

YOU WILL NEVER KNOW IF YOU DON'T EVER GO!!

By Trish Smith



Well, here we are – a week after Rahn (Beaucheval Akhiran) and I successfully completed the Shahzada and I am still grinning from ear to ear. And what an adventure it turned out to be from that time last year (2011) when I quietly thought to myself ‘one day I wonder if I could get over to try Shahzada? And now we have actually been there, participated and completed! Over the months of deliberating I read everything I could about this amazing challenge and started to feel more and more that perhaps we could actually be up to it. It was obvious from every report that this is a ride that is unique and that the camaraderie and friendships that are made are long lasting and very special. Ultimately, it all sounded so tempting that I

thought I'd better jump in and enter – it would be one less thing on my ‘bucket list’, if nothing else. Rahn's ‘sound and seasoned’ record of eight 100 milers certainly seemed to tick a few of the required boxes as well.

Having to travel a fair distance and carefully plan the details, the whole trip became a really wonderful journey for us – Rahn (super pony), Ian (husband/friend/supporter/driver/strapper/calming influence/cook) and myself and nine days before the start of the ride we headed off on a five hour drive to Devonport to catch the ferry to cross Bass Strait and then commence the long drive north to St Albans. Thanks to the generosity of wonderful friends, Carl and Lisa, and Tom and Louise, we were able to stop without setting up camp at showgrounds or pony clubs – now that was bliss!

I will never forget that first winding drive down into Wiseman's Ferry on Tuesday and the excitement mounted rapidly as we boarded the ferry and headed those last 20k's into St Albans and the ride base – not a normal ride base though because the event takes over every piece of spare ground around the whole small riverside town. The committee members were already hard at work getting everything set up and Sue Todd was everywhere all at once – meeting, greeting and organising, all with her lovely smile and making us feel so welcome. Now the days flew by as Ian headed off to the coast for a surf (we all have our own special priorities) and I settled into a routine of training, cooking, meeting people, visiting the Settlers Arms (now THAT is a pub), grooming and yard cleaning. It was great fun to watch as this quiet little hamlet gradually filled to capacity as floats, trucks and goosenecks of all sizes and styles gradually arrived and set up camp.

Fast forward to pre-ride and vetting And we have a start!! Things are starting to get serious. At 4.00am on Monday I participated in what was the most pleasant start to a ride ever as sixty horses calmly walked through the start line, up the road for a bit, then gradually picked up their trot and headed out on what has to be the ride of a lifetime. I just kept saying to Rahn, ‘there is no rush we have 400k's to go mate’. Now all the maps I had been studying for so long started to make sense. Until you actually ride the course the names meant nothing, but now here we were riding up The Common, turning up Johnny's Hill, following the Transmission Road, heading down Blue Hill and Wrights Creek Road and turning right into Settlers Road and back to St Albans. As the days passed all the other names were ticked off the ‘unknown’ list – Woomerah Path, Jack's Track (thoughts of my dad), Shepherds Gully, Careflight Hill, Great North Road (what amazing convict stonemasonry), Boyds Hill, McKechnies (quite technical), Prestons, Joe's Crossing, (not so) Short Wellums, Word of Life Crossing, and of course the high profile ‘Steps’! And what memories the mention of some of those names evoke!



I'm pretty sure I smiled my way around the whole course – and even in those moments where I was puffing like a steam train and gasping for breath on Prestons I was smiling on the inside! There are special memories of the people I rode with at different times – Rob and his beautiful mare, Lyn and her determined and gentle one-eyed Mecca, Kim and her effervescent and friendly hello's and the way she always stopped for a chat before picking up the pace again, Jody and

Beau who always looked strong, Rod and his pocket rocket and so many more. It was also really enjoyable to have the opportunity to admire the many beautiful wildflowers (too early for the Waratah unfortunately) as well as the plentiful bird life. The pride I have in achieving this goal is indescribable, particularly as

I ran all our vet checks myself and also tackled The Steps on my own (without any assistance) – something that us first-timers find quite daunting but when it is over you say ‘that wasn’t so bad after all’.

Shahzada isn’t only about the ride. The whole atmosphere is that of friendship and equality – just a whole lot of people who love our sport and want not just ourselves, but everyone else to be successful and get that special ‘thumbs up’ on Friday afternoon. And that’s another story – I think Rahn thought the crowd was an angry mob coming to eat him when they let out massive shouts and cheers at



our final trot out – he tried to hide behind me, stood up to about 17 hands and said ‘Holy cow, save me - I’m too scared to move!’ However, I got my heart restarted, we were able to regroup and get the job done well and I just about fell into Kym Hagon’s arms when he smiled and congratulated me. Rahn finished with all A’s and 1’s at the final check and in eleven vet checks only received 4 B’s. I guess you could say I am very proud and I know that the bond we had developed previous to this amazing ride has now been firmly cemented for all time.

I really want to urge anyone who has ever thought ‘I’d like to do Shahzada one day’ to just bite the bullet and do it. You really will have the time of your life, meet some wonderful new friends, learn a heap about yourself and your horse, and

at the end come away with an incredible feeling of personal pride and achievement. I hope I see you in St Albans in 2013!