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A TOUGH ENDURANCE EVENT FAURESMITH 2008



On a very chilly Tuesday the 8th July this year, 312 horses started the 3 day – 201 km endurance ride that takes place annually at a little town called Fauresmith in the Free State. This is a very special event with a long history – starting in the early 1970's, but which has developed into the largest endurance event of its kind in the world.

Fauresmith is the second oldest town in the Free State that derives its names from Reverend Phillip Faure of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape Colony and the then Governor of the Colony, Sir Harry Smith who played a distinct role in the early history of South Africa (1819 – 1834). Two years prior to the founding of Fauresmith, Bloemfontein – the judicial Capital of the Republic of South Africa, was founded by Major Henry Douglas Warden as a town and military outpost. This intervention of the British in the interior caused the

subsequent Battle of Boomplaats between Brits and Boers in 1848, some 30 km from the present town of Fauresmith. (Sir Harry Smith led the British troops and Andries Pretorius the Boer troops).

The first plots of Fauresmith were sold in 1849 and the town acquired municipal status in December 1859. At that stage the town was under the control and management of the Dutch Reformed Church. The original church settlement was laid out on the farm Sannaspoort, on land that belonged to Adam Kok and his Griqua people. The farm was named after Kok's wife, Sanna who once broke her leg there.

The 2008 Ride took place under extremely cold conditions and proved to be a real test of the horsemen, horses and the support grooming crew. Of the 312 that started the race, only 193 completed it – most having been withdrawn from the race

due to the vet checks – of which there are 10 in all that take place up to the end of the race. A further veterinary check takes place before the horses can leave the town of Fauresmith – to ensure that the horses are healthy and will stand up to the transport home. This year 324 horses were presented to the vets on Monday the 7th July and sadly 12 horses that had been transported to Fauresmith for the event never started. The number that participated in this event was lower than the previous year, but this is largely due to a substantial number of horses having been exported from South Africa since the 2007 event. This success story is linked to a South African horse that set up the fastest time in the world for 160 km event in Dubai.

Fauresmith 2008 was special for several reasons – some of which include the following:

1. One of the brave riders was a Mr Kobus Smit (43) from Meyerton who is suffering from cancer and in January this year had undergone a bone marrow transplant. His groom was a Mr Carl de Campos (32) who was born blind. Despite these combined disabilities, Mr Smit completed the race and was ably assisted by Mr de Campos. Mr Smit completed his first endurance ride in March this year and thus had a very short period in which to qualify to participate at Fauresmith 2008. What a brave example of determination.

2. A development rider team participated this year with 6 riders making up the Development Team. All 6 of these riders completed the event. This is truly an achievement.

3. One of the "die hard's" in the sport, Oom Ami de Wet who has ridden more Fauresmith rides than any other rider, once again took part and completed the event.

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Endurance riding events largely take place away from the main urban centres and therefore they do not receive the publicity that most of the other equine sport events enjoy. However, this year there were numerous photographers recording the 2008 ride as well as two TV crews from SABC TV2 and Carte Blanche. The major sponsor for this event is Subaru who specifically provided three ambulance horse boxes (as can be seen in the photos) which are required to collect horses from the points where vet checks take place and where horses are withdrawn. Each day there are two vet checks that take place in excess of 20 km away from the central start and finish point.

If a horse is withdrawn, it has to be transported back to the starting point where, should it be necessary, it can be treated in the clinic although there are treatment vets available to treat the horses immediately during the ride. The bulk of veterinarians that are involved in this event are located at the vet checks to check the horses as they proceed through the course each day. Once a horse has completed the 201 km, the horse still has to pass the final vet check before it has completed its race. This very stringent control of the horse's health ensures that riders that have completed the event have taken good care of their partner.

Endurance riding is a growing sport and a relatively expensive sport in which to participate. Not only does

a rider have to have a horse that is able to compete, but they also have to qualify for major events like Fauresmith. Most horses do not start participating in this sport until they are approximately 5 years old and when the pair (horse and rider) participates, they have to be supported by at least 1 or 2 grooms. This means that it is a team event and in many cases is a family team event. The participants have to get to the location where the ride is taking place, pay entry fees, accommodation at the location unless they camp, then ensure that their horse is in good health, pay their vet's bills, supplement the horse during major events and still travel home at the end of the event. Most of the horses that participate are Arabs or Arab cross horses and it is a true credit to this breed that when most of the horses complete the ride, they are still alert and eager to continue.

Those that participate in this event deserve credit and unfortunately are seldom recognised by being prize winners. However, an event like Fauresmith is more an individual achievement for most of the riders than the success of being a particular winner in any specific category. The categories that do participate are Child Rider, Junior, Heavy and Standard Weight and then the Fauresmith event is particularly prominent because of it being the locale for competition of the various unions who field teams of Junior, Standard and Heavy Weight teams.



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*All photographs provided
courtesy of Lourens Nortje*

