

Some Shahzada Tips from Anne Jones

Does the sound of riding 400kml scare you? Try thinking about riding 10 training rides instead. Psychologically, it sounds much better.

Be prepared beforehand for any eventuality. Ensure all your gear is spotless. Don't try any new gear either for yourself or your horse.

Ensure you have a spare saddle if necessary. You will need plenty of clean saddle blankets. Even if you don't normally use them, take along some girth covers just in case. Be prepared to treat greasy heel, saddle rubs, girth rubs and sore muscles. Have your farrier make up a spare set of shoes.

I have found that marathons require a lot of "weather watching" between legs. Everyone starts the first leg at the same time. After that you can choose your own time of starting the leg. Always make sure that you leave at least 2 hours, preferably 3 between the first and second legs. This gives your horse time to eat, rest and relax before doing the next "training ride." If you go out again after the normal hour break you are looking at doing five 80 klm rides rather than 10 training rides. Watch the weather carefully. If it looks like rain, get it over and done with. I prefer to try and return from the second leg well before cut off time. It gives you more time to settle your horse and have a shower before going to pre-ride talk. Always try to go to bed as soon as possible after the pre-ride talk.

Try and have a quiet camp. Don't be caught up with friends who want to party the rest of the time. It is important to get as much rest as possible and a nap between legs can make a huge difference. If your friends want to party ask them to go somewhere else to do it.

Pay attention to detail. This is one of the most important things.

Notice any slight irregularities with your horse. At the end of each leg, always make sure that you wash and dry your horse's heels and under the "arms". Sunlight soap is good for this. This can be done after vetting. If your horse does contract greasy heel then treat it with your preferred medication. Keep the area scrupulously clean. Putting Vaseline on the heels at the start of each leg may help. Sore backs and girth rubs can be treated effectively with "Curash" powder or cream. This can be found in the baby section of your supermarket. If the rubs are particularly severe, a change of saddle or other gear can assist.

At the end of each leg or at least the end of each day, massage the major muscles of your horse. Use liniment on any sore areas and put some on before each leg. At the end of each day, use a poultice and bandage your horse's legs. I use a clay poultice called "Swelldown". Put it on the lower legs of your horse, wet some newspaper or brown paper, wrap that around, followed by glad wrap. This keeps the clay moist for most of the night and makes it easier to wash off. Alternatively, you can make a potato poultice by grating some potato, add a small amount of liniment, put it in cotton wool and wrap around the legs, followed by bandages or glad wrap.

Try and take your horse out at least twice a day to have a walk and a good pick of grass if it is available. I do not believe in walking the horse through the night. The horse needs to rest and a walk before saddling or walking the first kilometre or so will reduce any filling or swelling in the horse's legs.

If you are taking maximum time to complete the legs, then start the first leg of the day at the earliest time. If you are making good time, then leave a bit later. You will catch the ones that left early and have the advantage of having more rest and less riding in the dark.

On track, move along when the going is good and slow down on any rough ground and in the hills, particularly down hill. Get off and walk down all the hills. If you have the physical strength then walk or tail your horse up the hills. If you cannot do this, then it is better for both you and your horse to stay on up the hills. You risk the danger of losing the horse's momentum and you can be injured easily.

Concentrate on the track all the time. Enjoy the scenery but not to the extent that you are not watching where your horse is stepping. One bad step that could have been prevented can be the end of your ride. Stopping to let your horse pick is good but don't overdo it. Taking too long on track is detrimental.

Don't get off and walk along the flat sections. You waste too much time. You are better to keep going and give your horse more time to relax and eat at base.

Make sure you change diagonals at the trot or leads at the canter frequently. If you or your horse is very "one-sided" and uncomfortable on a diagonal then have a break by cantering or standing in your stirrups for a while. Keep off the horse's back and ride as "light" and as centred as you can. Riding on the same diagonal will make your horse lame.

Unless you are riding to win the ride, do NOT play tactics. This is when you risk the danger of vetting out. No-one is going to remember in a week's time whether you gained a place in the last leg or not. Why put your completion at risk for that. If you place well at the end of the ride, consider it a bonus.

If you are injured or sore, take Panadol or a similar painkiller. If you don't, you compensate for your soreness and ride differently, thus running the risk of making your horse sore. If you become sore in places where it hasn't happened before, then check your horse carefully as this could be an indication of a change in gait or lameness. I always ride with a couple of soluble Disprin Max in my pocket. If I am hurt or sore, I can take them without water and they act fast.

Look after yourself. Make sure you have plenty to eat and drink. Try not to drink much alcohol. I tend not to eat much during the day but I always make sure that I have a good meal at night. Take lots of fruit and "nibbles" with you. If you don't eat them you can always take them home. It's better to have too much than too little.

Last but not least, take particular care of your horse's feed. After the first leg make sure feed is available all the time. Keep up the electrolyte intake and increase the grain. If your horse prefers molasses water then always keep a bucket of fresh water and molasses water in the yard.

Throw out any uneaten food and water and make up fresh feeds daily. Apples are better than carrots as a treat as they are digested easier. If your horse is not eating well, then go out and let the horse eat more grass.

If you do all the above, the rest is luck! Keep your fingers crossed, say a prayer, carry a good luck charm, whatever!!

Finally, have fun. Ride with a companion. It's better for you and your horse.

Good luck and have a safe ride.

Anne

Anne Jones has completed 12 successful out of 16 attempts at Shahzada.