

Madison MacPhail & Tai Juan



2019 AERC Decade Team



Rider's name: Madison MacPhail

Horse's name: Tai Juan (TaiBo)



Year of First Endurance Ride (first year in the decade): 2009

Region: W

Current rider lifetime mileage? 2430

Endurance: 1825

Limited Distance: 605

Tell us about your horse. When/how did you come to get him/her? My mom bought Tai as a 4 year old in 2006. I was 7 years old at the time, so my mom was looking for a safe, experienced, well-tempered horse for me to begin competing on. A lady reached out and said she had the perfect horse and that he was a little younger, but that my mom HAD to take him for a ride! He was the most well behaved, non-spooky, forward horse down the trail. The rest is history!

What is your horse's breeding? Sex: Gelding

DOB: June 25th 2002

Horse height: 14'3

Approximate weight: 850

Color: Chestnut (I like to say "gold"!)

Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse? I rode my first 25 mile ride when I was 8 on a horse named Sebastian, borrowed from our good friend Ruthie Waltenspiel. Sam was a bit too much to handle and really wanted to race! My mom was riding 5 year old Tai at the time, who was so well-collected and easy to ride down the trail. I started riding him shortly after my first endurance ride and have been riding him ever since.

How many different horses have you ridden in this sport? I have ridden several horses in endurance, but none of them have been like Tai. Out of my 2430 lifetime miles, I'm sure at least 2300 of them are with Tai! There have only been a few occasions that I've ridden my mom's horse or a friend's.

Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities? I took jumping lessons as a kid, but always preferred being out on the trail. While riding in the arena, I would be thinking about getting out on the trail afterwards!

How many years have you been involved with endurance? With horses in general? I did my first limited distance ride in 2008 and then began riding Tai the following year. I have competed on him every year since 2009. I definitely got the "horse bug" from my mom, and pretty much started riding horses when I could walk!

What got you interested in endurance riding? What was it that kept you interested? Endurance has always held a special place in my heart. It took "trail riding" to a whole new level and got me hooked after my first ride. I love travelling to new places and getting to see miles and miles of trail that I normally wouldn't have access to. I love the community of people, and "endurance family" I have made over the years. It is the best feeling arriving at ride camp, seeing friends and all sharing the excitement of a full day of riding ahead. A key reason I have stuck with endurance is not only my love of the sport – but who I get to do it with. My mom has been by side every step of the way, and getting to share that experience with her is magical. I feel like it is at the root of our relationship and I couldn't imagine going to rides without her! I have ridden most of my endurance rides with her, and the few I haven't she has been my crew. I am sure we'll keep doing endurance together for a long time.

How old was your horse when first started in endurance? Tai was 5 when he did his first 25 mile ride.

What mileage distance did you start with? (25, 50, etc.) I started with a lot of 25's. I think this provided Tai with a very solid base, and made him that much stronger and ready to move up to 50's.

How long until you top tenned or raced (if you did)? In general, my goal is to finish mid-pack at a medium pace. I try not to move too slowly or too quickly but take the terrain into account and move along when we can. The first time I really "raced" was several years after starting in endurance – we finished second at the Lake Sonoma 50 and won best condition. It was such a great feeling to not only test our speed, but have Tai feel so good at the end.

How much time off do you give between ride seasons? I think one of the biggest contributors to our ten years of successful completions is the amount of time off Tai gets in the winter and after rides. He always gets about 3

to 4 months off, usually from November to January/ February. He gets to be in a big pasture 24/7 with his buddy and receives plenty of cuddles and cookies to get him through the rain (which he hates!). This gives him plenty of time to recover after ride season and allows all those little micro-tears and kinks to work themselves out. I am a big believer in recovery time being just as important as training time.

If you have done 100s, how much time off do you give after doing one? I have not yet done a 100 on Tai, but have successfully finished several 75's. He gets at least 2 weeks off.

If you have done multiday, how much time off do you give after doing one? I have done several multiday 50 mile rides, and Tai always gets at least 2 weeks off afterwards.

Do you use any special type of tack or shoeing with your horse? I think the type of saddle you use is totally dependent on your horse and their comfort level. I ride in a light-weight dressage saddle that Tai loves. I have also been using Hought Endurance Tack for the longest time – it's the best and so easy to clean!

What kind of problems have you overcome with your horse? Over the years, I've been lucky not to have any major problems with Tai. However, the scariest thing that ever happened was after the Lake Almanor 75. My mom was riding the 25 on her new horse the next day, and Tai broke loose from his high tie and ran into the woods for several hours. I was trying to track him down with a lady volunteering at the ride, but to no avail. We finally got a call that he had run back to camp. His legs were badly banged up and cut. And this was after going 75 miles! I was very thankful nothing more serious happened.

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse. This is a tough question! I think my favorite ride is the Redwood 50 in Orick, California. Quite a few years ago, my mom and I were doing this ride and it was still early morning – we had climbed to the top of the ridge, and there were beams of red sunlight shining through the redwoods. We were trotting along and I remember noticing all the little dew drops falling down. Tai was eager to make it down the trail, and everything felt magical in that moment.

What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important? I have learned an incredible amount from endurance. I've learned that it's not all about winning and riding faster than everyone else – instead, it's about sharing the trail with friends and laughing all the way into the vet check. It's about the beautiful view at the top of a ridge after a tough climb. I've also learned that your successes and goals are completely personal, dependent on your life situation and horse's needs. I recently graduated from college and haven't been able to compete as much. But this only makes me appreciate riding that much more when I do get the chance.

What advice would you give to new riders? Endurance is all about partnership and finishing with a happy, healthy horse. I don't think there is any greater reward than keeping your horse strong, sound, and competing for (at least) ten years – I think this is something unique to the endurance world. I also believe in keeping your horse in a large pasture, where they can move around freely and live life like a horse should.

What was your highest goal for your horse, and did you achieve it? My overall goal for Tai has always been to stay healthy and sound. I feel like I don't "push" him often, nor do I race much, and I usually just want to complete. However, in 2016, my mom and I trained for the 100 mile Tevis Cup – this was the most I have ever pushed Tai. We rode purposefully in the heat of the day, hill after hill. On the day of the ride, Tai felt amazing – he pulsed down quickly and felt like he could do it.

Unfortunately, I was in excruciating pain coming into Foresthill (mile 70) and decided to rider option. I hope to make it to the finish line with Tai sometime in the next couple years.

My other big goal for Tai and I is to become a double decade team in 2029... life permitting!

Describe your horse's personality? How is it like or unlike yours? Tai loves affection and is a giant cuddle bug. His personality is my favorite thing about him – on endurance rides, he is so focused, determined, and doesn't want to take any time to stop and fiddle. He puts his game face on and wants to go go go! However, riding at home is a different story. He sluggishly walks down the driveway and acts like trotting is impossibly hard! I can't blame him, though – he's smart and knows what we're out there to do, and that his hay and relaxation time are close by.

In what ways has endurance riding made a positive influence in your life? Endurance has been one of the greatest things in my life for as long as I can remember. I know in my heart I'll always find a way to come back to it. It has provided me an outlet to see parts of California that I wouldn't otherwise. It has brought my mom and I closer than I would think possible – it is incredible to share a passion with someone you love. And of course, the love and appreciation for my trusted companion, Tai. Endurance has allowed me to create a bond with an animal much different than a dog or cat. I understand him, know when he isn't feeling well or has to stop and pee. Our relationship is true companionship and mutual respect.

Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success? Tai always has access to grass hay and receives mashes during ride season. I use oat hay pellets, rice bran, whole oats, magnesium, and sometimes oil to help him put on extra weight. He stays on the thinner side, so when I'm really trying to keep/ put weight on him, he gets two large mashes a day. This combo really works for him and I see a big improvement in his body weight.

Describe your electrolyte protocol. My mom and I have tweaked our electrolyte protocol over the years but have finally settled on something that works great. We use 1.5 scoops of Enduromax electrolyte powder, a tablespoon of Lite Salt, and a little molasses and water to mix it all up. We always give our horses a dose the morning of the ride, at each vet check, and sometimes near/ at the finish if it's particularly humid and/or hot. We also dose the night before the ride if it's forecasted to be hot and or humid.

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner? Tell us about him/her/them. When my mom first got into endurance, she was mentored by our now dear friend Ruthie Waltenspiel. She leased one of her horses to me to get started in endurance. I remember her sponsoring me several times as a junior rider, and we had a blast together. Ruthie and I continue riding together when we can, and I just adore her company and sense of humor – she tells the best jokes and looks at everything in such a positive light. I hope to be like her someday!