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American Endurance Ride Conference
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Photo available by request

It started with a parade, and a girl's endurance riding dreams have come true

by Riley McHenry

I fell in love with horses when I was 7. I went to a three-day horse camp over Labor Day weekend near our home in Carson City, Nevada, and I was hooked. I learned to ride (on an English saddle), tack, and muck out stalls. Kim Chappell, the trainer, was a wonderful teacher. I'm dyslexic and get my lefts and rights mixed up so she would use different terms like "inside ring" and "outside ring" to help me understand the direction.

That was the beginning of my obsession about horses. Now I love anything "horsey" including movies, books, and my model collection.

As usual, in June of 2015 my family went to the Carson Valley Days Parade, and we talked to the AERC parade group. They were at the parade as part of their training for the 2016 Rose Parade. I got really excited and wanted to join the riders. My dad had lots of questions about endurance riding, and after the parade called the American Endurance Ride Conference office and asked if they knew of a sponsor for a 10-year old girl. They gave him the name of Karen Chaton from Gardnerville, Nevada.

I began going on rides with Karen on her horse Pro Bono D, a 19-year old Arabian gelding that has been an endurance horse for 10 years. Bo is a great horse with so much power and spirit. I have learned many things from Karen. She taught me that the horse always comes first.

When we do an endurance ride, I must first make sure Bo is fed and well hydrated before I feed myself. She also taught me how to put on hoof boots and do a proper vet check with Bo. The vet check is a big deal. I have to be able to communicate with the vet on Bo's condition at the beginning, middle, and end of each ride.

My first ride was 30 miles at the Red Rock Rumble in October. And of course it had to rain; it never rains in Nevada. We had trouble in one small section following the ribbons so we got off trail but soon got back on. This is when Karen gave me the job of being co-navigator. Now it was my job to always look for the ribbons and to make sure we didn't miss them, or miss any turns.

Karen felt I was ready for a 50-mile ride in the High Desert Ride. There was a storm of all storms, windy and raining. We rode through two Nevada state parks, Lake Lahontan and Fort Churchill, and through a forest of golden cottonwoods along a dry riverbed.

My next 50 was Gold Rush Shuffle. The night before the ride, on our way there, my dad and I got lost, and since he does not have a cell phone, we were wandering around in the outskirts of Auburn in the dark. Finally, after hours of looking, we found the camp. The next day, it was freezing at the start, but it warmed up throughout the day and it was a very pretty ride.

At the Twenty Mule Team ride in Ridgecrest, California, it was very hot, and I made a mistake and didn't eat enough or stay hydrated so I was exhausted after the ride. A big snake rattled at Karen's horse Chief, but he let Bo and me walk right by without any problem. It scared Karen and me more than the horses.

Rides of March was my next 50 mile ride. That ride was a different story. I had learned my lesson and drank and ate plenty. We saw the strangest thing in the middle of the desert—a rusted old submarine.

At the Nevada Derby in early April, I rode Bo on Sunday. There were a lot of hills. I had to dismount to walk Bo down the steep, rocky hills. We rode to Duck Hill and then to Carson City. At the vet check, I got a compliment from the vet who said I had a good "trot-out" which made me happy with myself.

In addition to our endurance rides, I helped to get Bo ready for the Rose Parade in January. We rode in two parades: the Nevada Day Parade (I was dressed up in Arabian garb) and the Veterans' Day Parade in Virginia City. We also practiced for many weeks in the large arenas at the Douglas Country Fairgrounds, with the rest of our parade group.

My family has been very supportive of my new sport. They drive me to my rides, stay at camp during the long days while I'm on the trail, and cheer me on. They are very proud of me. I have ridden 250 miles in less than a year and I am fifth in the point standings for the juniors. My next goal is to complete a 100-mile ride.

I have had some exciting adventures riding Bo. I love endurance riding, and I hope to continue to ride with Karen for many more rides.

More information on endurance riding is available by visiting www.aerc.org or by calling the AERC office at 866-271-2372. By request, the office will send out a free copy of the 16-page Discover Endurance Riding booklet to prospective members.

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