

Constance Walker & DML Smoke Silver



AERC Decade Team



2850 Miles, 35 ride completions
First AERC ride: 1994 Region: NE

Tell us about your horse. When/how did you come to get him/her? I acquired Smoke as a 4 year old. He had been for sale after failing to be a driving horse to match his older brother, as his owners had hoped for. Stories were going around about him being a rogue horse, and there just wasn't any interest in him locally, to spite his powerful, impressive build. I was very impressed with him, but had just purchased another horse his age for distance riding, but offered to break him to ride, (I like a good challenge!) to hopefully make him more saleable. At first the training had gone very smoothly, but his temper tantrums, which were mostly driven by his very herdbound tendencies began to surface. My efforts did not help to make him more saleable, but lowered the purchase price to me! My friends and family wondered who was breaking whom.

What is your horse's breeding? Smoke is nearly straight Crabbet. Flying-C Voortek (0065919) X MSP Lori (0085386)

Sex: gelding

DOB: 4-25-87

Horse height: 15.1

Approx. Weight: 900 lbs

Color: grey

Shoe size: 1

Why did you decide to purchase this horse (or if you didn't purchase, why did you choose to use this horse in endurance)? I purchased Smoke because I was the only one that had the desire to put up with his behavior! I have ridden numerous Arabs, and 1/2 Arabs, and knew he was an incredibly powerful horse, if I could get him trained, it would be well worth my time. I was in the market for a good 100 mile horse.

Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse? No, but I had been involved in competitive trail riding, and knew I would like to get into endurance riding.

How many different horses have you ridden in this sport? I have ridden numerous horses in one or 2 endurance rides, but have primarily competed on Smoke.

Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities? I have played around a bit with small local shows, foxhunting, jumping and hunter paces. Mostly I have done a lot of Competitive Trail Riding, and Endurance.

How many years have you been involved with horses? In endurance? I have owned horses for about 20 years. I started into CTR's about 15 years ago, and endurance 11 years ago.

What got you interested in endurance riding? What was it that kept you interested? I became interested in endurance riding working on the Vermont 100 mile endurance ride. I had been a hold manager, and had offered to crew for Canadian riders who needed help.

How old was your horse when first started? First ride? Smoke was 4 years old on his first 25 mile CTR, and did hundred of miles of CTR's before any endurance riding.

How many rides did you do the first, second, and third ride seasons?

4 years old- 1 25 mile CTR

5 years old-a full season of CTR's, 25, 30, a 2 day 50, and finished with a 3 day 100 CTR. (that wouldn't have been my choice, but his owners were hoping it would help with the behavior!)

6 years old-more CTR's, all distances and a one day 100,endurance, (still not my choice, his owners last hope for his change in behavior. Didn't work, and I bought him). PS-2nd and high vet score.

What mileage distance did you start with? 25 mile CTR's-MANY OF THEM!

How long till you top tenned or 'raced'? Smoke has mostly top tenned on endurance rides, since we began doing endurance riding, but he started with a great base of long, slow distance riding on the CTR's.

How much time off do you give between ride seasons? I rode Smoke right through the first couple of winters, but have since then allowed a complete rest of at least 3 months in the winter.

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? I try to allow a minimum of 1 day for every 10 miles of competition, so 10 days minimum after a 100. If it was especially hard and, or involved a long trip, probably 2 weeks off. I usually ride 3 days a week, and train routinely with a lot of trotting. It is quite hilly in my area, so a good trot gives a more than adequate CV work out. A couple of weeks prior to a race, depending on what the terrain will offer at the race, and what he has previously done that season, I may increase my training pace to prepare for the race, but I don't do a lot of speed work, routinely.

If you have done multiday, how much time off do you give after doing one? What is your schedule in the month leading up to the ride? This answer would be the same as the last question.

What kind of tack do you use? I ride in an english, usually a dressage saddle. I use a biothane breastplate, and bridle, with a simple snaffle bit. I like the coolback, and woolback Toklat pads, and either a string, fleece or neoprene girth.

What kind of shoes do you use on your horse? Smoke wears a hand forged, bar shoe, something between a bar and an egg bar, all the way around, and also wears degree pads all the way around. He lands heavy to the outside of all 4 feet, and seems more comfortable shod this way. His natural angles are a bit low in front, and has an old tendon sheath strain behind, which gets a lot of support from these shoes and pads. He has only once ever lost a shoe on a ride in almost 4000 miles of competition, so doesn't wear Easyboots much! Note- ALL 4 FEET ARE WHITE!

What kind of problems have you encountered? When Smoke was 6, he ran into trouble with muscle cramping very late into rides.(85-100 miles). After a bit of research, we found he was hypothyroid. He required a thyroid supplement.

I also have ulcer issues with him. I have had to resort to using Neigh-Lox, and Gastro-guard on him.

What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had? My first attempt at the Old Dominion 100, Smoke lacerated a tendon sheath in the Shenandoah River crossing. He required surgery at the first vet check. We were worried he had punctured the joint capsule, but didn't. After a month of stall rest, he was as good as new, thanks to Jeanie Waldron(DVM)!

How did you work through it? I followed the doctor's orders. He had the 1-month of stall rest, 3 antibiotics, and was a blooming idiot when he came out of the stall. My first ride back on him, he managed to dump me, and fracture 3 transverse processes on my lumbar vertebrae!

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse? I know you are expecting to hear, the ride at the World Championships, or one of the high profile rides I place well in, but you know what? I have to replay those rides in my mind to get excited, because when I'm actually competing, I am so focused, I forget to have fun! I don't have a favorite ride to pick out of the others. I have had years of wonderful rides on Smoke, and most have been training rides, or pre-rides at big competitions with good friends.

Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse? The year I nominated to go to Pan Ams with Smoke, I was doing a summer training ride, and the deer flies were quite bad. In the downward transition from canter to trot on the road where it went from up to down, Smoke ducked his head to wipe the flies from his head, and tripped himself up bad enough to land on his forehead, ripping an upside down V shaped tear 6 inches wide, and exposing the bone. After first checking his legs, I could have died when I saw his face. All I could do was take him to the nearest brook, and sponge the gravel out, tuck the flap into his browband, and walk him home. It was a good 4 miles, and then when I called my vet, she was out on a cow emergency. It was another couple of hours of fanning the flies from the wound before the rookie vet that was on call arrived. She clearly was unprepared for the sight, and ended up calling in my own vet, who is a veteran, to stitch, place a drain in, and suture gauze into place where there was no skin to cover the bone! Poor Smoke was a bit shocky from the head trauma. It was horrible!

What was your most humbling experience? Probably the year Smoke became hypothyroid. Having had a 3 year relationship with the horse prior to his 7 year old summer, then having him muscle cramp 85 miles into a one day 100, and at the finish of a 3 day 100 CTR were quite hard pills to swallow, especially

not knowing the cause. He clearly had no metabolic issues prior to these incidents, and I was shocked when it happened. It took months to pin point the problem, and then to find the correct dosage of thyroid hormone was equally frustrating.

What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important? It is clear that most people starting into endurance riding want to RACE! The most important thing I have learned is not to race, at least up front, most of the time! As competitive as I can be, I have learned that if I care enough about the future of my horse, that many good top ten placings come from riding within the capacity of my own horse, and riding at a steady pace, rather than to getting caught up with the pace of others.

Where does your horse live? Smoke is a CLASSIC BACK YARD HORSE! He lives on about an acre with a few pasture buddies, and is the epitome of a PET HORSE! He is right in our back yard and often grazes on our lawn. He is out 24-7, just in to eat. He spends more time in a stall during the muddy time, than any other time of the year.

What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of its life in? Smoke was born in a pasture living with the mare and stallion. I would guess maybe on 5 acres in Billings, Montana. There was access to shelter. He came to Vermont as a 2 year old, with a similar arrangement.

What are your horse's strengths? Weaknesses? Smokes biggest strength is his powerful hind end. He can climb hills like they aren't there. He also has a great wind capacity, big stride, and is very competitive on rides. Weaknesses.....probably the fact he is long in the back, and very high behind, a good inch. His breakover on his front feet is to the outside of center, and he lands on the outside of all 4 feet. Had I pushed him to do more miles per year, and competed him more frequently, I believe he would have broken down. He also has no sense of self-preservation. He could care less about water consumption or food whenever there is the least deviation from his normal routine. I have had to avoid the horses racing at the front of the pack with him, because he is so competitive, that he would have never drank on trail. It is also a weakness to be so dependant on the company of other horses that it interferes with his ability to take care of himself.

What advice do you have for new riders? Start out slowly. Read EVERYTHING you can find on distance riding, find a GOOD MENTOR, seek help to find an appropriate horse, take some balanced seat riding lessons, AND MOST OF ALL, PUT YOUR PERSONAL GOALS BEHIND THE SAFETY AND WELL BEING OF YOU HORSE!

Looking back, what would you do differently? I probably would not have ridden Smoke as a 5 year old on a 3 day 100 mile CTR, or as a 6 year old on a 1 day 100, in spite of his owners wishes.

What do you feel you did right? I feel that I did give Smoke a wonderful base of long slow distance riding with all of the CTR's I have done with him.

What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it? My highest goal was just to be successful on 100 mile endurance rides, but Smoke kept raising the goals. His ability took us to winning the 1999 Pan Am ride, and to the Worlds in France, with an 11th place finish in 2000. He was more of an athlete than I ever bargained for!

Describe your horse's personality? How is it like or unlike yours? Smoke's personality is similar to my own. He is very ornery, and a non-conformist! He is competitive at a race, but pretty laid back about exercise in between. He also has a great value for his friends!!!!

What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most? I definitely like the one day 100's. They are the ultimate challenge. The best horses prove themselves after 85 miles.

Describe your electrolyte protocol. Small doses frequently. One ounce hourly is the best. Enduralytes or Enduramax. I also add a little No-Salt in extreme humidity. We live and compete in a very humid climate. I like to use yogurt to mix my electrolytes with.

Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success? I feed a grass/timothy hay, and use Nutrena's Legacy. I feel it is a superior product for endurance horses, as it is a high fiber, high fat, and a low carbohydrate diet. I do attribute the nutrition offered in this feed to our success. You are what you eat!

Are there any major changes you've made to your nutrition program (i.e., changed from one hay to another, added something special) that you feel made a noticeable improvement or solved a problem? Definitely adding the Neigh-Lox to Smoke's feed had a significant impact on his weight and appetite, especially late in the season.

What kind of supplements (if any) do you use? I use GLC5500, and their MSM, Vitamin E capsules, Vitamin E and Selenium, Nutrena's Milk Plus, and occasionally Red Cell.

Do you give any kind of joint products? I use GLC 5500, IV Legend, sometimes IM Adequan.

How far do you usually travel to rides? Mostly I compete within our region, but have ventured out to Montana, Kentucky, Manitoba, France, and Ontario.

Do you go to many rides outside of your region? Some, but only once or twice a year.

Name three people involved in the sport of endurance that you look up to, and why? Heather Hoyns, DVM, she has always given me good advice as a seasoned competitor, and as a veterinarian. Robin Culver-Groves, she is a wonderful trainer, and instructor. She's got an answer to every problem, and has a wonderful way of getting trail riders to enjoy ring work and gymnastics, while building trail horses into athletes! And, I will always remember the great clinic Becky Hart did in Vermont before I did my first endurance ride. I still use much of what I learned from that clinic!

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner? I don't recall an early endurance mentor, more of a mentor for CTR's. Mike Barber is a neighbor I met before I even did my first CTR. I did conditioning rides with him back then, and still do! He is a great explorer, and found most of the trails we use. He rides Morgan's, and still does only CTR's. He is enthusiastic to ride, and caring about his horses, and will ride in most any weather with me. His horses are always more sane than mine, and make good anchors!

In choosing your next horse, what would you look for? 15-15.2 hands, good bone, feet, straight legs, naturally an Arab or 1/2 Arab (which I often like better), forward, but not nuts, big stride, great sense of self preservation, would be nice if it comes from proven distance lines, superior health care from an embryo, including hoof care and a good parasite control program, a nice eye, adequate body and heart girth, strong hind quarter, and nice laid back shoulder, and having spent most of its life outside. I could go on.....

I feel very fortunate I was given Smoke to satisfy all of my horseless childhood dreams. I am very blessed to have had the opportunity to own and compete a horse of his caliber. I believe every horse person has one truly special horse in their life, and I am very thankful this partnership has lasted for so many years.