

My Shahzada..... Georgia Curry

“The Shahzada”, the name which everyone knows.



Ever since I heard about Shahzada three years ago, the Steps, the mountains and the goat tracks which I would one day endure, I have always been super intrigued and always wanted to know more.

People would tell me that the Steps were scary and there would be difficult parts during the Shahzada. This only made me want to do it even more! I thought awesome, a challenge, the “ultimate test of horse and rider” and ever since then I was keen on doing it.

Myself and my little ‘but oh so mighty pony’ Macquarie Park Banjo, have together completed quite a few kms and this year would have to be our biggest season yet, doing over 1000kms already. We have tackled many rides but nothing like Shahzada. I had saved up all my earnings including Christmas and birthday money from last year just to enter the Shahzada this year.

Kev Saver kept saying to me “George! The ride’s coming up. You need to make a decision whether you’re going or not”. I always replied “Are you going Kev? If you are could Banj and I catch a lift with you again please? If we can, damn sure we’re going!!”

When the decision to go was made, the nerves really began to set in. My nerves got so bad that I hardly ate for a week before the ride. I felt sick with the excitement of it all. By Sunday night I was really anxious and come Monday morning, I was beside myself.

Banjo and I had worked all year preparing for this event. I spent many hours running to get fit. I even ran up hills to prepare! But no one could really prepare us for waking up at 3am everyday!

As it was I managed and what better way to start your morning than being on your horse, looking out over all the beautiful mountains and St Albans tracks at sunrise. As it turned out, I would only see this beautiful sunrise a couple of days during the whole time I was in St Albans. The rest of the time it rained.

On Monday I rode in off the first leg, vetted through and around mid-day headed out on the second leg. We had to tackle McKechnie's going into this leg but Banjo managed to just breeze up it pulling me!

The views along the top were just terrific and I was so thankful for all the help and support I had received going into this ride and all the hard work as it quickly paid off.

My riding buddy which Banjo quickly buddied up with was Pit Pony (Tarnette) and her rider/owner April Newman.

Now the first day had past, the nerves started to settle until you wake up the second day and they start all over again. Once you put your foot in that stirrup, all your nerves disappear. Tuesday it rained and we got soaked by not wearing a rain proof jacket. Despite the horrible weather Banjo just kept powering on. Nothing fazed him.

By Wednesday the tracks had gotten very muddy and were very slippery. Prestons (which I had tackled last year completing on Macquarie Park Shafeeq), had to be taken out. It had rained so much the previous day and the night before that it was simply too dangerous to go up.

So the course was changed and we were off again riding into the rain. April said that she wanted to see what all the talk was about Prestons but I'm sure both our horses were glad they didn't have to do it.

Thursday was the day of 'The Steps'. Once again because of all the rain, the course had to be changed. Looking for some positives: at least it wasn't stinking hot like some days last year, I had no nose bleeds from being dehydrated as it had rained so much and so there was a positive!

Friday morning I still had my riding buddy, had my gumboots on as my shoes were still drying (but I just told mum I was setting a trend), and Banjo felt great!!!!

He was pulling more Friday morning than on Monday!!

Only 76kms to go. I was beginning to drive April mad (and deaf). I couldn't help but sing the WHOLE day. I was so excited and honoured to have come this far and all I can say is "I, love Caaaaaa-ndy..." repeatedly.

So, the morning was great. It wasn't raining; we managed to see one of the most spectacular views along Womerah Pathway; we got into base ok and everyone was a little excited. There were only two more vet checks to go.

Banjo was getting all A's most of week and come Friday his gut sounds were great, his gait was great, metabolics were great and he got all A's once again.

We were a bit late heading out on the final leg but time went quickly and before we knew it we were at the bottom of the steps.

I thought I was pretty fit until I was half way up the steps and blowing almost as much as a steam train! Seeing everyone at the steps cheering you on and supporting all of us really does give you that extra little boost to enable the climb up and once we reached the top...the relief I had was speechless!

I worried so much about Banjo going up the steps as he is only 14hh and his little legs had to really power up and jump up on to some of the rocks.

He was just looking mighty (as he is) and he did complete the mini marathon with dear friend Malaysian rider Adam, so Banjo had done the steps before.

The stress never gets easier though! When we finally made it home and were passed through the final vet check I did shed some tears. I had never cried at the end of a ride before, I had been close but at that moment I couldn't hold them back. I was so happy to complete on my homebred gelding - he is truly amazing!!!!

Saturday I pulled the saddle out one last time. During the week Banjo turned his head towards me and then turned back again the other way. Once saddled and on top of him he was ready. He was off and wanted to go again. I reckon he could have gone another day or two!

Lining up for presentation was just awesome. To stand alongside the horses and riders who have endured this tough course in difficult weather over 400kms, was just amazing. I felt honoured. Then to be called out for Best Managed I was over the moon!! My little rippa of a pony. Although we did not receive the award, it was such a great privilege to be called up and congrats to Margaret Boland who did receive the award for Best Managed.

Banjo and I received the Steve Locke Memorial Award for Last Junior Home. Banjo and I have always had a strong bond but after Shahzada, we are inseparable now!

I had a wonderful time at Shahzada. The experience you gain from it cannot be described. I am still so chuffed to have completed the Shahzada for the second time at 16 years of age, on homebred horses, there's no better feeling!

A HUGE THANK YOU to my sponsors Tuffrock, Castlereagh Feeds, Wandian Equestrian, and my wonderful mother who has supported me the whole time, my riding buddy April for riding 400kms with me, strappers Ian Dreghorn (when not riding in the mini) and Kevin Sayer for all your wonderful and much appreciated work, all the volunteers, ride organisers track markers and of course my awesome pony Macquarie Park Banjo! This wouldn't have been possible without you.

Georgia Curry