

# Australian Endurance Riders *Race to Silver* in Dubai

Imagine seven, nine, or even eleven hours in the saddle with few breaks and nothing but miles and miles of desert stretching out in front of you, to the left of you, to the right of you, and, thankfully, behind you. Add in that much of this time is spent at a trot or canter and the feat becomes more intimidating, maybe even frightening. To experienced endurance riders, however, this is routine. But not routine in a mundane or dull way. Routine in an addictive way that stokes the collective fires of joy, passion, and exhilaration.

A quartet of endurance riders from Australia experienced these emotions and countless others as they secured the team silver medal at the World Endurance Championships, held January 27, 2005 in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. The competition was held at Dubai International Endurance City, a venue built specifically to host long-distance equestrian competitions. The complex is situated approximately 70 km from Dubai.

The competition was sponsored by the Crown Prince of Dubai and Minister of Defense, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, often considered the patron of endurance riding in Dubai and a well-known competitor. The sponsorship was profoundly generous, as Sheikh Mohammed paid for all of the competitors to be there.

Due in part to Sheikh Mohammed's benevolence, the World Endurance Championships had more competitors than any FEI world championship ever contested, regardless of discipline. Aside from the 175 riders, more than 750 support personnel and 42 officials were in Dubai.

Teams from 32 countries contested the event, but only four of those teams—from Italy, Australia, Belgium, and Canada—managed to finish three riders and earn team medal consideration. Italy claimed the gold medal and Belgium, a country with fewer than 300 total endurance riders, earned the bronze. Nine other nations sent individual riders.

## The Team from Down Under

The Australian team consisted of Peter Toft, Penny Toft, Jennifer Gilbertson, and Kristie McGaffin. Longtime KER-sponsored rider Meg Wade and Anne Jones rode as individuals. Each is a member of the Australian Endurance Squad (AES), an organization formed two years ago to provide endurance enthusiasts with the opportunity to represent the country in international competitions. Squad members come from all levels—not just the upper echelon—with the common goal of excellence in competition.

As is often the case in world-class competitions, Kentucky Equine Research (KER) was on hand to lend its expertise. KER and Ridley AgriProducts serve jointly as consulting nutritionists to the AES. The companies' primary responsibility is to provide nutritional support and advice to riders throughout the year. Additional support is given leading up to and during international endurance events. Recognizing the importance of the World Endurance Championships, the companies expressed further support by shipping feeds and supplements to Dubai to minimize disruption of the horses' diets.

*Members of the Australian Endurance Squad receive nutritional advice from KER and Ridley AgriProducts.*



Supplied by Meg Wade

Scott O'Brien, an equine nutritionist with Ridley AgriProducts, traveled to Dubai with the team to offer technical assistance to the Australian team. Prior to the competition, O'Brien and Dr. Peter Huntington, director of nutrition for KER, visited Dubai to ensure forage availability was adequate for the Australian horses. While in training, team horses were familiar with being turned out to pasture much of the time, a luxury that would not necessarily be afforded in Dubai. Quality of forage, therefore, became a prime consideration.

All of the team horses were fed a muesli-like sweet feed called StableMaster Phar Lap or a specialized pellet called StableMaster Endurance, both of which are formulated by KER and manufactured by Ridley AgriProducts. Team horses were also fed Equi-Jewel, KER's stabilized rice bran product.

In addition to well-formulated concentrates and high-energy supplements, team horses were offered a combination of KER electrolyte products Endura-Max, Endura-Max Plus, and Restore. Antioxidant protection was afforded by Elevate and Preserve.

All four of the horses on the Australian team were prepared by Toft Endurance, an endurance empire run by Queenslanders and husband-and-wife team Peter and Penny Toft of Marburg, near Brisbane. For the championships, Peter was paired with his brightly colored Appaloosa Electra BP Murdoch, a horse that stands out among the crowd of bay, chestnut, and gray Arabians. Peter and the gelding have traveled far and wide to compete in endurance events. In 2003, the pair made the trip to the United States to contest the Tevis Cup, held annually in California. That trip proved rewarding as the pair finished fourth.

Peter Toft attributes much of the team's success to a proven scientific feeding program and unsurpassed veterinary support. In addition to these critical elements, Mother Nature lent a hand. Leading up to the competition, the environmental conditions in Australia were similar to those that would be encountered in the Middle East, which gave the Australians an edge as well.

Penny Toft's mount for the international competition was Harriet. Unfortunately for Penny, the mare was eliminated due to lameness after crossing the finish line.

Jennifer Gilbertson resides in Wiseman's Ferry in New South Wales. She completed the world championship race on Bramall Jazzmin, another horse owned by Toft Endurance. Gilbertson's family supports her horse interests whole-heartedly. Her husband is a delegate to the Australian Endurance Riders Association (AERA) and helps coordinate the 400-km ride held in Shahzada each year.

Gilbertson has been successful over the last several seasons. She placed among the top twenty finishers at a recent World Cup competition. She chooses a second-place



Supplied by Meg Wade

*Meg Wade is a prominent member of the Australian endurance community. She rode as an individual at the World Endurance Championships.*

finish in the 2003 Australian FEI Championship aboard homebred Webbs Creek Rippling as one of the most memorable rides in her career.

Kristie McGaffin was the final member of the silver-winning team. She and Bremervale Justice also placed 18th in individual competition. Bremervale Justice is owned by Peter Toft and was bred by his mother, owner of Bremervale, a well-known Arabian stud located near Brisbane. McGaffin hails from Walwa, a town on the border of Victoria and New South Wales.

The Australians have a rich tradition of performing well in world championship competition, having earned the team gold medal in France in 2000, and team bronze medals in 1994, 1998, and 2002.

Ridley AgriProducts is the largest stock feed manufacturer in Australia, selling the Barastoc and StableMaster lines of horse feeds. In 2003, Ridley AgriProducts released a new product, StableMaster Endurance, which was formulated specifically by KER to support the nutritional demands of endurance riding. Learn more about Ridley AgriProducts feeds and sponsored riders at [www.ridleyhorse.com.au](http://www.ridleyhorse.com.au).

For more information on KER, log on to [www.ker.com](http://www.ker.com). 