

Shahzada 2014

Doin' it again – WHY you may ask ????

Narelle Childs

Ok, this was my 3rd time down to St Albans to enter the 400klm marathon and no, I wasn't going to go again !!! but my good friend Caroline Windle twisted my arm.(to be honest it didn't take much twisting)

Two years ago Caroline and I completed the 400 kilometer marathon and we enjoyed it so much Caroline was keen to have another go. According to the Shahzada rule, 'Things don't always go to plan' and Caroline's mare didn't get a start due to a lameness issue. Caroline's partner Michael Coombe riding Nasr and me on Halo Kazaam, started the big one on Monday morning. Unfortunately Nasr and Kazaam didn't travel well together so we had to separate.

Just to paint the picture, imagine taking a cold shower with all your clothes on whilst riding your horse! Those were the conditions we faced, rain, rain and more rain right through until Thursday lunchtime. At one stage the Shahzada Committee had to make last minute track changes on Wednesday as the river was too high to cross. Endurance riders are pretty tough but some horses just can't swim!!!

Like every year the ride was difficult in every sense of the word. From the 2.45am wake up, the vertical climbs, open fields and the never ending stretches of road verges. Oh yes and of course there was the rain that filled our boots up just by running down our legs.

Things were going well up until Thursday when Michael vetted out after the first leg.

Kazaam powered on and seemed to get stronger each day, it's amazing what a couple of years growing up can do for a horse. This was Kazaam's third Shahzada, vetting at the 370 kilometre mark on his first attempt then successfully completing two years ago at his second attempt, although last time he struggled mentally on the Thursday only to get it all together on the Friday.

There were no issues at all this time and he seemed to take it all in his stride, both mentally and physically. That is to say right up until 2 kilometres from the end of the ride.

I was heading back to base and was the first horse returning, when a car towing a trailer full of cages containing chooks, that's right 'chooks', approached us from behind on the gravel road. The trailer made a horrendous noise and as the driver passed us on a very narrow stretch of road the trailer clipped Kazaam on the back legs and sent both of us down on the roadway. Without going into too much detail, the driver didn't stop and I couldn't believe we had come this far only to be taken out by a trailer full of damn chooks Kazaam had blood all over his back legs and was very stressed. All I was thinking was I needed to get him back to base as soon as possible. I was going to lead him in but just then Jody Smith from South Australia arrived on the scene and advised me to ride Kazaam back to base. This turned out to be the right decision and I thank Jody for this advice.

As I passed our camp heading to the finish line I called for my strappers, Caroline, Michael and Graham to meet me at the vetting area. As you can imagine I was extremely distressed and was going into shock (this was the first time I had ever been hit by a car) my main concern however was to get Kazaam to where he could receive treatment.

Well I must say, like a well oiled machine, strappers and helpers came from everywhere and the vets were very comforting. We hosed Kazaam off and we made a cursory examination of his injuries. His pulse was dropping quite well and it was decided to present him to the TPR. He pulsed at 49 and then after the Vet exam Graham trotted him out to the loud cheers from the gallery. Kazaam broke into a canter trotting out and then did the most amazing perfect trot coming back which raised the vets hands with a thumbs up. Not only did Kazaam successfully complete the ride but we placed second overall.

Thank goodness he was sound and is still sound today. All his injuries were superficial cuts and grazes, but at the time I was greatly concerned that this may have resulted in an early retirement for Kazaam.

Back to my original question WHY???

Words cannot explain the feeling of accomplishment and achievement you get every day as you and your horse complete another gruelling day on the course. They call it the 'Ultimate Test' for a reason but there are many factors that make this test achievable. The team of people you have around you, the mind set you have to adopt to get through it and foremost the trusty steed you have and the fact that he is prepared to give you his all just because you ask him.

THAT'S WHY !!!!

Of course none of this would be possible without the endless hours the Shahzada Committee and helpers put in to make this the astounding ride that it is. Add this ride to your bucket list. I did.

