

Alisija Zabavska-Rogers & Dixieland Dude



2018 AERC Decade Team



Photo © Tre Wheway Photography

Rider: Alisija Zabavska-Rogers

Horse: Dixieland Dude (aka Jude)

First Year: 2009

Region: Central

Rider mileage: 7575 (Endurance 6710, Limited Distance 865)

Jude is a problem horse. He was roped to be caught as a youngster which resulted in him being extremely spooky and head shy. Multiple trainers gave up on him, after trying to get close to his head in a stall to put a halter on (he would spin one way or the other, depending what side he was approached from) he was returned to a horse dealer and his next destination was a kill pen. That's when I found him, in 2007. After weeks of trying he would let me halter him but would break away, leaving me with a hand burn, every time I tried to lead him. It was a nightmare I prefer to forget.

His breeding: Sire-Shaman AA, Dam-AA Corina (by Nugad).

Sex: Gelding

DOB: 26 April 2003

Height: 15.2H, Weight: 750 lbs.

Color: fleabitten grey

Why did I buy him: I fell in love with his looks and confirmation, so decided to take on a challenge.

Did I do endurance before him: Yes, I started competing in endurance over 20 years ago, while I lived and trained horses in United Arab Emirates.

How many horses did I ride in endurance: over 100, then lost count.

Do I participate in other equine sports: My back ground is Dressage and Show Jumping and after moving to USA I competed in Western pleasure, English pleasure, Hunter pleasure and Sport horse at arabian horse shows.

How many years with horses and in endurance: I started riding at the age of 8.5 and got introduced to endurance in 1998.

What got me into endurance and what kept me: as a junior I felt like I didn't get enough time on a horse and dreamt of a sport that would require longer hours in a saddle. After moving to Middle East and learning about the sport of endurance I finally realized that I found what I was looking for. I enjoy the bond and partnership I develop with my animals in this sport.

How old was Jude when he started endurance: Jude just turned 5yo when we did our first LD.

How many rides first 3 years: first season we only did 3 30mile rides. Second - 3 50s as well as the third season, also 3 50 mile competitions.

How long it took to top 10: Since I train hard as like to prepare well for the competitions, almost all of Jude's rides are in top 10 with an exception of the ones we got lost out on trail.

How much rest time: I always make sure he gets plenty of rest after every ride, normally 2-3 months minimum.

Rest time after 100: Minimum 2 months.

Multi days: I don't do multi days.

Tack, shoeing: I use regular (biothane) tack and regular shoeing, with pads if terrain is rocky.

Overcoming problems: The biggest and still exciting problem is his spooks. He never got me off but I came close several times. It only made me into a better balanced rider.

Best ride: Our best ride was at the 2012 World Endurance Championship in UK, representing Lithuania. Jude recovered nicely from his trip over there and was super fit and ready.

Humbling experience: after arriving to UK, Jude was turned out in the pasture. One morning I was trying to take off his sheet and he did what he normally does - spooked when the sheet was half way off and sprinted at the full gallop, stumbling over it, stepping on it and falling over his head multiple times and then, full of fear, from the shreds "still chasing him," crashing into a strong wooden gate. At that time I thought he would kill himself and that would be an end of my journey.

Lessons learned: Always try to prevent, if you can, the worst possible outcome and don't take any chances hoping THIS time it will not happen. That is the time it WILL happen!!!

Advice to new riders: Don't tell yourself you are scared or can not do something, whatever it is and never give up, no matter what. Looking back: Sticking to my passion and becoming wiser from the experience that came along.

What would I do differently: Take less chances and use common sense. After all arabians survived for thousands of years for a reason. They know how to flee from (what they think is) a danger.

Highest goal: When I bought Jude my goal was to take him all the way to the World Championship and we accomplished it.

Jude's personality: Jude is extremely high strung and needs to be managed on the ground and under saddle. He barely trusts me even after all these years. Always worried that danger is just around the corner. I have to be opposite - patient, firm and as calm as I possibly can be when I am around him. It is my biggest challenge.

Most enjoyable rides: 50s seem too short to me and 100s are too long, as in most terrain in USA it requires to ride late into the night. 75s are the most enjoyable distance to me.

Influence of riding in my life: Most people that are involved in endurance have some kind of personal challenges. I am one of them. Riding brings a lot of positive emotions into my life and helps me stay seemingly sane.

Nutrition: Good quality roughage is the most important diet for my horses.

Choosing rides: I choose the rides according to the ability to prepare my horse for the terrain we are going to compete in. We try to travel out of region 2-3 times a year.

When I chose my endurance partners I look for tall horses with good feet, strong legs, big hearts and most importantly somewhat stable disposition.