

Shahzada 2005 by Laurie Stevens



Laurie Stevens and Deravozra, Photo by Laeli Hogan.

Sally and I normally start working our horses up 3 months prior to a Shahzada. We live at Hay which is flat country so take them to one or two 80km rides with hills in that time. Last year was no exception, I started work on Satin, the palomino mare our daughter Louise completed Shahzada with in 2003. Sally also started her horse Booralie Fire and Light. We took them to 2 Victorian rides to chase the hills but weren't happy with Satin. We called for a float at the Raglan ride in July. We took Satin to the equine hospital in Shepparton where she was diagnosed with arthritis thereby ending her successful endurance having achieved 4000km.

Fortunately Sally had kept Deravozra ticking over just in case. Derry, to his friends, had only carried lightweights and had his share of problems. At age six he nearly lost a foot in an altercation with a tin fence. Back in work

after an 8 month holiday, Derry sprained a suspensory ligament and x-rays showed spurs on his front fetlocks. A 12 month holiday this time.

Derry started training again as a 10 year old. Things went well for Sally and Derry successful completing the Quilty at Landsborough in 2002. In 2004 he started having hock problems. Another trip to the equine hospital for an operation followed by another holiday. Sally had him back in work early 2005 with no after effects.

When I found myself without a horse in July, Sally offered me Derry. I trained him for a couple of weeks to be sure he was ok with a heavyweight, had the hock scanned and we set off for St Albans.

Sally and I find the best preparation for Shahzada is hill work. We live close to the Victorian border and participate in a few VERA rides as well as rides like Gundagai. We like our horses to be a little more than half fit and to be carrying a bit of condition at the start of Shahzada. Our horses cope very well in the St Albans terrain and we ride them according to conditions. We never trot down hills or canter up them.

Our feeding regime is basic. Oats are the main energy source, with a little munga and some folactin blue supplement. Our electrolytes are home made with dolomite, lite salt and table salt. We also use neutradex over the tongue during the ride. We feed carrots as a treat to encourage them to eat.

Strapping is simple. At Shahzada we believe it's more important to let the horse graze and relax after a quick washdown and check for soreness. We are very lucky that Peter Manning takes his annual

leave to look after our horses at Shahzada. He is a man with magic hands. Peter massages and walks the horses in the evenings and if necessary in the early mornings. We don't use horse chiropractors but find massage invaluable. We also use bandages soaked with Epsom salt on their legs at night.

Derry was a lovely horse to ride in Shahzada country. He is a no fuss horse who does the job keenly without question. Steep climbs don't phase him; he drinks well on course and relaxes in camp. We had no problems. Sally insisted I ride in her little McClelland saddle. It was a bit small for me but fits Derry perfectly. We experienced a couple of stressful moments during vetting while they got used to Derry's characteristic skip as he starts to trot and after turning at the half point. After three Shahzadas on Chevy, my strong little goey cob, it was a pleasure to ride Derry.

Sue Manning was our camp cook. Sue made life at Shahzada a lot easier and lots of fun. Daughter Louise joined us as strapper. Sally's horse experienced foot problems and went out on Wednesday morning. Now the pressure was on as I was riding Sally's favourite horses and it would mean so much to her to see Derry get through a ride neither of us thought he would even attempt.

When Derry and I were called to work out for the Best Managed Award, we were all over the moon. What a way to finish a great week. Then to be awarded this most prestigious prize – I could hardly speak with the emotion of it all. Sally went berserk.

The whole camp floated through the rest of the day and for some days afterwards.

The icing on the cake was we bred Derry ourselves along with a few horses over the years. Most of them have performed very well in Shahzada, in St Albans – our favourite spot.

Riders thinking of doing Shahzada, have a go. There is no other ride like it.

The atmosphere is unique. Shahzada is one big happy family from overwhelmed first timers to Granny Rhodes who couldn't keep her emotions from bubbling over even after achieving 11 Shahzada buckles.

Cheers, Laurie Stevens.