

The Horse's Hoof™



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News for Natural Hoofcare

ISSUE 19 – SPRING 2005

Barefoot at the World Endurance Championships 2005!

Darolyn Butler-Dial began endurance riding in 1981 and has since logged in over 26,000 miles of competition. She is considered one of the most accomplished endurance riders in the world, and has used her fame to help promote her other passion: barefoot horses. At her Cypress Trails Equestrian Center in Humble, Texas, Darolyn and her family maintain 50 barefooted horses, most of which compete regularly in endurance races. This is her story of just one of her many incredible, talented, barefooted endurance horses.

by Darolyn Butler-Dial

DJB Wersus “Zeus”—what a horse! This small, dark, unassuming horse is now nearing his 2,500 mark in competition endurance mileage. Lucky for him, he came into our lives just as we had discovered “barefooting,” in 2000.

He’s nine years old and has fairly small, tight, and upright feet. I always stressed a bit, because he seemed to look a little high-heeled to me. After 4 1/2 years of trimming in various fashions, I let his feet remain true to the form he prefers. He is certainly one of the best horses in my herd of 50,



Zeus’ right front and right hind post-race photos, which were taken just after the finish of the WEC race. These beautiful bare feet just traveled one hundred miles in 9 hours and 27 minutes!

All photos courtesy Darolyn Butler-Dial



Japanese rider Kanako Hayashi (left) and her mount, Zeus, coming off the trail at the 1st vet check area, at the World Endurance Championships in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, January 27, 2005.

when it comes to handling rocky courses and challenging terrain.

Because of his size (14.2 hands) and ever-present calm nature, he originally was chosen to carry young riders (8-11 years old) on their first endurance rides. It didn’t take me long to notice—

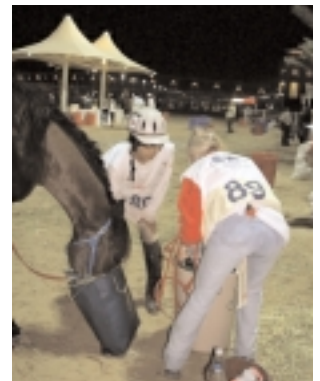
when this little horse came in with his young riders, he out-recovered all my top horses. For non-endurance folks, this means that his pulse would drop more rapidly than the other horses. This is incredibly important in endurance, as your ride time does not stop until the pulse reaches 60-64 beats per minute. The

horse’s position in the race is often a direct result of how well its pulse drops in the veterinarian-controlled rest stops.

2001 saw Zeus complete 355 miles, 8 out of 9 races, all barefoot except one. In 2002, he doubled his mileage, and has since done around 600-700 plus miles a year. He’s completed 38 of 43 races in his career—30 of them barefooted.

The year 2004, however, was a stunning year even for Zeus. He ran six 50-milers and six 100-milers, for a perfect completion record. He performed under six different riders, carrying from 150 to 200 lbs.

His 2004 100-mile record goes something like this: in February, barefoot, he carried a young Brazilian rider on his first 100-mile ride. In April, barefoot again, he finished a rather dry, hard, and occasional rocky “Texas Grasslands” in Texas. In May, shod in the polyurethane Equiflex, he finished the prestigious “Biltmore Challenge” with a Japanese rider. In July, he carried Sheikh Khalid bin Sultan Al Nahayan of the UAE to his second lifetime 100-mile in Canada—barefooted, of course.



In October, he faced his toughest ride of the season—the

Kanako, Zeus, and Vicki Hudson. This is before the start of the race—see the dark sky, the clean pennies, etc. Zeus is already eating well.

(cont. on page 4)



More post-ride photos: Zeus' left front and left hind after the finish of the 100-mile WEC.

"Fairhill International FEI," in which he finished 10th place with my daughter, CeCi Butler. The course was very wet and very rocky here and there, between the rolling pasture land. He managed throughout the day alright, and was holding a nice position in the top ten until the last ten miles. Unfortunately, six of those miles were on a sharp gravel road, with no available shoulder. Because of the rain, many creek crossings, and mud, his hooves were pretty soft by that time, and it was a struggle. No crew were allowed in this area, so there was no opportunity to boot, either. However, CeCi wisely did some leading on foot, and this tough little horse managed to hold on to his top ten placing.

By the end of 2004, Zeus had a 100% completion rate, and all but two rides were done totally barefooted. Moreover, he was rated 37th in the World Standings for FEI rides.

Zeus got a well-deserved rest after Fairhill in October, as the next thing on tap for him was the World Endurance Championship Race in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on January 27th, 2005. Well, I say he got a rest—he actually got at least a couple of weeks off, then went back to his "day

All photos courtesy Darolyn Butler-Dial

job" as a trail ride horse at Cypress Trails. All of our horses have "two lives"—they race on occasional weekends, then they carry paying riders on 1-3 hour trail rides on a daily basis, here at the ranch. It actually is a great way to keep the horses on a long, slow, distance maintenance program, as well as a means of financing their own oats and carrot money.

DJB Wersus (who completed the full course barefooted) finished the World Endurance Championship in 30th place. He was ridden by Kanako Hayashi from Japan, who is also in the U.S. Central region standings on him, and had qualified him as her mount at the World Endurance Championship (WEC).

Through November and December, 2004, we dealt with the mountains of red tape required for shipping the horse, flights for Kanako, Vicki Hudson (crew), and myself (crew), selecting equipment and saddles, etc. Kanako weighs less than 100 lbs. At FEI level, the rider and tack have to weigh at least 165 lbs. Fortunately, she decided to purchase a weighted saddle, but even with that and various saddle packs, she barely made her weight requirement. So even though he's a small horse, Zeus got no break in the weight department.

Zeus was conditioned lightly in Oklahoma the month before he left, due to the VS (Vesicular Stomatitis) restrictions on shipping out of Texas. He had gone by professional shipper from Oklahoma City to New York City. He's a good and calm traveler, but he does have a minor flare up at times with an acid stomach. I guess we "moms" always hold our breath when our "children" are shipping. He boarded a flight that had a short fuel stop in Gothenburg, Sweden, then on to Dubai, UAE. Zeus arrived in the UAE on January 8th. We were not allowed to be at the airport upon arrival, but I was present when he came off the van at the venue. He didn't seem stressed at all, and was taking it all in his stride. Knowing what I now know about the feet, I'm very much more comfortable shipping my horses barefooted rather than shod.

He had a good exercise walk that first day, and then I started light riding on the second day. He seemed to be doing quite well, so I just increased the workouts a little each day for the next few days. I shipped several bags of our custom feed—a beet pulp, oats and corn concoction—but we also had a literal smorgasbord of "horsey" food to pick from that was provided by the organizing committee. This included: sweet feed; barley; oats; hi-carb, low protein pellets. Then there was the hay: oat hay, timothy, grass hay, alfalfa hay, & alfalfa-mixed hay. I'm sure I've left something out, but you get the picture. I was also giving him Gastroguard as a preventative measure, due to his acid tummy. Carrots and apples were cheap at the camel souks, so this little horse was denied nothing.

Kanako arrived on January 20th and took over the daily training rides, and I actually got to see a bit of the surrounding country.

I personally continued to touch up his bare feet during the training period, and he had daily water soaks to ensure good hoof mechanism and pliability. Yep, I even dug a small hole in the ground, filled it with water to about 3-4 inches, and had Zeus stand in it for 10-15 minutes once or twice a day. This is VERY IMPORTANT in that dry climate.

Zeus fell in love with "Cameo" (SMR Fayette de Cameo), a Shagya Arabian owned by Selichi Hasumi, another Japanese team member. It was a good thing, too, since we had a limited amount of paddocks. Cameo and Zeus had to share one on turnout during daytime hours. Luckily, the horses got along, Zeus being happily bossed by his new girlfriend.

Of course, I was a bit nervous about the romance since Cameo was wearing those dreaded shoes, and it would only take a misplaced kick to do some damage. Luckily, they got on famously, almost too famously. As the race got closer and they had spent this special time together, they truly bonded and both of them would "act the fool" when separated. We had sort of hoped this would encourage the two Japanese riders to ride together—good for the horses, guys! But alas, they didn't, and Cameo was pulled after the 3rd loop. There went the team medal... (There were



Darolyn leading Zeus, followed by Kanako, going into the "Timed" Vet check area.

only three Japanese riders who started, and to have a team finish, you must finish three riders.) Their other rider was pulled at the finish. VERY SAD!

The choice to ride "barefooted" at WEC was not made easily, and was a group decision based on the gut feelings of the rider (Kanako), the owner (myself), and the other grooms (who had also competed on the horse). Our biggest cheerleader was the UAE WEC official farrier who examined his hooves and felt it was a viable goal.



The organizing committee built these cool oasis' for the riders & horses. You could just ride through them on the course, sponge out of them, drink out of them. (Someone must have told them about barefoot horses!) I was delighted to see them, myself. Cool those feet off (of course, this is good for the shod horses, as well).—Darolyn

Kanako and I joined a drive to see the course, a few days before the ride. We agreed it all looked pretty do-able for the “little man.” We were getting more and more comfortable with keeping him barefooted. Unfortunately, the tour was cut short by a car accident, involving one of the other team cars. Therefore, we did not have a chance to examine the last loop. Now, quite honestly, if I had seen it, I think we would have come very close to changing our minds about not shoeing. During the race, this last loop proved to be by far the rockiest ground we would cover. Much of that last 12 miles was like a big salt flat, with quarter-sized rocks covering it.

The check-in was fun, because just as the Veterinarian was finishing up, he looked down and noticed that Zeus was barefooted. He exclaimed, “He has no shoes!” I replied, “Yes, he has no shoes, he has raced four other rides this year with no shoes.” “160 Kilometers?” he asked incredulously. “Yes sir, four 100 mile races, and three 50 mile rides.” Then we commenced a long chat on the “Barefooting” principles. He shared that he had almost gone to a “Barefoot” clinic in Spain, and regretted that he had not.

The U.S. and Canada teams had already vetted through (we were in the same barn as they were), and all of them were waiting on us to finish, since we had to go back to the quarantine barn as a group. They all naturally assumed there was some question whether or not they would allow Zeus to run “barefooted,” and they were quite surprised to find out that the conversation was simply a sharing of information about “Barefooting.”

Coincidentally, the same Veterinarian did the final completion exam at the end of the 100, along with the traditional extra two vets at FEI events, and I felt he was very pleased with Zeus’s final trot out, and the fact that he had finished so nicely.

An additional outstanding fact regarding Zeus’s race was that he had the third shortest recovery time of all competing horses. The recovery time is the time it takes a horse’s heart rate to decrease from the working pulse, as he comes off trail

through the “In Gate,” until he achieves the required resting pulse and is permitted to proceed into the “Vet Gate.” We were at a bit of a disadvantage, as we had a very small crew, and did not even have a heart monitor the majority of the time. Still, Zeus has such amazing recoveries, we usually were able to just walk straight in from the trail to the Vet Gate. His total time, including his recovery at the finish, was slightly over 12 minutes. Only two other horses in the race had shorter recovery times, both from the UAE, and both with huge pit crews.

Race Stats:

(Loop Speed in KMs & Recovery Time at end of each loop.)

	DJB Versus		The Winner	
	Speed	Recovery Time	Speed	Recovery Time
1st	18.54	2:31	21.32	1:16
2nd	19.99	1:35	22.13	1:08
3rd	18.04	1:34	22.05	1:23
4th	14.99	1:27	21.43	1:11
5th	15.8	1:16	22.06	1:36
Finish	14.8	3:57	22.68	26:18
Total	12:20	Total	23:06	

During the race, I watched Zeus’s feet carefully. Then somewhere around 75 miles, I backed off his back toes a bit, when I thought there was a chance he might be overreaching a tad in the deep sand. The trail consisted of about 20% sand dune type riding, 50% road cut in sand, fairly firm and some occasional gravel rock that was usually avoidable, if one watched where one was riding, and about 30% across firm desert salt flats, with scattered rocks.

What was interesting, (for us barefooters) was somewhere around the middle of the race, I noticed some bruising on the white soles of his feet. I was concerned, but not enough that I was going to put shoes on him. Remember that I had not seen the last loop. Luckily, when he encountered the challenging final loop, Zeus trotted right through the very worst rocks at 95 miles. Nothing was stopping him by then. At the finish, as you can see in the finish hoof photos, the bruising apparent at the middle of the race was gone. Evidently, the adequate and continuous circulation enabled that bruising to be swept away.

Zeus finished brilliantly, with his best time on record, 9:23 minutes. His feet were examined and photographed by several ride vets at the end of the ride, as well. He did have several fans in the vet line-up that were quite anxious to see him complete “Barefooted,” as they had become very interested in the horse’s ability to finish this fairly challenging course “Barefooted.” One international rider immediately pulled her horse’s shoes after the ride, and asked me to do a “Barefoot Trim” on her, which I did.

After a few days of rest, Zeus was shipped home.



Zeus and his happy, but tired, girls at the finish, left to right: Kanako, Vicki & Darolyn.

Once again, he traveled beautifully, and arrived home looking as if he had been at a horse spa. He was back in the line and doing his trail ride job within a few days of his return. I think he may have even missed it a little bit.

Barefooting...personally, it is the greatest horsemanship discovery I have made in my entire life. However, as I have shared from the very beginning, it is not as simple as just taking the shoes off, doing a farrier trim and going at it. It takes a skilled physiological trim, daily water exposure, and natural keeping, or a lot of exercise. Moreover, it does not save you a lot more time than simply shoeing, but I feel we are definitely increasing the longevity and performance of the horse, our partner.

Naturally, I observed lots of feet and talked to a few farriers while attending the World Endurance Championship. The majority of the problems with lameness are shoeing problems, all over the world. The U.S. team was faced with incredible “feet” problems during their last few weeks, and going on into the competition, as well. “Barefooting” may not solve all the problems, but for me, personally competing the number of horses that I do, I cannot imagine doing anything else.

A final note: after Zeus finished the 100, and Cameo (the boss mare) did not, he became the boss in the paddock. Interesting how their self-esteem changes upon completing a World Championship, huh?

I’m still trying to get an analysis done of all my horses’ “barefooting record.” It will be posted to my website in due time, at www.horseridingfun.com. I stay incredibly busy with my riding and trimming, but feel free to address anything personal to my home e-mail: darolyn@swbell.net I’ll do my best to answer. The best success to everyone in 2005! 🌟