



Eduard Penning on Al Gamila Rothos won the standard weight division of the ride in a time of 8 hours, 35 minutes and 26 seconds. On this picture with them is Stephanes Lombaard on Princess (Photo: Equerry)

# The Fauresmith 200: showcase of endurance riding

by Dr Marc Walton, BSc (Agric), BVSc, attached to the Ceres Veterinary Hospital

**What brings 16 vets and hundreds of competitors and their families together to camp in the freezing cold of a rural Free State winter? Simple: to enjoy the tradition of the annual National Fauresmith Endurance Ride – a culture not found anywhere else in the world.**

Endurance riding is one of the fastest growing equine sports in the country. Each year more than sixty competitive rides are organised with distances of 30-160 km. There are some 1 800 registered members. Fauresmith is a story of more than 30 years of tradition, growing from

its humble beginnings to this year's record 356 initial entries from all over Southern Africa.

The prestige of Fauresmith arises from its gruelling 201 km course over mountains, stone and sand. Riders compete not only against the clock, but fellow competitors battle the tough course and the harsh winter elements. The first two days comprise 74 km and the last day 52 km.

Sixteen of South Africa's most experienced endurance veterinarians (thirteen vets and three treatment vets), are employed by the Endurance Ride Association of South Africa (Erasa) with one simple mantra: "The well-being of the horse is paramount." The thirteen line-vets are there specifically to make sure the horse is fit to



History in the making – Themba Mlangeni from Platorand Club became the first previously disadvantaged rider to breed, train and complete Fauresmith on his own horse



Subaru provided a well-received horse ambulance service this year. They ferried horses that were eliminated at vet-check points far away from base camp, back to their stables



A horse undergoes a tendon scan in the well-equipped clinic at the Fauresmith 200

continue without undue discomfort or danger to its well-being or future athletic career.

The ride is held under the Erasa rules unique to South Africa and is different from the international FEI systems. A pre-ride veterinary inspection begins the day prior to the start. Only horses in the correct condition, properly shod/balanced and completely sound are allowed to compete. Riders start in small groups every five minutes from 7:00 in the morning. The sight of the horses and their riders riding off into the mist and frost, is truly an amazing experience.

### Compulsory inspections

Following each stage of the ride, there is a compulsory veterinary inspection. Riders have 20 minutes following arrival to present the horse. The pulse is taken (must be below 64 at successive stages) and veterinarians also judge specific parameters at each vet inspection, evaluating for lameness, injuries and metabolic conditions. If there is any doubt over a horse, three vets vote to keep the level consistent.

During the ride horses may be affected by metabolic conditions secondary to hyperthermia (heat stress), dehydration and electrolyte and acid base abnormalities. These manifest as “Exhausted Horse Syndrome”, “Monday Morning Disease” and “Thumps” (synchronous diaphragmatic flutter). The regular inspections by line veterinarians ensure early recognition and treatment of these problems.

Fauresmith boasts a fully equipped clinic with the latest state-of-the-art ultrasound scanner, X-ray machines and even full blood chemistry and haematology machines. Johan Marais sponsored the use of an Idexx blood chemistry and haematology machine. Comprehensive profiles could be run within minutes of presentation of the horse and aided in the treatment of horses. Vetchem sponsored a number of profile discs, allowing us to run profiles on competing horses at various stages of the rides with fascinating results.

The clinic has two stables with a flat attached for 24-hour monitoring of horses. Subaru vehicles operated the equine ambulance to fetch cases off the course. We thank Subaru for the fantastic service that their vehicles did with such ease.

A total of 78 horses were examined by the treatment vets this year. Of these, 15 were for metabolic

conditions, 55 for lameness, three for respiratory conditions, and three for wounds. All the horses recovered fully and no fractures were diagnosed.

### Blood chemistry

The blood chemistry enabled us to evaluate the difference between horses with muscular cramps (few blood abnormalities) *versus* "Monday Morning Disease" (major blood abnormalities). A number of typical "Monday Morning Disease" cases were seen, even before the ride. The common presentation is the horse stopping with hindquarter stiffness, increased heart and breathing rate and possibly colic signs. Often the horses urinate dark urine due to muscle breakdown products in the blood and urine. Treatment involves prevention of further damage, correction of fluid and electrolyte balance and supportive therapy for the kidneys, massage and pain control. In all cases a history of little exercise on high carbohydrate diets was implicated.

By doing serial blood profiles including electrolytes such as potassium, sodium and calcium, urea and creatinine (indicators of kidney function), GGT and TBil (indicators of liver function) as well as blood proteins, blood

glucose and muscle enzymes CK and AST on successive days, we were able to evaluate the response to treatment and adjust our approaches accordingly. Repeating the profile daily, the progress can be measured and complications such as kidney failure predicted and prevented.

Interesting was the number of cases brought during and before the ride that the owners were not happy with. Clinical examination was unremarkable, often normal, yet some of the horses showed definite abnormalities on blood chemistry evaluation. Without exception, these horses did not complete the ride, some of them only showing specific symptoms 12 hours after the blood tests.

The blood profiles done on normal, healthy competing horses were fascinating. While muscle enzymes were elevated due to the tough nature of the ride, by the day after the ride the enzymes were normal. Credit to our wonderful horses and their athletic abilities!

Fauresmith is a highly rewarding experience, much appreciated by competitors and highly recommended to colleagues. SAH



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