I started riding horses approximately four years ago, starting with beginner trails where the horses follow each other, and then advancing to a facility where they offer out-rides and you can go at your own pace on a game farm. I then leased Dewaal privately, and later even moved to the game farm where I rode Dewaal regularly. I also started riding out alone along the safe and defined sand roads, which my horse followed religiously.

Taking the plunge
I always wanted to participate in endurance riding, but knew that I’d need my own horse and knew it wasn’t a cheap sport. Then, in 2008, I took the plunge and went shopping for a non-pure-bred, cost-effective all-rounder horse, and stumbled across Billy, a beautiful black gelding of approximately ten years old at the time, with a fiery spirit and wonderful nature. In the process I stumbled upon Kobus Smit, a cancer survivor who has, since selling me Billy, become my mentor and main sighted guide on the endurance rides.

I partook in my first 30 km endurance ride at Randfontein, and realised there how competitive and forward-going Billy is on these rides. I mostly ride in front of Kobus and he warns me of obstacles, splits in the path, etc. Billy generally sticks to the paths for me.

I went on to riding a couple of 30- and 40-km rides, and then accompanied Kobus to Fauresmith 2008 as his official groom. I was also his official groom at Walvis Bay during the Africa Tri-nations. And since then I wanted to ride Fauresmith myself.

Ever since he completed his first Fauresmith 200 endurance ride last year, the blind endurance rider, Carl de Campos, has been in the news quite a bit. Read on to find out more about this remarkable rider.
I joined the Endurance Ride Association of South Africa, Erasa, after Fauresmith 2008 and in October did my first 80-km ride at Leandra. I then completed three 80-km rides to qualify for Fauresmith 2009 and, although still facing many challenges, entered for the ride.

Facing uphill
The main challenge was finances, but I was astonished at how the endurance crowd, clubs, friends and horses supported me. Fellow riders pooled their funds to pay my entry fees, friends sponsored me with blankets and horse goodies, and even my travel costs.

The other challenge was the fact that many people believed that Billy would never finish Fauresmith, due to his non-breeding, small hooves, tent bum, and other so-called conformation errors. But I just knew that Billy had the heart and spirit. Admittedly I was also very concerned about Billy’s fitness, as I had moved to a new area the previous year and had to get to know my new surroundings.

Although my neighbours assisted me to train a bit, I often had to head out in the new area alone, but thanks to my trust in Billy, as well as my fair sense of hearing and direction, I was able to stick to a safe route around our immediate plot area. To make things worse, Kobus couldn't ride Fauresmith with me himself, as he was to represent Gauteng / Mpuumulanga. But he did find me two co-riders, Heinrich Potgieter on Koedoe and Magdaleen Watermeyer on Timika, both also doing their first Fauresmith.

The big day
The day we started on the first leg of Fauresmith (three days totalling 203 km) we couldn't believe that we were finally participating one of the biggest endurance events in South Africa. My sighted guides and I made a fine team. We rode as a group all the way and encouraged each other. They warned me of obstacles and kept monitoring our average speed. We ended up riding 0,1 km/h quicker than the average speed Kobus had suggested.

Billy was strong and pulling like a train on day one. He started tiring on day two, which concerned me as to whether we'd be okay for day three but, as my vet warned me, he felt like a new horse on the last day, and we came cantering into the stadium with Billy showing such pride and looking very strong – apparently stronger than a lot of the horses on the ride! I would ascribe this to that fact that we didn't ride for speed, but rode to finish and conduct our ride according to plan. We were definitely not last and had hours to spare.

The experience of finishing the ride was pretty emotional, even more so than finishing the Comrades Marathon in 2000. I know that this is probably due to the fact that I shared this ride with such a willing and amazing horse like Billy who, in doing so, proved many people wrong.

Nothing can stop us
Subsequently Kobus and I went to ride myself and Billy's first 120 km one-day ride at Louwna in September 2009. Billy again impressed me and our actual riding time was 8 hours 24 min, which was not bad for Billy, considering it was still within his first year of riding 80 km + rides.

Since completing Fauresmith, Spurwing has become our horse feed sponsor and Herbal Horse our supplements sponsor. Many clubs have invited us to partake in their rides, carrying our travel and entry costs. In return we are more than happy to give a motivational talk – Kobus on surviving cancer and myself on conquering a dark world.

Contact Carl on 072 486 8506 or visit www.freewebs.com/blind_bat