

LOWER MURRAY LAST (?) CHALLENGE *Jil Bourton*

The last in the Lower Murray Challenge Series 2008 was run in cool but pleasant conditions on the weekend of June 21 & 22. The course was the same as LMC II with a couple of minor changes, including crossing the main Melbourne – Adelaide railway line “in the bush” and a 5am start which meant that most of the Monarto Shooting Complex loop was ridden in the dark. This loop follows the boundary of some 1600 hectares of sandhills and remnant scrub as well as open pasture. Unfortunately riders had to contend with five “cockey” gates due to two mobs of sheep being quarantined in the scrub paddocks but everyone seemed to get around this section with no dramas.

The second leg, another 30km loop was a fairly straight forward run up to Callington Hill, then a 16km loop of roads and woodland tracks over undulating and very scenic terrain to the North of Callington, before returning down the same verge-track adjacent to the Old Princes Highway back to base.

The third leg of 20kms also used part of this track both out and in and was marked with “tri” and “double” coloured arrows, an innovation in course marking I believe, which negated the need to put up one of every coloured arrow on common tracks. I also colour coded the distance markers so there would be no confusion over distances covered where tracks were shared.

For the first time in ages we had a harness entrant in the Intro Ride which meant a couple of minor diversions to separate wheels from hooves along the common and two-way parts of the course but it all went off ok and it was great to welcome back Janne Schloss (a past President of SAERA) after an absence of several years whilst living in QLD.

To be expected, the entries weren't huge with the SC at Starkeys only two weeks prior, the overall number of 35 riders and horses was pleasing and manageable with the usual small group of volunteers able to hold it all together without too much stress.

LECTURE TIME: We all like to ride. Some of us are chasing points and/or distance. We now have 94 members, (the largest m'ship we've had for a few years) but ride organisers are constantly scratching for helpers just to put on rides for you all to enjoy. Some riders do help behind the scenes before and after riding and that's great – every little bit helps. But the crunch comes on Ride day when “two men and a dog” end up running the actual ride! Usually they pull it off with a little extra assistance here and there – that's if nothing goes wrong

Remember the resolution at the AGM? that all members are to “give up” one ride to help with its running (or someone nominated by a rider/member) Or if your horse is “not right” and you are unable to ride, give the RO a ring and VOLUNTEER, instead of just not going. Hey that's what belonging to a club is all about and you never know what you may learn from the experience! And there's nothing wrong with having a warm and fuzzy feeling when you've done your bit!

BACK TO MONARTO fortunately everything ran smoothly for the LMC (last?) with no invasive treatments, only a handful of vet outs and a few riders getting lost occasionally. The main glitch of the day was a course error on the last leg for Maggi Winn and Brianna Baigner which was rectified when, with a bit of egging on by the CS and myself the two riders resaddled and cantered off to rectify their mistake with only an hour up their sleeve. Well full credit to them and their horses in making it just in time!

Last of all, the Series draw prize of a cotton rug made and donated by Pip of Archer Horserugs was contested by 3 riders with the delighted winner being Anne Simmons – well done Anne and also to Cheryl Bullock and Bob Masters who also completed the three 80km rides in the LMC Series 2008. As much as I enjoyed running the series I think next year I will stick to just one or two rides, phew!