

## DARE TO GO BARE: Tassie Barefoot Endurance Success

by Jen Clingly



More and more horse owners, vets and even farriers are coming to appreciate the potential of the barefoot horse. And now in Australia there is also a dedicated army of caring individuals who have tested the waters and are determined to see that others test them, too. One of these people is Jen Clingly, endurance rider in Tasmania, a big advocate for barefoot horses. This is her story.



*Jen and Imaj Zamir in action (Photo courtesy Jen Clingly. )*

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Last year I lobbied the Tasmania Endurance Riders Association (TERA), to support the motion that barefoot horses be able to compete in rides. It was at the AGM that I first realised the difficulty ahead. I was handing out information sheets and copies of the submission that went to the Veterinary Committee, and the group who had gathered shook their heads and told me I was mad. Only after I presented my case from a personal point of view did they stop and take notice. In the end they voted unanimously in favour of the motion.

I realised then and there it wasn't what I preached that would make an impact and get people to take notice. It was to get out there and lead by example.

My hoof care experience came from a number of sources. My instructor introduced me to the barefoot issue, then loaned me a copy of Jaime Jackson's "Natural Hoof Care". This book was a turning point for me. For the last 12 months I have spent time with a farrier learning trimming techniques and have surfed the 'Net for information. Through these sources and thanks to some very patient horses and friends I have acquired more and more knowledge about the natural hoof and developed some basic skills. I now barefoot trim my own horses, so they can now enjoy metal-shoe-free lives. I also take the time it takes to train and condition their hooves for riding and competition.

I am in awe of wild horses, their condition and the strength of their hooves. There is so much to be learnt from observation of the wild horse. My six year old Arab, Imaj Zamir, who has never been shod, will willingly tackle any ground. I train him in and around the quartz terrain of Golden Valley, Tasmania, for endurance events. He moves freely, is surefooted, travels far and as well as nature intended. He has proven to me that shoes are not a necessity, and his ability gives me the courage of my convictions to study this further and challenge any assumption that the hooves are too weak or too sensitive to go unshod.

As the rule change allowing barefoot endurance competition only came into effect this year, to compete in 2003 I had to abide by the original rule of presenting an "adequately shod horse". To comply with this, I trialled the Old Mac Boots. This allowed the opportunity to bridge the gap between conventional horse shoes and high performance barefootedness.

All our endurance training was done without shoes or boots - on all types of terrain. For actual endurance rides, I fitted him out in the Old Macs. Hoof boots have been invaluable to my endurance competition. I would not be able to pursue this sport if the boots weren't an option. Zamir successfully completed 4 x 40km events and 4 x 80km events in the Old Macs. However, I was ridiculed for using the Old Macs. I remember my chin wobbling at the end of Zamir's first successful ride because people were so unrelenting in their nastiness.

This year has opened a new can of worms. On 20th March, following the rule change, Zamir and I competed in our first official 80km ride for the season - barefoot!

The terrain couldn't have been any tougher, with gravel roads, rocky forestry trails and bitumen stints. I was certainly concerned by the unrelenting gravel with its small stones that can easily lodge in the frog cleft and cause a bruise. This did not happen but all the same I got off and checked his hooves at any hint of gait abnormality.

In his true style, Zamir crunched up the kilometres and won the applause of fellow riders by completing the 80km in six hours with a heart-rate of 47.

Following the eventful year of lobbying Tasmania for the rule change, and having copped a lot of flack for using the Old Macs in competition, it seemed unfair that the vet would "vet-out" the horse in the limelight and further crush the efforts of the rider. Even though Zamir did not show signs of consistent lameness, he bobbed around the corners of the witches' hats in the trot-out and was deemed lame.

Like most endurance riders, I know when my horse isn't sound. I'm very in tune with him and that day he was the best he has ever been out on the track.

I expected the vet-out from the start. What really shocked me was that the vet showed no interest in inspecting Zamir's hooves. Wouldn't someone whose life's work is veterinary science be intrigued about the condition of a natural bare hoof after an 80km ride?

Nonetheless, it was a real "feet" [sic] for Zamir and I to complete this ride, and the fact he did it, and he did it well, earning the respect and interest of fellow riders, meant a lot more than acquiring any trophy. Just like the conditioning of his hooves, it's going to take time to condition the people.

Saturday 3rd April saw Zamir and I successfully complete a 40km ride barefoot in Tassie's East. I had not come across these officiating vets before. They were very open-minded and made very little reference to Zamir's bare hooves. Perhaps things are looking up?

I would like to help spread the news about barefoot horses, how much they benefit from a natural lifestyle and from not having shoes. Maybe in my lifetime, unnatural practices with horses (especially shoeing) will become just a memory, something that was done in the "olden days".

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In late April, Jen and Imaj Zamir got through a 160km ride barefoot and with no problems. Jen is now qualified to compete in the famous Tom Quilty Endurance Ride and has the greatest confidence in Zamir's ability to run this ride barefoot.