

RACHEL BROWN

There's something about saddling up at night and riding out on track — the horse's breath lit up in the headlight, the rhythmic thump of hooves as you negotiate the course. It's addictive. The smell of the forest, the horse's sweat, the partnership you build with your horse. The physical challenge, the adventure of seeing new places and meeting new people. That's endurance.

My endurance story has been shaped by the horses I've had. In many ways, it's not really my story, but theirs.



I began Endurance with Davadi, a Thoroughbred gelding a friend had rescued and later gave to me. Soon after starting him under saddle we were expecting child number three, so I made the reluctant decision to sell him. He needed consistency in his work and I wasn't sure how long it would be before I could return to riding. The person I sold him to dabbled in endurance riding and, as luck would have it, guess who was up for sale when I was ready to start riding again? I bought him back.

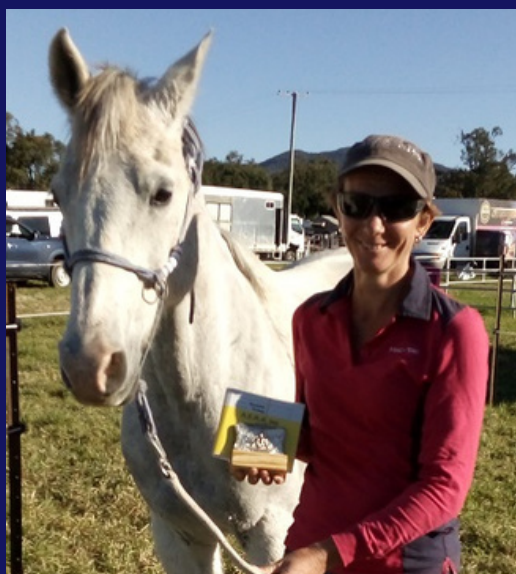
Our first 40km ride was at Tenterfield in 2014. I knew nothing! I had him overtrained and overfed, and as he was already seasoned to the distance and the work with a heavyweight rider, my big cheeky gelding at home became a crazed racing machine on track. He took the bit in his teeth, threw his head in the air and we were away! But what a ride! I was hooked.

We nussed out a better communication strategy and, after a few more endurance rides, I decided to sell my stock saddle. The lady who wanted it couldn't pay for it until she sold a horse. "But nobody wants him because he's an Arab," she said.

I said I'd do a swap.

And so Harry — Houdini — entered my life.

I don't recommend purchasing a horse in this manner. It was a gamble. But it paid off.



Just wild about Harry

Soon after Harry arriving, on a simple trip from the house to the farm, Davadi died in a float accident. It was a tragedy. But there was cattle work to do, and Harry was it.

Harry turned out to be the complete package. Smart, quick on his feet and seemingly tireless. He could work cattle all day and have the same energy at sunset as he'd had that morning. Never in my life had I ridden a horse that loved to run like he did with such stamina.

Our first ride was the Maryvale 40km in 2016, Warwick club's breast cancer fundraiser, which is now held at Bony Mountain. Harry blitzed it.

We went on to have a successful partnership spanning seven years. The horse nobody wanted turned out to be a star. He gave 200 per cent effort each time, every time. He pushed me to get fitter and become a better rider so that he could reach his potential. My heart horse. With Harry, I felt like we could achieve anything.

Some of our key events were our first 160km ride at Tooraweenah 2018 NSW State Championships, and our first Tom Quilty at Stirling's Crossing in 2019.

Harry retired in 2023 after his third Quilty, following a tendon injury sustained in training.

He's still the first to greet me at the gate and is now living a fat and happy life on the farm.



Adhara: A new horse, a new partnership.

Harry was at the top of his game when Falcon Hill Arabians advertised a stud clearance due to the drought. I didn't need another horse, but I went to have a look at the youngsters and came home with two-year-old Adhara. She was started under saddle as a four-year-old and did some gentle trails and farm work before beginning endurance in 2023.

While Harry was my best friend, Adhara is best described as a business partner. Working with her at home, she could be sweet or sour — usually a combination of both. The mood of the day would become clear within a few minutes of swinging into the saddle. I did my head in trying to work out what the problem was. Did the saddle pinch or rub? Had she eaten something different yesterday? Was it the bridle, the saddlecloth? Did she need bodywork?

But at an endurance event, all the nonsense disappeared and she was all business. In the finish I decided she thought she was too good for me. I tended to agree with her. I still don't know what the trigger was, but last year she decided I was all right. I've had consistent behaviour from her ever since.

Adhara is a natural champion, and she knows it. She achieved open status in her first year of endurance and we've now clocked up 1,269km with a 100 per cent completion rate.

After a few setbacks at home, 2026 was supposed to be our year to shine. I started preparing her early in the season for the Far-A-Way Marathon, but the week before the event Adhara put her leg through a fence. It wasn't a major injury, but certainly not something worth risking over a marathon, so we scratched. Since then, we've had further multiple mystery injuries. No Quilty for us this year either. She's still on paddock rest and can't say for sure when or if she will return to endurance.

The past 12 years have given me some fantastic adventures. I've had great rides, seen a lot of country and made some wonderful friends. It's been an incredible journey, and I hope it continues.

