

# My Virgin Shahzada Experience by Narelle Childs

Well !! where to begin ? I have been endurance riding for 14 yrs, hold 4 Quilty buckles & numerous achievements over those years, but I have never had the courage to attempt a marathon. Earlier this year I had surgery on my foot, which brought my horse riding to an abrupt halt. Once recovered I thought it was about time I took on the challenge of Shahzada.

My husband Graham (aka super strapper), my friend Toni Appleton & her mare Coolatai, (who were attempting the mini-marathon), my 6yr old Arabian gelding Halo Kazaam and I, arrived at ride base by Saturday midday. We were greeted with a warm welcome from Sue Todd, who may I say was a great support & friend throughout the ride. We were surprised to see how limited the facilities are at the camp, I guess we must be spoilt up in Qld (I forgot to mention that we come from Byron Bay NSW, so I ride for QERA). So if you go to Shahzada you really do need to bring all your human water & food, there's no Woolworths at St Albans.

I won't go into an hour by hour description of our ride, but I will say that **it was the best riding experience I have had in my career**. The course is extremely challenging & difficult (I can see why some of those iconic climbs have earned such a reputation) & I loved every minute of it. I didn't find it tiring getting up at 3am, 5 days straight, nor did my body suffer as I thought it would, I must say I did get myself reasonably fit for the ride & I am convinced that it helped.

My super young horse was absolutely awesome & just cleaned up the track effortlessly, he was never tired & went out twice a day with enthusiasm. He totally enjoyed the obstacles & challenges that were asked of him. By Wednesday (being the toughest day of the ride ) the comments in his logbook off the 1<sup>st</sup> leg read – looking strong & at the end of the day \_ powering, you can just imagine how happy I was with his performance. I strongly recommend taking a horse with a good attitude as a lazy horse would make the ride very, very hard.

Toni & Coolah had a great time also in the mini-marathon. Toni rode with her twin sister Vicki, who is a Webbs Creek local. They both had a successful ride, with Coolah (also a very keen horse) handling the course in her stride.

It's Friday morning, only 76 km's left, Kaz & I head out at 4 am confident of another successful day, we took about 4 hrs to complete the 46 km leg (going down McKechnie's is very slow, as you have to lead). I rode into base past my hubby who was waiting for me at our camp & gave him the thumbs up, Kaz was feeling great as always. Off to vetting after strapping time, heartrate 46, all's looking good until the trot out, what the hell !!! He was short stepping offside front, the vet's offered us a represent, so back to camp we go. Sharon May Davies's apprentice Mimay worked on him, as does our friend David Somerville. After about a 3 hr break we represent still not that confident. Graham trots Kaz out that fast he broke into a canter so therefore had to go again, but it was to no avail Kazaam & I were out, welcome to the notorious Friday first leg vet out. Not even the Friday Club which is for horses that complete the whole 400 km then vet out. I must admit I was totally shattered & it was definitely the hardest vet out I have ever had to deal with. I'm glad the vets made the call they did, as it turns out he had a very slight sprain to his fetlock which would only have gotten worse had we continued. He is only young & I know he's a tough little bugger & is going to be a future champion !!

So if you have been contemplating going to the Shahzada, **DO IT**, you will never get to experience such an amazing course & create such a strong bond with your horse, in any other endurance ride.

I must thank Graham for all his support & hard work, not just for Shahzada, but my whole endurance career, I would never have gotten so far in this sport without him. Also, Toni for training Kazaam for me while I was recovering from my surgery, I deeply appreciate all the time & work she put into him. At the time I thought I could never, emotionally, put myself through it again, but I now I want one of those prestigious buckles, so I will be back.