

HORSE RIDING IN THE BLACWOOD MARATHON 2014

I might be biased, but the horse riding leg is definitely the leg to choose. There are so many reasons, but the scenery would have to be one of the main ones. I've ridden the Blackwood Marathon 4 times now and every time I forget how close and how beautiful the Blackwood River actually is. Running and cycling are either heading towards the river or away from the river respectively, and when canoeing and swimming you're actually in the river. But when riding, there is a good 8 km of gorgeous soft track right next to the meandering river and green rolling hills.

The organisers of the marathon are extremely accommodating. My horse is always trained with others and gets a bit stroppy when asked to leave her mates. So the last couple of times I have ridden through with people that I have been training with. You do need to talk to the organisers and the time keepers to discuss with them what you would like to do. But most things are possible. And even if you don't have horsey mates to train or ride through with, there are always other riders on the track that you can chat with. You can also take your horse through the final vet check with a stable mate if this helps keep your horse calmer.

Even though it is a relay, it is important to pace yourself and your horse to the conditions, particularly the weather. Ride to your training and keep in mind that if it is a hot day you will need to go slower. Speed is not for everyone. Many riders take their time, enjoy the views and still finish in an average time. The most important aspect for the equestrian leg is to pass the vet check at the end, so do the ride with this in mind at all times. Most teams are looking for a successful completion of the equestrian leg rather than chasing a fast time.

Safety is also a key at the marathon. The track is very easy to follow and there are people at checkpoints every couple of kilometres. There is a Veterinary check in the middle.

If you're worried about where to stable your horse there are several options. Camping at the Bridgetown Sports Ground (where the leg finishes) is free. Since it is also the trotting ground, they have great stalls but most bring their own white tape or portable yards and have their horses next to the float. You just have to bring food and drink, though on the day there is plenty of food for sale. There is a great atmosphere, participants and their entourage of supporters get together for a drink on Friday night. The Showground is another option for safe camping. A small fee applies and horses must be kept in the horse yards, not next to floats.

Don't forget if you are unsure or have any questions send the organisers an email at theevent@mccays.com.au, you will get a prompt reply.