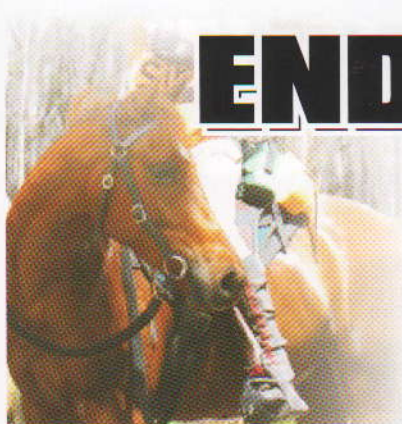




# ENDURANCE RIDING

## Is it for You ...and Your Horse?

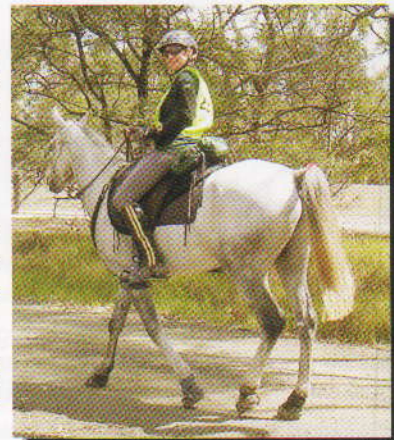


Endurance riding is now one of the fastest growing equestrian sports in Australia. In 2010, New South Wales will be its focus, with Manilla hosting the famous 160km Tom Quilty Gold Cup in June. Held over 24 hours with a midnight start, this renowned event is held in a different state each year. In August, another major ride takes place: the 400km Shahzada, which takes place over five days at St Albans every year.

A month ago, the new Coffs Harbour and Grafton Endurance Riding Club held its first meeting, with members discussing plans to hold an inaugural ride at Upper Corindi in August. This is just the latest club to arrive on the scene: the northern regions of NSW boast an increasing number of clubs and riders, while South East Queensland has one of the densest populations of endurance riders in Australia.

So what is the appeal of the sport? One aspect is that it is very egalitarian and accessible to many people, regardless of status, income or - importantly - time available for training. Anyone can participate at a level to suit their lifestyle. So while some riders progress to the larger, more competitive rides of 100km plus, many people take part only in shorter, more local events.

Is endurance riding for you? Training is undeniably time-consuming and requires a high level of commitment. Yet the rewards are considerable: most riders forge great partnerships with their horses, gaining the satisfaction of completing rides and improving individual performances.



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The beauty of this sport is that you can easily test the water to see how it feels. By taking part in a shorter 20km ride, known as a 'social ride' you can discover whether you like the experience and the scene in general. Alternatively, you can go straight to an affiliated 40km 'training ride', which is held under the regulations of Endurance Riding Australia (in this region, the NSW or QLD branches).

Many people take to it quickly, finding pleasure in riding through varied and often stunning scenery, while enjoying the convivial atmosphere of the overnight ride base camp and generally supportive attitude of other riders. This is certainly one of the friendlier sports to be involved in.



Photo by Sue Crocket  
Megan Matters of the new  
Coffs Harbour & Grafton  
Endurance Club

What sort of horses can take part? Arabians dominate, due to the renowned stamina of the breed, but other breeds also perform well. Thoroughbreds, Anglos, Walers, Stock Horses, Standardbreds, Appaloosas and even Brumbies participate regularly. Note that the horse's age is important: for an affiliated 40km ride, horses must be no younger than 4 ½ years on the day of the ride. Only horses that are at least 5 years old can participate in longer events. This is because the wellbeing of the horse is central to endurance riding and immature horses are not physically developed enough to cope with the training regime as well as the ride itself.

Respect for the horses' wellbeing permeates the sport. All horses are required to pass compulsory vet checks before and after the ride, when heart and respiratory rates are measured, temperatures taken and checks made for soreness or lameness.



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If the horses fail this, they are 'vetted out', ie, disqualified. Additionally, maximum speeds are set for novice riders on 20km and 40km rides. Completion not competition is the byword at this level. It is more important that the horse and rider develop together, building stamina, strength and experience, before continuing to longer rides of 80km or more (if this is what you wish to do).

You can improve your chances of both completing the ride and passing vet checks by following an appropriate training regime. This needs to start months in advance, allowing time to progress through an effective daily (or near daily) programme with your horse. This starts with at least two weeks of walking to strengthen the legs, with only a gradual introduction of trotting and cantering as the horse's fitness and strength builds.

Many riders understand that their horses' needs are similar to those of top human athletes. If your horse is to remain injury free, you should pay close attention to nutrition, hoof care, bodywork and comfortable tack. It is certainly worth joining a regional club and maybe an online forum, as many endurance people know that everyone starts in the same place and are pleased to help when you're starting out.



This year, 20km and 40km rides are taking place in (NSW) Upper Corindi, Copmanhurst, Kundabung, Wauchope, Tenterfield, New Italy, Tingha and Kirrawak, and (S.E. QLD) Noosa, Brymaroo, Maryvale, Kalbar, Eidsvold, Spring Mountain, Widgee and Lake Manchester.

For more details, see the association websites: [www.nswera.asn.au](http://www.nswera.asn.au) and [www.qldera.asn.au](http://www.qldera.asn.au) (Northern Rivers Clubs are members of the QLD branch of ERA, so do look at both sites.)

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Balanced Horse



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