



Wade tops Toft



The loneliness of the long distance rider: Meg Wade on her way to another Masters success

From Gilly Wheeler

Antipodean endurance stars Meg Wade and Peter Toft rose to the top of the pile yet again while fighting out a thrilling finish to the Tasmania Masters.

For the third year running Dungrove, a 50,000 acre sheep and cattle station, was venue for Tasmanian State Championship. This year Dungrove also hosted the first Masters ride in Tasmania. Unfortunately, this event taking place one day before the State Championship, the Masters entry was small and just nine went to post.

The majority of the route was over Dungrove property with sections passing through land on neighbouring farms. The major hazards on course were the numerous cattle grids, 14 in total but all were marked with warnings and manned by stewards during darkness.

MASTERS

The Masters ride commenced just as dawn broke. Pace setters over the opening loop of 44 kilometers were Karen Holden on Tierview Fire Danzer and Tammy Lockhart riding Peter Toft's Blake who was vetted lame at the first vet gate.

Two minutes behind the leading pair were Meg Wade on Little Joe and Peter Toft astride Electra BBP Murdoch. The stars had ridden much of this loop together. Tailing them were two more horses from Toft's Queensland stable. His wife Penny on the mare Harriet, riding alongside Jennifer Gilbertson on part Arab, Arcadian Rose.

Then came Corey Nix riding the Wade trained Magic Glenn Tulgar, bred and owned by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al

Masters result

1	Meg Wade	Little Joe	6.40.39
2	Peter Toft	Electra BBP Murdoch	6.40.40
3	Karyn Holden	Tierview Fire Danzer	6.46.36
4	Corey Nix	Magic Glenn Tulgar	7.27.35
5	Penny Toft	AHarriet	7.32.15
6	Julie Woods	Carradine Kincade	10.17.10
7	Diane Costello	McKenlyn Park Kahns	10.17.11
(9 starters, 7 finishers)			

Maktoum. The tailenders were Julie Woods and Diana Costello, a place they very happily maintained throughout the ride on two horses also owned by Sheikh Mohammed, 12-year-old Arab Carradine Kincade and the nine-year-old Anglo Arab gelding McKenlyn Park Kahn.

Toft was first away on the second leg and immediately pushed up the pace, not his usual tactic at this stage.

"Meg was my most serious competition so I went on the second leg knowing Meg might think I would go on the third. I rode to beat a competitor," he explained afterwards.

Over the first five kilometers he forged a lead of 2.5 minutes and pressed on extending his advantage. But Toft could not add to his advantage at the end of this loop of 38 kilometers. Wade picked up time in the second vet gate as Little Joe took just over five minutes to vet in compared with Toft's nine.

Toft continued to push over the next 26 kilometers, still tracked by Wade and Holden who rode this entire loop together. Nix was not far adrift in fourth place.

Toft was first to vet, almost five minutes ahead of Wade and



Holden. But as he left on the last 16 kilometer leg Electra BBP Murdoch did not display his usual unwillingness to leave the gate and was visibly tiring in comparison to Little Joe who was rearing to go.

Within the first couple of kilometres Wade drew away from Holden and reduced her deficit with Toft to two and a half minutes, but was surprised to see that Toft was so close.

"I came over the rise and saw Peter, I couldn't believe it. Joe rose to the occasion and soon caught him. This is the first time I have ridden him in a ride," she explained.

Wade and Toft rode together the rest of the way and, in sight of the line, broke into a canter with Wade claiming victory by a second in a ride time was 6.40.39. Wade trains Little Joe for his owner Dr Bill Harbison. Little Joe's previous ride was the 2002 Quilty where he finished sixth Lightweight, 33rd overall, ridden by American rider Kathleen Crandell.

"It was an awesome last leg – Little Joe was amazing," said Wade

Little Joe is an unregistered pure Arab with a totally Spanish top line. His sire, Fad Bravo, owned by Silver Cloud Stud, has produced some significant endurance horse.

Toft's mount, Electra BBP Murdoch, is half Arab, half Appaloosa. Sired by the Arab Stallion Credit, a Crabbet line. Toft purchased Murdoch two years ago, prior to which he had completed three 80 kilometer rides and won a 100 kilometer ride in 2001 in Tasmania. The pair finished second Heavyweight and seventh overall in the 2002 Quilty, over a very tough course. On this day Murdoch easily won Best Condition

"I will be 80 kilos by next season, then I will ride internationally again," said Toft, a comment that many in the Endurance world will welcome.

Third placed Holden lives in in Northwest Tasmania and is quite new to Endurance. Indeed her beginnings would have dampened many riders' enthusiasm. Her previous equestrian pursuits were Western Riding and then dressage. A broken leg, the result of a fall led her to Endurance.

"To get fit I did plenty of trotting and this led a friend of mine Jodi Hutchins persuading me to try Endurance. My very first 40 kilometer ride was a disaster my horse died from a heart attack after two kilometers," she said.

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP.

The 160 kilometer State Championship, sponsored by Country Club Casino, started at midnight on the Friday so the first and most of the second loop were ridden in the dark. One additional hazard was a thick early morning mist that enveloped the riders over the latter part of the second loop.

Thirty riders, 21 in the middleweight division and nine in the heavyweight, were eligible for the title. In addition two juniors and two lightweights competed for their sections.

A group of six riders lead the way over the opening stage of 44 kilometers. These included reigning champion, race favourite and eventual winner Tony Purton on Beer Street Sioux, a smart part-Arab paint mare. An early casualty was the victor of the previous day, Meg Wade. Her mount, Rowalan Miss Lilly, had vetted through

fine but as she set out on the second loop Wade found her to be unsound and retired.

The aforementioned first vet gate was also the end of the trail for Veronica Monroe and hard working ride secretary Sue Docherty. Over the next loop of 36 kilometers two more riders drew level with the leading pack. Bonnie Burgess riding the inexperienced Duloe Banner and Peter Toft on Sashy. Sadly, like Wade, his rival of the previous day, Toft's run in the State Championship was not to last and Sashy was ruled out soon after.

Jane Statton, a tailender was vetted out with Bellawongarah Maahrissa and Linda Hanson on Kurrajong Astina, by the famous Australian sire Chip Chase Sadaqa, withdrew.

Over the next 38 kilometers four riders broke away, Purton, Burgess, Jenny Thumwood and Jodi Hutchins on Carluke Park Royal Crescent, who vetted out at the end of this stage. They had established a lead of around twenty minutes over the following group which included heavyweight Greg Johnson riding part Arab mare Davlyn Park Tangala, who had been up with the leading bunch over the first two legs. He eventually finished third overall and second heavyweight, a great result as his horse had only been qualified for a few months.

The early morning rain had passed leaving a mild summer day with no burning sun, just fresh wind, and ideal riding conditions. The international flavor of this Championship was provided by four Japanese riders, who were on horses trained by Dennis Foley. Emiko Inoue finished a most commendable 15th (11th middleweight) and the petite Fumi Kameyama was third lightweight on Highland View St Nickolas.

Over the next 26 kilometers it looked as if the leading three, Purton, Thumwood and Burgess had the ride all but sewn up as they traveled together throughout this fourth loop. But it was a very very close call for Thumwood's Beer Street Berki at the fourth vet gate. This called a halt to her challenge and she rode the final stage very cautiously taking an hour longer than the winner.

Just two serious contenders were up for the title with 16 kilometers remaining. It was obvious that Purton had no intention of giving up his title and, over the first 10 kilometers he had opened up a gap of four minutes on Burgess. But to the surprise of waiting crews and spectators, as Purton came into view at the top of the hill above the vet gate he was accompanied once again by Burgess. The pair trotted home together with Duloe Banner looking full of running.

Within sight of the line Burgess left this success to Purton and dropped back. Purton cantered to the line unchallenged. This made it two in a row for Purton and three in a row for his horse Beer Street Sioux.

Having been awarded his numerous trophies Purton said: "I only bring the cup back so it gets polished before I take it home again." Second placed rider Burgess was completely overwhelmed by her success: "No one was more surprised than me to be up there. I had lots of fun riding, it was very interesting. On the first leg I rode behind Meg Wade, she was like a bloodhound smelling out the next marker. The second leg I rode behind Peter Toft who went faster. Then for the rest of the ride I rode with Tony and Jenny, a hoot all the way round."

“It was an awesome last leg – Little Joe was amazing.”