mel is so easy to get along with. Mel most graciously agrees and makes my day. So with my ankles heavily strapped, my stirrups gaffed taped and chocked, we are traveling really well and the legs start to blur from lack of sleep and weariness.

Thursday has some highlights in that we were now doing water crossings and they were a little deep and of course Thursday afternoon we have to come down the steps. How scary is that. I almost lost Bogart on one corner but I managed to turn him around, get in front of him and go again and made it safely to the bottom where Mel and I had a little celebration with drinks of water and snakes shared with the horses. Bogart is very partial to lollies, whereas Tiki prefers carrots. Home along the common road and vetted through. All good again.

Friday is when the nerves really set in and every rock or pothole is out to get you. Riders start to get really paranoid. Up on the woomerah path we start singing "I'm on top of the world, looking down on creation" the view was outstanding. Fog in the valley with the sun coming up - just amazing. As this is a turn around you get to see everyone going one way or another and all you hear is riders wishing each other good luck.

Vetting after leg one today is very stressful for me as this is where I went out last year. Robin Gossip runs up to me and tells me to "breathe Vic" and I feel someone massaging my shoulders and turn around to find head Vet Kym Hagon telling me to get some oxygen into me before I fall over. No problems and I get to start the Friday afternoon leg and go up the steps. Oh shit.....

As Mel and I approach the bottom of the steps, I ask if there is any advice she can give me. She thinks very carefully before saying "Take your rests when you can and stay out of your horse's way" Okay. With Gary Bennett, Alan Caslick and others halfway up giving everyone advice and directions it was much better than I expected and Thanks to those of you who were there. I also remember Brad and Wendy Jones, Beau Knihinicki and Jo Arblaster taking photos at the top. Jo mentioned that they had a great view, I didn't think that my red, gasping face made such a great view. I was totally breathless but we had made it safely. Not far to go now and we were conscious of every step. The 11 kms from the bottom of Johnny's hill back to camp seems to take forever. But finally we were within the last km and Mel and I dismount, loosen our girths and lead our horses in. As we get close, Mel looks over the top of Tiki's head, shrugs her shoulders and gives me a little smile and I burst into tears. What an emotional ride and I haven't finished it yet and I'm already crying. We have to walk past my camp and there are all my camp mates cheering and waving and Chris my super strapper waiting and looking almost as nervous as I felt. We strapped Bogart and headed for the vetting area. Pulse 38 and we wait for our turn to see the vet and then be trotted in front of the peanut gallery. The street was lined with people cheering and clapping as each rider vetted through. Finally it was our turn and in his nerves Chris left the rug on Bogart's rump when he went to trot. He starts again and I hold my breath. The trot looks good, he turns and trots back and I turn to see the 6 blue thumbs up. Thank God, we have done it. We have just ridden 400 kms. The next little while is just a blur of tears, smiles and hugs from everyone. I don't know if I'll be back to do it again but it was one huge achievement to tick off my bucket list.

So many people to thank. Firstly, Neil Clarkson and his small but formidable committee, Vets, Tpr's, Chief Stewards, those who helped with track clearing and track marking and all volunteers who helped in so many ways. Thanks also to my riding buddies Keith Nagle and Sunny and Mel Anderson and Tiki, my personal cheer squad, Roz Ryan for keeping me well strapped and my hardworking, super strapper/farrier/chef/stirrup fixer/husband etc for everything he did and of course my awesome horse Bridle Track Bogart, what a legend.