

Alison Farrin & Caer Donn



American Endurance Ride Conference

2007 AERC Decade Team



Region: PS

Tell us about your horse. When/how did you come to get him/her? Caer Donn, aka "CD" aka Ceders, was an accident. My mare kicked down 2 gates to commune with my stallion. We thought that was the extent of it, as the ruckus was observed and they were separated quickly. Not quickly enough, apparently, as 10 months later, whilst observing said mare from the rear, it was obvious that she was fat only on one side, and that side kept moving. About a month later, we were presented with a colt, born midday, without any assistance from the humans, since we were all at work, not expecting the birth for at least another week. So, I have owned him since birth.

What is your horse's breeding? $\frac{3}{4}$ Polish and $\frac{1}{4}$ CMK. Phenotypically, the only way he looks like either parent is he got mom's tiny, dished CMK face. Genetically, I'd say this horse is Heterozygous for just about everything. Good thing he's a gelding - nothing would breed true!

Sex: G

DOB: 4-22-93

Horse height: 15 hands

Approx. Weight: 850#

Color: Grey

Easyboot size: 0

Why did you choose to use this horse in endurance? He was the horse I had. Everyone looks at his sickle hocked, cow hocked, slab sided, hippy confirmation and wonders how he got 100 miles down the trail let alone over 2500. But he has, and the only lameness issues we've had are fusing hocks. He is a horse that takes care of himself. If he feels good, we go ripping down the trail. If he doesn't, he lets me know in no uncertain terms.

Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse? His sire and he started at the same time, his sire carrying my son on limited distance rides and carrying me on the occasional 50.

How many different horses have you ridden in this sport? I have a couple more horses that I have started, with the intent of having backups, especially for multiday rides.

Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities? I intend to dabble in dressage and eventing, but so far lack of time has kept me from really participating in something other than endurance.

How many years have you been involved with horses? In endurance? My earliest true riding memory is of being bucked off my cousin's horse at age seven. Yes, I got right back on. I pled for a pony at every birthday and took riding lessons regularly from the age of 12 or so. I bought my first horse as soon as I lived on my own somewhere I could afford to keep one close by. Of, course, then that was all I could afford, so trail riding was a good way to be on the back of a horse at no extra cost. So, I'm pushing 35 years of involvement with horses and 12 years of endurance riding.

What got you interested in endurance riding? What was it that kept you interested? I was looking for a horse sport that I could do with my son. He liked riding trails and didn't like showing. He also had Cystic Fibrosis and the physical exertion required to ride 25 miles was a challenge. As it turned out, he was able to use conditioning and competing in limited distance to satisfy his Physical Education requirement the first year of High School. The requirements of competition resulted in the Reserve Junior Limited Distance National Championship that year. However, I think it was that year, I didn't ride a 50, so it took us a little longer to make our decade. Me, I was hooked and looking to go farther, faster, longer!

How old was your horse when first started? First ride? I backed him at two, because he desperately needed a job and I didn't have a cart to teach him to drive. He had already learned to dismantle fences, open gates, untie knots, take off his halter, open the feed bins, open the tack room door, etc. If he was in it, he could get out of it. He didn't have 20 acres to roam in, so he went to work. Whether this led to his hock issues, I can't say, but I try my best not to start them until they are late 3 or coming 4 anymore.

How many rides did you do the first, second, and third ride seasons? Not many. The issues were more with truck and trailer than the horse. He did some 25's at 4, 2 50's at 5 and almost nothing the year I didn't have a truck. Then we really started to compete and averaged 300 miles a year for the next 8 years.

What mileage distance did you start with? (25, 50, etc.) We started with 25's for my son's sake. I moved up to 50's as soon as I could and I doubt that I would start a new horse at 25 miles. I would just wait until they are 5 and have them conditioned to start with a slow 50.

How long till you top tenned or raced? It wasn't until our 5th and 6th seasons that we pulled off a few top tens. Mostly lack of time to condition on my part.

How much time off do you give between ride seasons? In Southern California the ride season is year round, so time off has always had more to do with how busy I am at work than time of year. Too hot to do much in July, and too busy to do anything in November/December. That's how we end up with breaks in the schedule. I don't think you have to worry about it much unless you are doing 2+ rides a month and

riding for top ten every time.

If you have done 100's, how much time off do you give after doing one? What is your schedule in the month leading up to the ride? Ahh, 100's. My bane, my nemeses, my unconquerable peak. Actually, I think Murphy just has it in for me. One of these days I may actually finish a 100 and then I might be barely qualified to comment on this question.

If you have done multadays, how much time off do you give after doing one? What is your schedule in the month leading up to the ride? Again, if you are not out to top ten every day, 2-3 day multadays once a month should be well within a healthy, conditioned horse's range. If I managed all 5 days on the same horse, I would probably see that they got a month off.

What kind of tack do you use? At this point I have to confess to collecting Reactor Panel saddles. I love them. They fit the horses and they fit me. I have a VSD, Endurance and a Cross Functional. Ceders usually goes in an S-hack and/or a French link snaffle or a Mylar combo that's not much more complex than the French link. I like reins that I can get off and use to tail or run ahead of the horse. I often use a running martingale, but prefer to dispense with it the moment it's not necessary.

What kind of shoes do you use on your horse? Pads? Easyboots? Ceders has been almost exclusively in easyboots for the past several years. Before that, I had good success with Ground Control plastic shoes. I like the easyboots; it saves me coordinating ride and shoeing schedules. I occasionally have them come off at speed, so I might put on shoes if I knew I was intentionally going to a ride to top ten. But I haven't had the time off from work over the last several years to pursue serious top ten type conditioning, so mostly we throw the horse in the trailer and the boots in the tack compartment and off we go.

What kind of problems have you encountered? His right rear hock is 90+% fused but it won't finish, so we are still injecting it as necessary to keep him comfortable and sound. I got used to running downhill, as Ride n Tie vet Barrie Grant told me not to make him carry my sorry butt down hills until that hock finished fusing. I have made the classic mistake of not rinsing a saddle pad well enough and having Ceders get a raging case of contact dermatitis at the 25 mile mark. Two pulls for muscle cramps and we pulled at the National Championships RO because he was not happy about something. Vets couldn't find anything. I went home with a happy horse, which after all, is the aim, no matter how you finish.

What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had? Ceders has always looked out for himself and refuses to push himself, so we've never had any serious metabolic or lameness issues. Closest we had to an injury was the time he did a forward 180 down through a little wash and ended upside down with me underneath. Nothing wrong with him other than a slightly skinned knee ? I tore my favorite tights and mangled my knee. Since we were 5th at the time, there was nothing for it but to get back on and finish the day in sixth place.

How did you work through it? He carried me home - a bit off balance and compensating - but it was one of the days he was truly 'on.'

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse? There are several kinds of best rides. Manzanita in 2001 - first ride back after I broke my leg (on another horse!). I suggest the reader not do as I did and attempt a 50 mile ride 2 weeks post cast. Ceders carried me both physically and mentally that day as I was on so much medication the first person to see me after the ride said, Your horse looks great, you look like hell. It was repeated by everyone I ran into that afternoon. Eastern Mojave the day he rolled on me, because he was just so darn good that day. And finally, last years - Tejon Fandango ride where it was a day of true partnership in a beautiful setting.

Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse? We were so not prepared for the trail on our first 25 mile/first AERC ride! Towing a junior or a green horse and me on Ceders at age 4 and neither horse had ever crossed water. There were about 20 water crossings on the ride. Cheri Dalliwahl and her big quarterhorse pulled both horses through every water crossing all the way down the mountain. We would never have gotten home without Cheri's aid.

What was your most humbling experience? Grin. See the answer to the last question!

What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important? It's a cliché - but ride your own ride.

Where does your horse live? Full turnout? At home on 2 acre turnout with 4 other horses

What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of its life? In a 24x24 - all I had. Not the ideal, by any means.

What are your horse's strengths? He is really smart. He can canter comfortably for miles. He takes care of himself These days, anyone can ride him. He has entered that dead broke stage where you can do stupid stuff around him and he just puts up with it.

Weaknesses? He has the world's slowest walk. And unless you ride him collected, his trot is rather bouncy. He only has an extended trot in the last 2 miles of a ride. He still spooks at white plastic bags.

What advice do you have for new riders? Take the time to really get to know your horse. Use tools like HRMs and GPS and Temp gauges as a backup to what you see when you look at your horse. If they say something is wrong, don't immediately dismiss them as inaccurate. Look again at your horse and see if there is something less obvious that's not quite right. Beyond that, your horse is probably a lot more capable than you think. Condition well, then go ride!

Looking back, what would you do differently? It's possible to override Ceders if he knows he's headed for the trailer and I managed to do that a couple times, finishing with a horse that didn't have a lot left. I've learned that if my horse is tired to slow down whether or not he agrees!

What do you feel you did right? We had fun! I fed good hay and some beet pulp and whatever he wanted at a ride. We conditioned well prior to beginning in this sport. If anything I overdid it.

What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it? I would still like to finish a 100 mile ride. Ceders has done several 75 milers and finished well. Perhaps when that right rear hock is confirmed fused, we will try again. That would also make him a bronze medal horse in the PS 100 mile awards program. We are also aiming at his 3000 mile medallion. That goal he will likely accomplish next year.

Describe your horse's personality? How is it like or unlike yours? 15 going on 2. He is still an escape artist. He still makes faces at horses that pass him. He makes me laugh.

What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most? Multidays!

Describe your electrolyte protocol. Different than it used to be! Remember we are in PS, so generally the humidity is 50%+/- . I used to give an ounce of electrolyte at least once during the loop and at every vet check. These days I only electrolyte that frequently if I'm going fast enough to top ten and I only give a ¼ oz per stop. Most days, I'd rather just see him eat on the trail or at the vet checks.

Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success? Keeping it simple for the most part. I switched to a pelleted hay in a Bermuda Alfalfa combo several years ago and was immediately rewarded with weight gain in all my horses. I occasionally add complete feed, senior, COB or beet pulp as situations change, but my horse's basic diet is pelleted hay.

Are there any major changes you've made to your nutrition program that you feel made a noticeable improvement or solved a problem? I think I've tried everything and seem to end up back at grass hay and complete feed or beet pulp.

What kind of supplements (if any) do you use? If I use a supplement it's either from Peak Performance or Platinum Performance.

Do you give any kind of joint products? (describe) When we are competing, Ceders gets glucosamine shots monthly.

How far do you usually travel to rides? The longest multiday is over 600 miles away; the shortest ride is 45 miles away. If I ever get to 'retired' I'd like to take the motor home and a couple horses and follow the ride calendar around the west.

Do you go to many rides outside of your region? We compete in the Mountain region and the West region occasionally.

Name three people involved in the sport of endurance that you look up to, and why.

Julie Suhr - consummate horsewoman, genuinely sweet person and still riding in her eighties. I want to be just like her.

Dave Nicholson - who can tell more about how a horse is doing in 30 seconds than most people can in 30 minutes and Annie Nicholson who takes exquisite care of the horses and riders at her rides.

Tom Ivers - who taught me that science has a place in the art of conditioning, among a 1000 other things.

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner? Tell us about him/her/them. I didn't have anyone to train with, but I had Ridecamp. 10 years ago, it was right in the thick of everyone getting to know one another on the net, so it was like having 1000 trail partners to draw on. Invaluable. Becky Hackworth was also invaluable in making sure I didn't make too many newbie mistakes at rides. Susan Garlinghouse, DVM who was always willing to answer nutrition and later, veterinary questions.

In choosing your next horse, what would you look for? A 5 mph walk. Even if you are taking it easy, a 5mph walk gets you there a lot faster than a 2 mph walk. A good back and good legs. Some really awful confirmation is really successful out there on the trail, but you might as well start by stacking the odds in your favor. A go forward, bold attitude.