

## Erica Williams (1931 – 2021)

**Life member Australian Endurance Riders Association; Life member Queensland Endurance Riders Association; Life member Arabian Horse Society of Australia;**



Erica Marjorie Williams was born in 1931, in Boonah, South East Queensland. She was the eldest of three daughters of Olive and Douglas Nunn, who, at the time, owned the bakery in Boonah. Soon after Erica was born, the family moved to Sunnybank in Brisbane, where her parents opened another bakery and where Erica learned about horses from the ones that pulled the baker's cart and delivered bread to the Nunn's customers. Erica, her mother and her two sisters, Daphne and Mary, became talented and experienced horse riders, who participated in a variety of equestrian events in the many local shows that were held all around the

then semi-rural fringes of Brisbane.

In 1955, Erica married bush legend RM Williams and moved to the large and fairly isolated property "Rockybar", near Eidsvold in Central Queensland. At that time, she began breeding Arabian horses, with the purchase of the stallion "Phaeton" (by Sala imp. from Siraatika by Sirdar) from the NSW Department of Agriculture. Erica is listed as a member of the Arabian Horse Society of Australia in Volume 2 of the old Stud Book.

Phaeton was used at Rockybar for over ten years, mostly producing part-bred working horses, but two of his notable progeny include the purebred mare Quickstep (from Qasim by Nekhl) and the partbred gelding Noddy. Qasim was purchased from Frank Staunton in 1963, having already produced the prolific stallion Simaran. Her daughter, Quito (by Royal Domino) was the dam of a long line of Erica's favourite mares – the well-know "Q" family. Erica rode Noddy to be the first woman to win the Tom Quilty Gold Cup Endurance Ride – in 1975.

A couple of years after the purchase of Phaeton, a second Arabian stallion came to Rockybar. This was Melriff (by Riffal from Meliha), originally from the Fenwick Stud, Victoria. A little later came Shiekie, by the great sire Royal Domino and from Melissa, a daughter of Melriff and out of Murra by Ibn Fayrial. Other mares came and left Rockybar

and later Erica's Wealdbarns Stud at Hodgsonvale – such as Nura (by Nekhl), Sharinda (by Shafreyn), Rosaleen (by Gai Galizon) and Rani (by Argent). Then, in the early 1970s, Erica and RM imported the bay stallion, Gai Galizon from the famous Gainey Stud in the USA. Unfortunately, he only had a few years at stud until his demise in a paddock accident, but he was soon replaced by another Gainey horse, Gai General, who went on to be one of Australia's most successful and prolific stallions. Later, Erica purchased the aged Tallangatta Muftakher – a prolific show winner but also the sire of champion endurance horses for Bob sample's Sharahd Stud. This was a return to the original Rockybar bloodlines, as Muftakher was by Shiekie's sire, Royal Domino, and with a strong line to Riffal, as well as Silver Moonlight.

Erica was one of the foundation members of Australian endurance riding. At a meeting of interested people in April 1966, the motion to form a Tom Quilty Endurance Ride committee was moved by Alan Henscke and seconded by Erica. The first person nominated to a position was Tony Croft, as president. The second person was Erica, as secretary. This committee agreed to hold the first 100 mile endurance ride in Australia in October of that year. It was to be held in the Sydney area. There were to be rest stops at 40 miles, 60 miles and 85 miles. Veterinarian Dave Hutchins was to be asked to officiate, and they agreed to the rules of the ride. There were five rules.

When the first Tom Quilty Gold Cup was held, Erica was there at the start on her little part-bred Arabian gelding, Stormy (by Melriff) and she was there at the finish, in 4<sup>th</sup> place behind Gabriel Stecher (who famously rode the ride bareback on the Shafreyn stallion Shalawi), Susan Mitchell, and Tex Mooney. Fifth place was Ron Males on another Shafreyn stallion, Shareym, 6<sup>th</sup> was David Benedict and 7<sup>th</sup> was Betty Serpell. Erica's time was just over 12 hours. At the second Quilty, in 1967, Erica was also there, also in 4<sup>th</sup> place on Stormy, behind Sam Timms, Merle Hill and Rhonda Ryland. Erica's time that year was 11hrs and 16 minutes – just 7 minutes behind the winner and a time that would still be very competitive today.

In fact, Erica was there for the first 12 Quilties, although she did not ride in all of them, and in 1975 she was particularly satisfied to be the first woman to win the Gold Cup – on the partbred gelding Noddy, by Phaeton. The mid-seventies was a time when equality for women was a major social and political issue, and Erica was very pleased to be able to show everyone that her beloved sport was ahead of most sports, and in fact most social institutions, in giving women that equality of opportunity to win the most coveted award possible.

More importantly for endurance riding, Erica was the Secretary-Treasurer of the AERA through those first twelve years of its emergence. Those were years when the sport was finding its feet and its direction. The two or more meetings a year always happened near Sydney, but Erica was always there despite the day or more drive from "Rockybar" in

central Queensland or later from Hodgsonvale near Toowoomba. There were many changes. There were six presidents. The date, venue and format of the ride often changed, and especially the vetting requirements. Many new endurance clubs formed and were affiliated with the national association. The constitution was amended and then changed completely. The “rule book” doubled in size – from its original five rules to eleven by 1974. (The current AERA Rulebook has 97 pages)

There was a ten year hiatus in Erica’s involvement with endurance (1977 – 1987) while she sorted out family and life. Significantly, during this time, she continued breeding and showing fine horses and was a hugely respected judge at many shows and events.

Then, she returned, found her partner of many years, Sharahd Friday (by Tallangatta Muftakher), and won her tenth Quilty buckle in 1991 – in her 60<sup>th</sup> year. In a ten year period, Erica and Friday completed nearly 5000kms, three Quilties, four Faraway marathons, three QERA State Championships and the Shahzada memorial marathon of 400kms. And Erica and Friday did not dawdle on the track. You had to ride seriously to keep up with her.

Then came a feisty little bay homebred mare, Martina (by Tallangatta Muftakher out of Quebec by Gai General and from the Qasim family), and a 13<sup>th</sup> Quilty buckle at Boonah in 2000. By the time of the second Boonah Quilty in 2006, Erica had decided that, at 75 years of age, she had enough buckles – but she had not had enough of the ride she had started 40 years earlier. She was there on one of the crucial timing gates, making sure everything was running smoothly, always encouraging the riders to go on and inspiring a few much younger assistants to take up this amazing sport.



*Erica and Martina at the 200km Windorah Ride, 2001. Photo by Pat Slater*

During the 90s and early 2000s, Erica returned to the QERA State Management Committee and the AERA national committee. These were difficult times, with animal welfare legislation, major changes to the endurance rulebook, the internationalization of the sport, insurance issues and health and safety matters impacting equestrian sports in general. Endurance Riding in Australia was, for a short time, faced with a rival organization.

For Erica, in these years, if she could help, she would. She was an active member of the Toowoomba Club.

For many years, Erica was the editor of the Queensland Endurance Riders newsletter, as well as managing various portfolios and she also found time to write two books to document the history of the Quilty. Ironically, the author of those two books is the one about whom a book could be written – a breeder of fine working and show Arabian horses for fifty years, a foundation member of Australian endurance riding, a talented rider, great judge of horses, a friend, mentor and inspiration to many.