



Each year Shahzada is such a major event for us that we prepare for it from the beginning of the year. 2019 was a big competition year for us and the biggest challenge was the drought. Training and competing on hard concussive ground for the whole year required management to reduce accumulative damage.

Garonne Park Elmo is an unregistered 9 yr old Arabian stockhorse, 15.3hh. I started him under saddle at around 3 yrs and he has done a lot of slow riding in the bush. He was slow to mature and did not start competing till he was 6 yrs when he was mentally and physically ready and he is certainly a powerful horse in the hills and confident in the roughest country. He completed Shahzada in 2018, a strong steady completion ridden by Braden Cameron (NZ).

This year his preparation included doing the St Albans NSW State Championships in June with Anne riding him. He was sound and fit following the ride and had some time off when we went to QLD Quilty.

Meanwhile my own fitness was a bit complex. I had trained very hard on my fitness with lots of running to compete in the NZ 240km marathon the Makahiwi Challenge in March 2019. However in June I broke 2 toes and

although I could ride, thanks to finding special shaped stirrups, I could not run, even the trot out in vetting was a challenge. I did the QLD Quilty and so was ride fit. So for Elmo and I lots of slow walking up hills was our main preparation so that we both were leg strong but avoiding concussion.

Monday, we started the ride well Elmo was very keen and on the steel. Think he thought he was doing the State ride again as it was run over some of the Shahzada tracks.

Tuesday, Elmo was settling on course starting to get into Marathon mode. However, he had not totally settled when returning to camp and rather hyped up for vetting. This was the first time he had been in camp at a ride with no other horses, in all his career to date there was always a mate in camp. Luckily he loves food and ate and drank well and always enjoys his strapper walks and eating green grass.

Wednesday, the hardest and longest day of Shahzada. Elmo was travelling well he was settled, using his body well and I was tailing him up all the hills. He was really settled into marathon mode and relaxed in vetting.

Big thanks to Chris Geddes for shoeing him Wednesday afternoon, his shoes were completely worn out.

The Shahzada committee had done an outstanding job to get water on course, the whole ride all water drums were full of water. That was a huge task as with the drought it was so dry, no surface water in the bush even Joes Crossing was dry. Much of the water was carried into 4WD country they did a great job.

The weather on Wednesday had been increasing in humidity and you could feel there was a change coming.

Thursday, it had rained most of the night. I don't think I have ever been so happy to saddle up in the rain. Amazing what a difference 24hrs made, dry waterholes had water in them, creeks were starting to flow. Elmo is like Garonne Park Walker they love the wet, the feel of rain of their bodies and in muddy slippery conditions they are surefooted and sensible. Elmo was happy and keen and riding great and I was so relieved to see softness in the ground.



Usually by Thursday I need to watch my weight which can start to drop, no problem this year with the waterlogged gear.

This year I rode mainly on my own but did get to ride with Alan Mackinder quite a bit. Great to see him do Shahzada again and to talk about past Shahzadas and the developments in endurance over the years.

Friday, the day you hope you have got it right. I was lucky to have an organized camp with Anne strapping and Kylie Berg running the camp.

Elmo was cared for by Anne from the moment he was unsaddled till the time he rode back onto course. In Shahzada, the strapping needs to be so thorough and Elmo is happy to have massage, ice boots, treatments of any skin rubs or knocks and he loves his strapper walks and green picks. He has a selection of different feeds to keep him keen on eating.

I also had great food and felt thoroughly spoilt with Kylie Berg's amazing cooking. We had a happy camp and could enjoy the company of other riders and crew around the campfire, one of things that makes Shahzada so special.

Elmo rode beautiful on the wet Friday and thanks to Shahzada committee for ensuring we had a safe course for our horses. His final heartrate was 39 and his trot out was really strong.

Elmo was called up to work out for best managed. We should all be proud how well the lineup of horses presented and rode.

It was a true honour to be awarded the best managed. Elmo is such a tough honest horse and I am so happy with him.

As I write this, I reflect on the tough year everyone has had with drought, bushfires, floods and now Covid 19. Stay safe and hope to see you all at the Shahzada 40th anniversary ride in 2021.

