

Tom Quilty | 160km Endurance Ride

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JO ARBLASTER

Five overseas riders joined competitors from all over Australia - including Tasmania and Western Australia - travelling to Canowindra on the Queen's Birthday long weekend in June to take part in Australia's most prestigious ride. Gathering at the Canowindra showground, the "Quilty family" once again united in the cherished ambition to win a Quilty buckle.

The little town of Canowindra turned on a warm welcome for the visitors with virtually every shop window advertising the event and wishing riders well.

There were old-timers and first-timers keen to pit themselves and their horses against the weather, the terrain and the clock and ride 160km in 24 hours. The weather was changeable with rain - and possibly snow - forecast for the day of the ride; after months of drought the terrain was rock hard under foot and the only consistent ingredient was the clock.

With 3% of the field vetting out pre-ride, 263 competitors lined up at the midnight start on Friday on the Canowindra racetrack. Those keen to lead the event jockeyed for a place on the start line while others took a more relaxed approach knowing that a frontrunner in

When the first 100-mile Tom Quilty Gold Cup endurance ride was held at Clarendon, NSW in 1966, there were 34 entries, 26 starters and seven successful completions. Thirty-six years later, in 2003, the 160km National Championship ride attracted 273 entries, 263 starters and 109 successful completions.



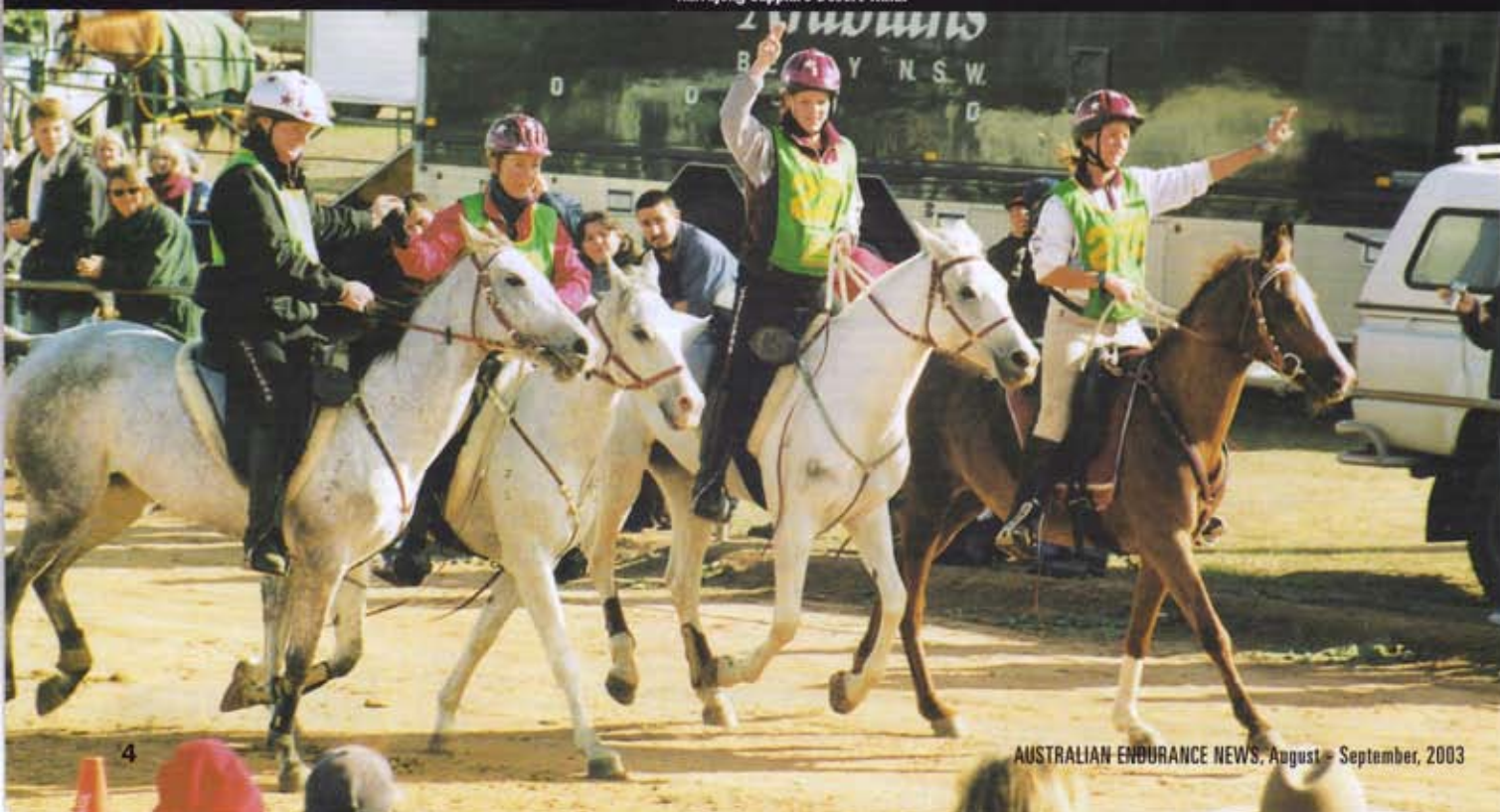
Watering spot on course at dawn.

the first leg seldom means a frontrunner at the finish.

The first 38km followed bitumen, gravel roads, paddocks and stock routes before returning to the showground. The leaders completed the leg in a little over two hours

before heading out on the second 35km leg to the travelling vet gate. Situated high on a hill with very little in the way of windbreaks, this refreshment and vetting point was far from welcoming. Wind and sleet rain allowed the horses little respite and relaxation.

The Castlebar team take the honours: (L to R) Kristie McGaffin on Rowallan Miss Lilly, Meg Wade riding Castlebar Macleod, Emily Davidson-Daw on Celsar Baydaht and Jodi Knowles riding Kurrajong Sapphire Desert Wind.





Alan Caslick riding A-Landell Sequence, 5th H/W.



Jodi Knowles & Kurrajong Sapphire Desert Wind, 1st Junior & Best Conditioned.

Head veterinarian, David Brown said the travelling vet gate was detrimental to some horses.

"The weather turned particularly nasty and the horses were somewhere they weren't familiar with and so they didn't settle well. They didn't relax in their yards or get a chance to eat or drink. Horses are creatures of habit. They like to go back to their yards to eat and drink."

The third leg of 45km had the greatest elevation in the ride. The track rose to more than 550 metres, crossing hillsides eaten bare by stock and providing spectacular views before dropping back down to the Belubula River.

Following this leg, there was a compulsory represent resulting in the greatest attrition rate of the ride. In bitterly cold conditions, riders had to juggle whether to keep their horses moving so they didn't stiffen up in the cold or allow them time to eat and drink before going out on the fourth leg. Metabolics and gait were checked and many who had vetted through with A's at the end of the third leg vetted out on gait at the represent stage.

Those who did make it to the fourth leg once again set out along undulating gravel roads, crossing the river twice before returning to the showground. There were numerous vet outs at this stage and some made the tough decision to withdraw their horses with just 12km to go.

Coming in off the fourth leg, Jennifer Gilbertson (NSW) was in the lead riding Webbs Creek Ripling but went out on gait at the vet check. In hot pursuit were the Castlebar team of Meg Wade riding Castlebar MacLeod, Kristie McGaffin riding Rowallan Miss Lilly, Amily Davidson-Daw riding Celsar Baydahl and Jodi Knowles riding Kurrajong Sapphire Desert Wind.

As the four entered the racetrack for the final time, they held hands, cantering across the line. McGaffin and Wade tied for equal 1st Middleweight in a time of 10.42.54. (It is interesting to note that Kristie McGaffin won the curtain-raiser ride on this course last year also in a time of 10.42.) Jodi Knowles was 1st Junior and Best Conditioned but unfortunately Lightweight rider, Amily Davidson-Daw's mount vetted out lame at the final check.

Fourth placegetters, Corey Nix and Razorback Sierra won the Best Conditioned award in the Middleweight division.

Equal 1st Heavyweight were Peter Toft riding the distinctive Appaloosa, Electra BBP Murdoch, and Ron Haigh riding Magnum (11.17.23). 1st Lightweight and Best Conditioned was Jenny Annetts riding Pharoah in (12.56.34).

The team event was won by the Queenslanders Peter Toft riding Electra BBP Murdoch (1st H/W and Fittest Horse), Penny Toft riding Bremervale Justice (3rd M/W), Anne Jones riding Tongarra Red Cloud (= 8th M/W) and Narelle Childs riding Arslay House Eryldene (2nd L/W).

Head veterinarian, David Brown, whose

team of 22 vets administered the ride, attributed the high number of vet outs to a combination of factors.

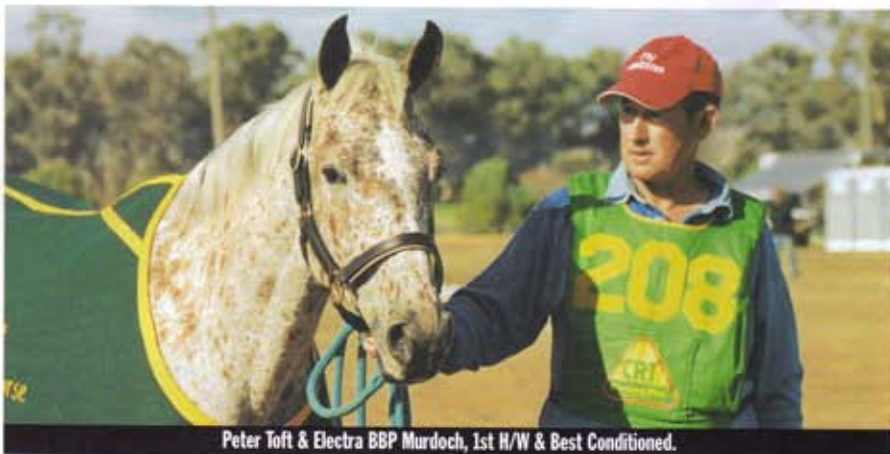
"The undulating terrain was deceptive. As a national championship ride, I don't think it was too hard. The course designer set a challenging course and it took a great deal of experience and good luck to get through.

"The vetting standards were firm but we applied a consistent level across the field. I think the prestige of getting a Quilty buckle tends to make people bring horses to the ride that perhaps aren't fully prepared. The other factor that may have had something to do with it was the lack of green pick available - hay is not a complete substitute.

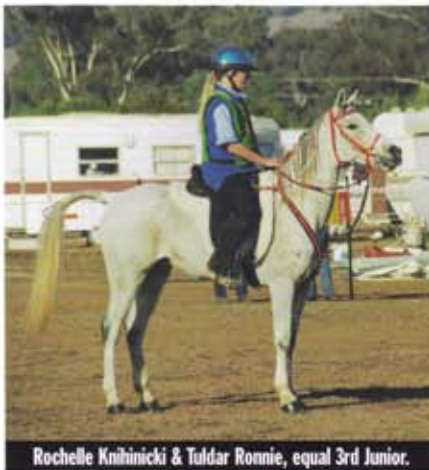
"Most people accepted the vet's decision with good grace and realised we only removed the horses from the ride because we were worried about them."

David said more horses than usual (20) were treated at the veterinary hospital.

"I had a policy that all metabolic vet outs needed to go to the hospital for another check but a lot didn't need treatment." (However, one horse suffering from colic had to be euthanased after not responding to treatment.)



Peter Toft & Electra BBP Murdoch, 1st H/W & Best Conditioned.



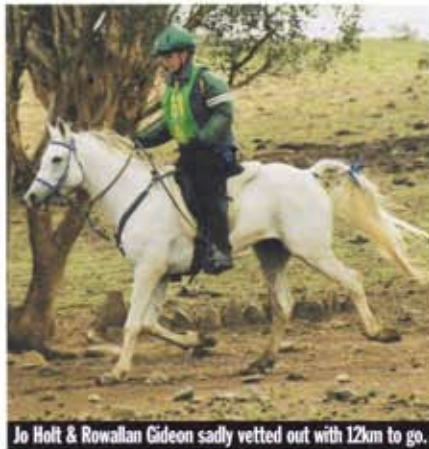
Rochelle Knihinicki & Tuldar Ronnie, equal 3rd Junior.



Suzanne Barton riding Petria Jaffah & Kim Cocking on Anuah Park Shiraz cross the Belubula River on the third leg.



Raelene French & Mindari Nadji's Magic, 8th H/W.




Jo Holt & Rowellan Gideon sadly vetted out with 12km to go.

Meg Wade of the Castlebar team was thrilled to once again win the world renowned event.

"The personal achievement for me was competing and winning Australia's most prestigious ride on a home-bred horse. Also, to have three of my trained horses cross the line with me I think is an achievement that possibly will never be repeated.

"The other thing is that the three people who crossed the line with me were all really young - 16, 17 and 19 years old - half my age - and look what they have achieved at such an early age. I have always said the beauty of

endurance is that you can have people like them compete and on the other hand you have people like Ron Haigh and Barb Timms still up there doing really well. That's the beauty of the sport."

Although there are concerns at the less than 40% completion rate at this year's Quilty, it compares favourably with the first Quilty when the completion rate was less than 21%. 


COVER PHOTO: Some of the Quilty horses enjoying a welcome drink at the Belubula River crossing. Photo by Jo Arblaster.

Kentucky Equine Research

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Meg Wade and Castlebar Endurance -

who rode and trained the first four horses across the line in the 2003 Tom Quilty Gold Cup.




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