

RAY ADAMS

A Quilty Journey to Remember

For Ray Adams, the 2009 Tom Quilty Gold Cup remains one of those experiences where the kilometres tell only part of the story. It was the culmination of several years of learning, careful preparation and a partnership with a horse who had begun life doing very different work.

Ray came to endurance later than many. Work, family and three daughters involved in horse sports meant that finding the time was always a balancing act. By 2009, however, the opportunity to qualify for and ride a Tom Quilty had presented itself, and Ray knew it might be his best chance to have a go. His partner for the journey was Erin Park GBH, affectionately known as Thomas, an eight-year-old registered Australian Stock Horse with a background in stock work and droving.

The Road to the Quilty

Ray and Thomas steadily worked their way through the necessary qualifying rides, including events in the Northern Rivers, Queensland and Glen Innes. A particularly memorable success came at the Bago Bush Ride at Wauchope, where they won the Heavyweight division and Thomas received the Best Conditioned Heavyweight award. The final challenge was a successful 160 km qualification at the Queensland State Championships near Mackay. After a three-day journey north, Ray was confronted with unfamiliar terrain and a much warmer climate. One of the most valuable pieces of veterinary advice was to closely monitor Thomas's sweating and hydration and manage him carefully before, during and after the ride. There was also some practical advice about a particularly demanding mountain on the course, known ominously as "The Widow Maker": take it carefully and walk if necessary. Ray listened. After a long and testing ride, Ray and Thomas successfully completed their first 160 km event and secured their Quilty qualification. With only six weeks until the Tom Quilty, the advice afterwards was equally important: give Thomas a genuine recovery period, allow him to regain his reserves, and then gradually return him to gentle work. There was no need for more hard training. The preparation had already been done.



RAY & THOMAS 2009



Tonimbuk Quilty, 2009

South to Victoria

Ray travelled south with fellow riders Michael Combe and Vicki Galliard, together with a capable and very social support crew. After another three-day journey they arrived at Bunyip State Park, Tonimbuk, Victoria, for the 2009 Tom Quilty Gold Cup. It was an extraordinary setting.

Only months earlier, Victoria had experienced the devastating Black Saturday bushfires. The evidence remained clearly visible around the ride area, but after a wet winter the bush was already beginning to recover. One of Ray's strongest memories came as daylight returned during the ride. From horseback, competitors could see fresh green growth emerging among the blackened trees. The landscape was scarred, but very much alive.

For Ray, the fact that the event went ahead at all was testament to the organising committee, volunteers, sponsors and local community. After such a difficult year, their determination to make the Quilty happen reflected the spirit that is so often found within endurance riding.

Not everything went according to plan for their travelling party. One horse was lame before the start, another combination was unsuccessful during the ride, and a borrowed horse carried one rider through the entire course only for the combination to lose the completion at the final veterinary examination. Such moments are part of endurance. Nothing is guaranteed. Ray and Thomas, however, kept going.

“To complete is to win”

The Quilty presented a testing five-leg, 160 km course. Ray approached it much as he had approached the entire qualification process: steadily, patiently and with Thomas's welfare determining the pace. Eventually, after many hours in the saddle, Ray and Thomas completed their first Tom Quilty. For Ray, successfully passing that final veterinary examination remains one of the most satisfying moments of his endurance career.

After only four years in the sport, and following the preparation, qualification rides and long-distance travel required simply to reach the start line, he had earned a coveted Tom Quilty buckle. The achievement meant even more because endurance had always needed to fit around family life. Ray's wife was working hard in nursing, their three daughters were involved in horse sports, and weekends away riding required cooperation from everyone. The Quilty was therefore never simply an individual achievement. It represented family support, the generosity of friends, a dependable strapping crew, veterinary advice, experienced riders willing to share their knowledge and, above all, the partnership between Ray and Thomas.

Thomas had carried Ray from his early endurance rides through to two 160 km completions in 2009. Their success was built gradually, ride by ride, through patience and learning rather than any rush for results. Unfortunately, Thomas developed an ongoing itch problem after the Quilty. Ray eventually made the difficult decision to sell him to an endurance home in an area where the condition was less troublesome. It proved to be a positive outcome. Thomas remained healthy and continued his endurance career, later helping introduce younger riders to the sport. For Ray, that was a fitting second chapter for a horse who had already given him so much.



Support crew Lorraine Adams, Caroline Windle, Michael Combe, Vicki & Ian Galliard with Ray and Thomas

Ray's involvement with endurance also encouraged a broader interest in horse welfare. Wanting to better understand the animals whose wellbeing is central to the sport, he undertook a three-year layman's course in equine dentistry. He found the study fascinating and believes that understanding dental health became another valuable tool in improving the comfort, health and performance of horses.

For Ray, that willingness to keep learning is one of endurance riding's strengths. Riders constantly share knowledge about conditioning, feeding, veterinary care, shoeing, terrain and horse management. Everyone has something to learn, regardless of how long they have been involved.

The Journey Home

Even the trip home from the Quilty produced another lasting memory. While the team was camped at Parkes Showground, the huge September 2009 dust storm later remembered as “Red Dawn” was sweeping across eastern Australia. By the following morning, Sydney and much of the east coast were covered in red dust. At Parkes, however, Ray remembers a much simpler scene: good company, a cold beer and the enormous satisfaction of knowing the job had been done. Not even the dust could dampen the mood. All these years later, what Ray remembers most is not simply the buckle. It is the shared commitment, camaraderie, willingness of people to help one another and an enduring appreciation for what a well-prepared horse can achieve.

That same philosophy has shaped Ray’s involvement with the Tenterfield Endurance Riding Club. He values the club for its varied and challenging tracks, comfortable ride base and, perhaps most importantly, the experienced people willing to share what they know. For riders wanting to begin endurance, continue competing or simply enjoy their horses in good company, that generosity of knowledge provides a strong foundation. Ray often comes back to the old saying, “It takes a village.” The 2009 Tom Quilty demonstrated exactly that. Horse and rider may cross the finish line together, but behind every successful endurance partnership stands a much larger team.

For Ray Adams and Thomas, that team included fellow riders Michael Combe and Vicki Galliard, family, friends and a loyal support crew who shared a journey that is still fondly remembered. The buckle remains, but so too do the friendships, lessons and memories. And perhaps that is why the traditional endurance saying still captures Ray’s experience so well:

“To complete is to win.”



Ian Galliard, Ray Adams & Michael Combe on the way home