



Shuna puts it, "Now that it was public knowledge that a mad lady in Aberdeenshire was competing her horse without a bridle I was invited to give talks and demonstrations to various groups across Britain, even travelling Don to Ireland in 1974". Shuna ended the season by hunting Don with the Duke of Buccleuch Foxhounds, albeit with the Bosal, just in case the excitement of the day proved too much!

Going Western

Then in the Spring of 1972 Shuna went South with Don and took a short course in Western Riding and took her Western Riding Instructor's certificate. It was here that Shuna met Ann Hyland, one of the founders of the EHPS, and an expert Western Horsewoman. It was she who introduced Shuna to Endurance Riding. Don was fit and clearly enjoyed her work, so when Shuna returned home she decided to increase Don's work and to try to qualify her for the Golden Horseshoe ride, at the time 75 mile ride. The 40 mile qualifier was held in the South of Scotland, and after an argument with the B.H.S. steward about whether it was safe to allow her loose on the course without a bridle, she was eventually allowed to start. But only after doing a few tests, including galloping another horse past Don, both whilst she was walking and cantering. Luckily for some riders, this test isn't required if you ride with a bridle! Shuna and Don completed the qualifier well within time and with 100% Vet points, qualifying them for the Golden

Horseshoe ride that year. Unfortunately, Don pulled a tendon in her hock just before the big day and they were unable to compete. However, Shuna attended the ride (being held at Goodwood that year) and gained some valuable experience, and saw her friend Ann Hyland gain a silver award on her Arab stallion, Nizzolan.

Endurance

There were no Endurance rides in Scotland at this time and so Shuna concentrated on her Western classes and showing with Don. But late on in 1973, she travelled all the way to Dartmoor to compete in an EHPS ride, accompanying Ann Hyland on her young mare Katchina. And for once there were no comments on Don's lack of bridle! The following year Shuna decided to enter for the Golden Horseshoe again, but this time the 40 mile qualifier was in Leicestershire. Don took it all in her stride, and the day after the qualifier gave their hosts a brisk jumping demonstration before heading back to Aberdeen. The 1974 Golden Horseshoe ride was held on Exmoor, and Shuna travelled some of the way there with Carol Cotton and Shanta who they had met at the qualifier. Luckily, both the horses passed the initial vetting but the B.H.S. steward decided that Shuna wouldn't be allowed to compete without a bridle. After what Shuna describes as a "disappointing argument", she compromised by saying she would use her Bosal as well as the neck strap. The following morning dawned sunny, with the promise of a hot day to come. Shanta pulled a back muscle just after the halfway and had to retire, but Shuna completed the day on silver. On day two Shuna rode with Brian Shepherd and his stallion, and completed the ride, gaining a silver award. Later on in that year, Shuna competed in an EHPS 25 mile ride in the New Forest (bridleless again) and ran the first 25 mile endurance ride in Scotland from the Manar stud. There were only 5 entries for the competitive ride, but many pleasure riders entered and competed over 12 miles. This was the first of many rides that Shuna would

organise in Grampian. Shuna was really bitten by the endurance bug and donated the Manar Trophy, named after her Stud Farm, to the EHPS. This trophy has been awarded annually since 1975 to the EHPS Supreme Champion. In 1974 Don retired from Western competition, retiring as a true Champion after being unbeaten in four classes and winning the British Pleasure Horse Championships for the third year in a row.

Royal appearance

In 1975 Don had the first of her two foals, and her photograph appeared on the front cover of Horse and Hound a few weeks later. And although she took part in endurance rides, she never competed in "serious rides" again. During the latter part of her career Don concentrated on mothering weaned foals and "teaching" people to ride Western. Shuna and Don continued to give displays throughout the country and were honoured to be asked to give a display of dressage and jumping without a bridle for H.R.H. Princess Anne. Although Shuna owned and rode several other horses without a bridle, including her outstanding Quarter Horse stallion, Waccabuc, she never had quite the same mental connection as she had with Don. In 1990, old age caught up with Don and she became very stiff and was in a great deal of discomfort so Shuna made the difficult decision to have Don put down. This was one of the most difficult decisions Shuna had ever had to make over a horse because as she describes it, (she had) "a close rapport with her that I never quite felt with any other horse." *You can read more about Shuna and the other horses that she rode without a bridle in her book "Riding Free" by Shuna Mardon, 1985 ISBN 0 85606 141 7, although it may be hard to find!*

