

Debra Ivey & Vali-Hifazeyna



AERC Decade Team

7010 Miles, 108 ride completions
First AERC ride: 1987 Region: SE

I first saw Vali at the Alabama Ride in the fall of 1988. Ridden by Ben Clark from Houston MS, she was at the last vet check of a 65 mile ride, forty-five minutes ahead of the second rider! She was grade three lame and was pulled that day! I had just been introduced to endurance by Barbara Rogers (a friend met through a local saddle club), and had ridden my first LD that day. I had recently been certified as a farrier with the American Farrier's Association and Barbara told me that my services might be needed at this last vet check. Nina Warren's horse Amir (now in the Hall of Fame) had lost a shoe and might not finish the 100 mile ride if I couldn't help. Amir did finish, and it was at this vet check that Barbara told me Vali was for sale by her owner.

Vali, a mare born March 21, 1981 was gray, stood 14' 2, weighed 720lbs, wore OO shoes all around and was lame on the right front! I was not interested. I was afraid of the lameness. She had been shod improperly and her right front hoof was 1/4" inch longer than the left! But my ex-husband insisted that we go to MS. After riding Vali, he had to buy her for himself. So, I began shoeing this skinny little mare.

Natchez Trace 50, in the spring of 89 was the first endurance ride my ex-husband rode in. Had he not lost trail, got discouraged and given up, Vali might have finished in third place that day. They did receive a completion and I was proud of them. But he said from that day on he would only do LD until he was in better shape himself. I could not see Vali doing LD. She was a proven 50mile horse. My ex-husband then challenged me to my First Endurance Ride. He said "You take Vali to the next ride and IF you can just finish, I will take my hat off to you."

April 22, 1989 was the first of many rides I will never forget sharing with Vali. I rode by the seat of my pants, scared half to death, but I trusted her. She knew what she was doing. After all she had been doing endurance for 2 years with Ben. I chose to keep Vali in a trot and what a trot she had! I would just be glad to finish the ride. Thanks to Barbara's help in the vet checks, Vali and I found ourselves in first place with a 20 minute lead at the last one! All the leaders had been pulled! I rode the last 15 miles of The Heart of Dixie 60 at a leisurely trot. We stopped at a creek and Vali took a good drink. I had no idea that there was a group of riders hot on our heels. We finished with 2 minutes to spare!

My ex-husband took his hat off to us and again when Vali won BC! That day he said " I will ride another horse in LD and Vali is now yours to ride." This was how we began 16 years ago! and I am the only one who has ridden endurance with her since that day. That first year I rode her in 11 50 milers. She received 5 BC's and was named SE BC Champion! The second year we did 13 rides (8 of those 100's). She was SE Region Champion, SE BC Champion, SE LW Champion, SE High Mileage Horse, and was the National 100 Mile Champion for the first time. She was the National 100 Mile Champion again in 1993.

How much time off do you give between ride seasons? I usually gave Vali 2 months off in the winter and 2 months off in the summer.

If you have done 100's how much time off do you give after doing one? What is your schedule leading up to the ride? After Vali and I started doing 100's I tried to give her at least 3 weeks or more between the rides and I would ride her for maybe 10 miles one day in the second week of that period just to see how she was feeling. The week before a ride, I left her alone.

What kind of tack do you use? Vali has always been and still is hard to fit as far as a saddle goes. I have many different ones in the barn to prove that! Crosby, Brown's Performance, Wintec, Sports Saddle. You name it and I have probably tried it on her. I have even had 2 saddles custom made to fit her back, which I had problems with. I have also tried every kind of saddle pad known to man. I usually take 2 sometimes 3 different saddles with me to a ride and if the one I am using seems to bother her I swap. Her withers are lower than her rump and this has always caused a back problem. I found over the years that whatever saddle I use, Vali seems to do best if I use a crupper to keep the saddle from sliding on to her shoulders.

What kind of problems have you encountered? Like I said before saddle fit has been a major problem. When my ex-husband bought Vali she was embarrassingly thin. So putting weight on her and keeping it on was another huge difficulty.

What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had? In 1990 during the start of a 100 mile ride Vali was kicked in the right leg just above her knee. At that first vet check Vali was slightly off, but she passed the vet check OK. The Vet (who by the way was Dane Frazier) said the kick may have bruised her a little but he thought she would be OK to continue and that he would keep a close watch on her. At each check she was the same just a little something there but he said she was fine to go on and she did finish with the front-runners. There were four of us and I chose not to run her at the end. The next 100 she was fine until about 85 miles and the "little something" showed up again. She finished the ride and the next 100 too, but about 85 miles there "it" was. I decided to have her checked out. The vet wanted see "it" but I could not ride her enough for "it" to show up. So he x-rayed her in the spot I told him she had been kicked many month earlier. She had had a hairline fracture and he could see the old scar! He said that she was healed and that I should not stop ridding her! I could not believe how tough she had been during that ride. I would have never asked that out of her and I know Dane would have pulled us in a heart beat had he thought "it" was anything more that a little bruise! "It" still shows up from time to time never enough for her to be pulled, usually when she begins to get tired and always as a reminder for me to take care of her.

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse. It would have to be mine and Vali's first 100 miler at the Tallahalla ride in MS. I did not know many people in the sport at that time. On the trail I met Stagg Newman I had no idea who he was but I thought to myself if I just watch him and do what he does maybe Vali and I will do OK. I didn't know he was a runner! He would jump off his horse about 1/4 mile from the vet check and run. Well I tried that a few times. I had no pit crew and I must say Stagg and his crew helped me out in every way on the trail. I also met for the first time Valerie Kanavy and on the last loop I decided I just might need to stay with her and learn what she does. I was a little tired but Vali knew she was headed to the finish line and she felt great!! Vali somehow made the turn towards the finish before Valerie and that was all she wrote. Vali had done several 50milers on this trail and she knew exactly what to do. Each time Valerie tried to pass Vali sped up until we were in a dead out run to the finish. I still have the picture to prove that Vali won by a nose that day. I remember after we dismounted Valerie hugged me around the neck and shouted "WOW!!!!" That day I got the 100 mile fever. Vali and I went on to do 27 of them together.

Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse. I think this would have to be in 1990 at the Race of Champions at Land Between the Lakes. It was a 2 day 150. On the last day, at the second to the last vet check, I found that the shoe of Vali's left hoof had a bent heel. I don't know for sure what caused the

lameness, maybe the farrier who put the shoe on quicked her, I don't know. But when I reached the last vet check 5 miles from the finish of the Race Of Champions, Vali was lame! This was our very first pull ever! The sad thing too was that we had a 20 minute lead on second place! Talk about the agony of defeat! They wrote that under my picture in The Trail Blazer the next month!

What was your most humbling experience? I would have to say the second time Vali and I were pulled. I had started her on a new supplement, which I thought would help her performance. She was not herself that day and was extremely hyped up. We were staying with the front-runners that day and at about 60 miles Dr. Page from TN told me Vali was metabolically unfit to continue. I just could not accept his decision. I knew my horse! After all, I had ridden her over 3,000 miles and we had only one pull together. I argued that fact with him but it did no good. We were pulled! That evening Vali went down. She had to have 27 liters of fluid. The treatment vet was with her half the night and I was asking God to forgive me for what I had done to her. Had it not been for the great care that vet took that night, Vali would have died! I wrote Dr. Page a letter of apology and thanked him for his knowledge and his firmness with me that day. Vali has never had to have fluids again.

What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are important? Get to really know your horse. If your horse is doing well there is no need to try everything on the market to help improve performance.

Where does your horse live? We have a 24-acre farm and Vali is only in the barn at mealtime.

What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of its life? Vali came to me when she was seven. I heard she was brought into our part of the country on a truck from the West somewhere.

What are your horse's strengths? Weaknesses? She has an amazing heart! She is getting older now and has slowed down some, but she use to do what I call "The Ultimate Turbo Trot." Her weaknesses I hate to give those away! She's not totally retired yet. Her worst one is that she is very herd bound. She's up there with the horses she can see, but she will wait on a horse if she cannot see the ones in front of her.

What advice would you give new riders. Ride your own ride! Don't get caught up so much in the race that you forget your horse is there too! Be consistent. I have found many times that I can catch up to the front runners just by staying in the trot and if they do get away remember it just wasn't your day. Vali has 34 wins, 26 BC's (19 of those are 1st+BC). She has 101 top 10's, around 85 top 5's out of 108 completions, most of that was done in a trot!

Looking back what would you do differently? I would have put that shoe on myself at the 1990 Race of Champions!

What do you feel you did right? I watched people at the rides. I use to read everything I could get my hands on about the sport. I learned what worked for my horse and I learn what didn't. I kept on top of her shoeing, and health in the best way that I could.

What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it? I would have to say the 100 Mile National Champion and Vali did this twice. Once in 1990 and again in 1993. I did have two other goals for her later in her life. In 2002 we set out to win the Southeast Overall Award. It was a challenge because she turned 21 that year. But she did it and also won the SERA's "Most Consistent Horse Award" which is the highest average of the accumulated BC scores throughout the year! I must say I was not expecting that one. Then last year we completed 7,000 miles.

Describe your horse's personality. How is it like or unlike yours? Vali has always been all business. Her previous owner told me this years ago. She has proven it to be true and I guess I am a bit that way when I know I have a job to do. I am not really sure how we are alike or unlike.

What kind of rides do you enjoy the most? I use to love the 100's, But now I am perfectly happy to finish a 50! I will never ask Vali to do another 100. Maybe I'll try them again one day.

Describe your electrolyte protocol. With Vali I use to always make them myself, especially after that metabolic pull she had years ago. The ABC seems to work for her now. But I still find it very hard not to make them myself because it has worked for her so long. I give them to her at every vet check if she is drinking well. Electrolytes before the ride do not seem to work for her, other horses it may. **Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success?** I feel that pasture is very important with plenty of good quality hay.

Are there any major changes you've made to your nutrition program that you feel made a noticeable improvement or solved a problem? Vali has always had a weight problem and in 2002 we started feeding her Endurance Gold. It is 10% fat. After 970 miles she not only held her weight but gained 100lbs!

What kind of supplements do you use? I like to keep free choice mineral. I usually give her a liquid vitamin supplement daily by syringe during riding season. She has never ate anything I have tried to put in her feed.

Do you give any kind of joint products? 2002 was the first year I tried Adequan for her. I felt like at her age that she needed it. It seemed to help her, but "that little something" still showed its face on occasion.

How far do you usually travel to rides? Right now we are sticking close to the SE Region, but we have in the past traveled all over the country.

Name three people involved in the sport of endurance that you look up to, and why. I would have to say Valerie Kanavy, Becky Hart, and Nina Warren. I have ridden side by side at one time or another with each of these people and I have found each of their characteristics, horsemanship and sportsmanship to be outstanding. I feel that Vali and I would never have accomplished what we have, had it not been from what I have learned, through listening to and watching what these people had to say and do.

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner? I never really had a mentor that I rode with. But I do believe that someone starting out would greatly benefit from one.

In choosing your next horse, what would you look for? I think I would look for one just like Vali, knowing I will never find one. Vali has done endurance for a very long time. She has spent 16 of those years with me traveling thousands of miles. She has been with me through many life situations and right now it is hard to think of letting go.