

# Valerie Kanavy Provides Heart-Pounding Finish to World Endurance Championship

BY ROBIN STANBACK AND JANET GLOWAKY

World championship endurance riding and the name Kanavy have become synonymous. Providing a dashing finish aboard High Winds Jedi, Valerie Kanavy led a field of 173 horses and riders from all over the globe to the finish of the 160 kilometer desert marathon. Still, the win was bittersweet for the 52-year-old athlete who bemoaned the elimination of her daughter Danielle and the horse they each had ridden to previous World Championships.

Mrs. Kanavy won the fifth World Endurance Championship held in Holland in 1994 riding Pieraz, better known to his many fans as Cash. The gray Arabian ran another world class performance in 1996 with Danielle aboard when the Championship was held in Kansas. The finish to that race was a rare sight in competitive sports as a mother and her daughter raced their horses neck and neck to the finish line. One second separated the two horses. It was an experience the duo hoped to repeat in Dubai but the valiant Cash was stopped at the first vet check. Explaining that the champion had been clipped from behind early in the race and then

the finish in Dubai but Italian rider Fausto Fiorucci riding his homebred Faris Jabar who goaded Jedi and Mrs. Kanavy to an all-out galloping finish. A mere five seconds separated the two riders who completed the race in riding times of 9:00:07 and 9:00:12, respectively. Daisuke Yasunaga of Japan on Natsu came in five minutes behind the leaders to place third.

Mr. Fiorucci's and Mr. Yasunaga's finishes marked two of the many interesting aspects of this event. The gray 10-year-old gelding Faris Jabar had experienced significant enough health problems prior to the race that he and his rider, who together won the 1997 Italian National Championship, were not considered to be a part of the team competing for Italy. The horse recovered well enough to place second in the race and was named third in the judging for best-conditioned horse. Mr. Yasunaga's finish in his first world championship surprised many endurance enthusiasts. The 23-year-old is one of only four endurance riders in all of Japan, a country that does not host any 100-mile rides. Yet it was Mr. Yasunaga and a fellow Japanese team member who bolted out of the fourth vet check gate that Mrs. Kanavy credits with pushing her to ask Jedi for more speed in the last quarter of the race.

Like Mr. Fiorucci, Mrs. Kanavy was riding as an individual instead of as a member of the United States team. U.S. Chef d'Equipe Rick Stewart had to decide which of the seven riders competing from the United States would serve as the four-member team representing their country. Jedi had suffered difficulties with a sand-caused fungus problem in his hooves and had also experienced a mild tying-up episode shortly after his arrival. These two factors weighed heavily in the decision to have Mrs. Kanavy compete as an individual. Shirley Delsart on KJ Destination, Ona Lawrence on RAA Crusader, Wendy Merendini on Fire Mt. Flikka and Darla Westlake on MC Rams Z were chosen to serve as the United States team. The group came in with a team total of 33:31:36 to capture the team silver behind the New Zealand team of Jenny Heam on Simbar, Kevin James on Glendaar Sarita, Alan McCaughan on Tonka and John Stevenson on Taralea Raja who came in with a team total of 33:14:27. This was the first time a team from New Zealand had participated in the World Endurance Championships. Their tight team



*H.E. Sh. Mohammed Bin Rashad, H.E. Sh. Mohammed bin Zayed and H.F. Sh. Hamad bin Mohammed with Valerie Kanavy*

tripped and hit himself causing a lameness that would not allow him to continue, Mrs. Kanavy stated, "It was just the wrong timing. It was very disappointing and unfortunate that Danielle and Cash didn't get to finish the race. She had done most of the training to get us there and then did not get to finish. She's young and very talented so I am certain she will have other opportunities, but I couldn't help wishing we could have repeated our finish in Kansas."

It wasn't her daughter riding hot on her heels at

had just less than five minutes time separating the riders.

There was some confusion as to which team had placed third in the competition, but the bronze was finally awarded to Australia with a team total of 34:41:35. Problems with the computerized timing system developed early in the day and the manual backup system was not as efficient as many had hoped it would be. Some teams complained that not knowing the speed and placement of their competitors made strategy planning difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

The timing problem and any other logistic glitches that occurred were far outweighed by the generosity and hospitality of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the host for the seventh World Endurance Championships. The UAE had one year to develop a course for the event, veterinary support stations, quarantine areas and the stables necessary to house the equine competitors. The contest was originally slated to have taken place in Ireland, but that country was unable to meet the commitment necessary to host the event. The UAE requested the honor and went beyond providing the course and stabling to paying the expenses for riders and horses from all over the world to be a part of the championship. Transportation and housing for riders, horses and grooms were provided and, as a result, this event stands as having the largest collection of countries represented at a world competition. Over 37 nations were represented with many, like New Zealand, for the first time at this competition.

"Individuals from the UAE were wonderful and gracious hosts and did everything to make our stay as comfortable as possible," Mrs. Kanavy said. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum was instrumental in assisting the Kanavys by providing them with feed from his own feed mill. The feed was very similar to what the Kanavys feed their horses at their home in Virginia. Dr. Joe D. Pagan of Kentucky Equine Research (KER) worked with the Sheikh's staff to develop this mix.

Mrs. Kanavy explained, "We use Ultra Plus, a product developed by Pennfield Feeds in conjunction with KER. We feed about three pounds in the morning and again in the evening. Before we started using Ultra Plus our horses did not handle the work as well and it was hard to keep the weight on them. Now, if anything, we need to watch so that the horses don't gain too much. If they do lose a little weight from a competition, it is easily replaced. Our horses

now have no down time from work or competition and are well turned out all the time. So, obviously, we consider our feed to be very important. We really appreciated the extra effort Sheikh Mohammed and Dr. Pagan went to in order to provide a feed that would be a good substitute for us. They were able to develop a feed very similar to what our horses are used to and our horses quickly accepted it."

Dr. Pagan added, "Kentucky Equine Research has worked with Dr. Billah at Zabeel Feed Mill in Dubai for several years preparing rations for Thoroughbred racehorses and racing camels. This was our first opportunity to make endurance feeds at this facility and we are delighted with the way the feeds turned out."

Another KER product that was, according to Mrs. Kanavy, instrumental in helping her horses deal with the desert heat was Endura-Max. This electrolyte was designed by KER specifically to help endurance horses replenish the fluids they lose over the long period of time they compete. Dr. Pagan stated, "Endurance horses are unlike any other equine athlete in that they sweat over a much longer period of time. They need an electrolyte that is designed to provide a longer lasting effect than most others can provide." According to Mrs. Kanavy, "Endura-Max is what we normally use the night before, morning of, and during competition. In Dubai, because of the heat and humidity, we used it almost continuously. I felt that our horses drank more water and handled the conditions better than we had even hoped."

The fully equipped equine hospital designed for the competitors' use provided technicians and labs to help caretakers carefully monitor the health of the horses. Mrs. Kanavy particularly appreciated

the availability of specific blood testing that allowed her to monitor potassium and other vital levels that would indicate any potential problems.

The UAE also provided an Equestrian and Racing Federation Endurance Village that served as the primary veterinary checkpoint for the race. The race was set up in a cloverleaf design so that each of the five legs of the race came back to the central area. Within the large village enclosure, each country was provided with a shaded crew area that was stocked with abundant supplies of ice, mineral water and soft drinks. There was also access to two large restaurant tents complete with formally dressed waiters to



*German rider Uta Wilhelmi rides Sihdih in the quarantine area prior to the race.*

cater to every need. An air-conditioned tent was supplied for the press and it was equipped with computers, fax machines and Internet access. A large-screen television provided crews with the opportunity to monitor the competition. Stationary cameras and those mounted on helicopters were the only way for the crews to help plan strategy for their teams as the computer problem made knowing exact placements difficult to decipher.

The host team from the UAE had an impressive showing at the competition as well, with four riders finishing in the top ten. Unfortunately, Sheikh Mohammed's mount, the Arabian gelding Nelson 1, was pulled at the final veterinary gate and he was unable to finish. One of the Sheikh's sons, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Maktoum, finished fourth riding Ratzia d' Alauze. Another horse from the UAE stable, Amraj, finished as well. Sheikh Mohammed loaned this bay Arabian gelding to Houston, Texas resident Laura Stoicescu who was riding for Romania. Without his assistance Ms. Stoicescu would not have had the opportunity to compete.

Perhaps the best example of international support and cooperation could be seen in the story of two Russian riders, Taov Ali and Zoukhov Zamir, who wished to participate but had never competed in a 100 mile race. Neither would have been able to consider making the journey without the financial assistance of Sheikh Mohammed. Even so, their journey to Dubai was fraught with difficulties. While traveling through Poland, the two competitors were stopped by

authorities who questioned the legality of their papers. The men were jailed for five days while their papers were investigated. Their horses, an 11-year-old mare and a ten-year-old stallion, stood on a trailer for the entire time. This definitely delayed their training and their acclimatization once they finally arrived in Dubai. Crew members and competitors of the United States team stepped in to assist the Russians by providing basic necessities and support. The Russians finished in a tie for 63rd.

Sheikh Mohammed was on hand to congratulate the competitors as they crossed the finish line. Dr. Pagan, who was at the finish, stated, "When Sheikh Mohammed went to congratulate Valerie, there was a sea of white dishdaks surrounding them both as he gave her a hug. They spoke for a few minutes and then he turned to congratulate others. For a minute it looked like a huge human amoeba as the crowd of people in their robes followed the Sheikh. All of a sudden, Valerie just popped out. It was a very exciting finish and I was very glad to have been able to attend the race."

The closing ceremonies of the World Endurance Championship would, according to Dr. Pagan, have rivaled the Olympic finale in Atlanta. "The event was held in Sheikh Zayed Stadium. There were laser light shows, over 5,000 beautiful dancing children, fireworks, camels and, of course, horses. Two screens on either side of the stadium showed a view of the celebration taken from helicopters hovering above the ceremony. It was very impressive." ☺

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