

My Shahzada Mini Marathon by Kerry Spratt.

One of the things I love about endurance is that it provides opportunities for people to participate in so many ways. The motto 'to complete is to win' means different things to different people of course, and my Shahzada experience has been a reminder of just how fantastic our sport is at providing opportunities to participate at whatever level we can manage.

My first experience of Shahzada was 1992 strapping with the 'Watagan Warriors'... what a great bunch they were..... united in their common love for the horses and chipping in to help everyone get through the ride! There was a fair enthusiasm for drinks around the campfire as well. Caz Wendt warned me that Shahzada would get under my skin and I'd be addicted too and by the end of the week I was sure she was right. I went back every year until 2003. I strapped and experienced the high of 'my riders' getting their buckles, and the 'character building experience' to quote the great Paul Grieves, of vetting out on Friday. Over those years I spent some time helping in the office as well, it was all great fun. Then life got in the way, and I haven't been back for more than the odd day for a while.

But... this year was different! Thanks to some great ideas hatched around a Quilty campfire, I think about 3am on Monday after the party, I was signed up to ride the Mini Marathon. So, I went home to explain to my wonderful little mare, Oak-Glen Solitaire, aka Solo, that we were on a big adventure that would involve more riding than we'd done in the previous 3 years! Carol Griffiths devised our training program... which we stuck to come rain, hail (and it did!) and shine and I started to think, maybe, with the help of Carol and her horse, Especial's Sun, aka Sunny, that this adventure was achievable. I went shopping for all the gear I hadn't bothered to collect because I really haven't ridden much lately.....more saddle cloths, stirrups (thanks Neil), chaps, new boots for me, boots for Solo and on it went. I took leave from work and got extension after extension for my university course because riding was the most important thing I could do.

The ride brought some great experiences, and a chance to see the fabled Shahzada tracks for myself. Isn't that country beautiful, the views go on forever. The chance to ride with friends was fantastic. Your encouragement on track was great, thank you! I'm really glad the Lyndrian windmill didn't devour Solo as she expected it to, that would have been rather embarrassing at the feet of a dozen 'long riders'.

There's a few special thank yous. Firstly, Brooke Warner for your understanding and patience. The look of disappointment on Brooke's face was priceless when she caught us at the top of Shepherd's Gully on Tuesday. Poor Brooke had left an hour late so her horse wouldn't have to travel with anyone, but to her amazement she still caught us. Same thing happened on Wednesday and Thursday, and by Thursday, Brooke's horse wasn't worried about going past. To the WICEN people who drew the short straw and had to follow us in each day, thank you! Thanks too for offering to provide replacement painkillers when I was in the throes of panic having dropped mine near Brown's Rd on Thursday. By then, I sure needed something to dull the agony, luckily I found them again. Especially, thanks to Carol for your support, I couldn't have done it without you and Sunny. Not sure if this warrants a thank you, but I should mention Ray Griffiths and Brad Jones who have the most developed senses of humour I know. You know what I mean..... and be very afraid! Seriously though, thanks Ray for all your help and Brad for suggesting I should ride in the first place. Finally, thanks to Neil and the Shahzada committee for your fantastic efforts so we can ride! I think I've gotten used to riding again already!

Kerry