

David LeBlanc & Tsundances Laser



American Endurance Ride Conference

2011 AERC Decade Team



Region: NW

Current Rider Lifetime Mileage? 3915 total, 3500 endurance, 415 LD

Endurance: Laser also has 3500 endurance miles.

Limited Distance: 470

Tell us about your horse. When/how did you come to get him/her?

The horse I started riding on had gotten hurt, and I needed a horse more suitable for this sport. I'd spent a whole ride just before that crewing, and looking for the type of horse that seemed to be doing well – it was a big ride, so I got to see a lot of horses. I wasn't very experienced with horses at the time, but he just looked like he'd be a good endurance horse.

He'd just come back from the trainers at 5 years old, and I'd been riding less than a year, so my wife first tried to talk me out of it, and we compromised that she could ride him for the first couple of years, which we did. We picked him up Christmas Eve, 1998.

What is your horses breeding?

He's an Arab, mainly Russian-Polish lines.

Sex: Gelding

DOB: 6/23/93

Horse height: 15h2"

Approx. Weight: 950#

Color: Chestnut

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)? As I said above, he just looked like he had a good confirmation for endurance, and I also liked his personality. He's very calm and affectionate. We spend a lot of time with our horses, so you ought to have a horse you like.

Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse? I started endurance on an old quarter horse, but that only lasted two rides. I then did a couple of seasons on my wife's mare – we did well together in 2000.

How many different horses have you ridden in this sport? Only 4 in actual rides, and only two that I've started more than a couple of rides with.

Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities? We go out in the back country, trail riding, some competitive mounted orienteering.

How many years have you been involved with horses? In endurance? My wife put me on a horse our second date, which was March, 1998, and I was bitten so hard (with the horses and her) that I was in an LD ride 7 months later.

What got you interested in endurance riding? What was it that kept you interested? My wife rode endurance, and we boarded our horses with Robin Oscar. The first time they took me on a trail ride at an endurance pace, I knew I had some work to do to ride better, but I was hooked.

What set the hook solidly was my first ride where I was afraid I might hurt my poor old 25 year old quarter horse, and we went slow for the first 15 miles. We came into camp with his pulse down, he got straight A's (which seemed to amuse the vets), and then we went out and picked up the pace for the last 10 miles. Various people tried to follow us, but we left them. He got straight A's at completion, too, and I learned that it's better to have extra horse midway, which was a good lesson.

How old was your horse when first started? First ride? He was first started at age 5, and he did his first couple of LD's at 6, and then started 50's when he was almost 7. With 20-20 hindsight, I think this is one of the bigger reasons he's lasted so long.

How many rides did you do the first, second, and third ride seasons? (list w/ distances) He did two LD's his first year, 9 rides (including 2 LD) his second, and then 7 rides with no LD his third year.

What mileage distance did you start with? (25, 50, etc.) See above.

How long till you top tenned or raced? (if you did) He got first place in a 2-day hundred his second year, but it was because he was the only one that finished, so I'm not sure that really counts. We did one ride fairly quickly his second season and came in 11th. His second top-10 was in his third season, and that one was a lesson in strategy – we left camp dead last at a walk on a loose rein with people reminding me to leave. We kept passing people the further we went into the ride.

I've only really raced him a few times – it really depends on how he feels that day, and the terrain. He's not that fast, but he's tough. For example, there was a ride we tied for 3rd that was near home, and I

decided to do an 8 hour ride time that morning, and we did it in 7:47. I hadn't planned on that bringing us in up front, but it was a very difficult ride, and a lot of the other riders burned their horses out. We've done several rides where we just rode our own ride and it happened that we did well, but there's only been once that we just went all out, and we tied for first on a 75. I'm proud to have done that, but I don't like riding on the edge – you have to take too many chances with rocks, and too many chances with metabolic problems.

How much time off do you give between ride seasons? It rains a lot up here, so you can't really ride much between November and February or March, depending on the year.

If you have done 100's, how much time off do you give after doing one? We haven't done a 1-day hundred, but he's done two 2-day hundreds.

If you have done multadays, how much time off do you give after doing one? It all depends on how many days we get to go. If he goes 3 days or more, I'd say about 3 weeks.

What kind of tack do you use? (saddle, pads, girths, bits, etc.) The saddle that's worked best for us is the SR Enduro. We've tried several saddles, and the Reactor Panel worked fairly well for quite a while, too. We use Reactor Panel girths – expensive, but very nicely made. He started out in a Tom Thumb, but we converted him to a Myler hackamore with Neil Merrill cheeks – it flexes, and isn't harsh like a straight hackamore. For pads, we use Skito.

What kind of shoes do you use on your horse? Pads? Barefoot? Barefoot and booted? We use plain old steel shoes, with pads on the front during the season. It's worked very well for us, and his feet always look great. One of the nice things about steel shoes is that you get to put the break over where it needs to be, which has kept him from clipping himself, which was a very early problem.

What kind of problems have you encountered? We've had two major problems – the first was when we had a wreck at the beach. He doesn't like waves at all, and tripped trying to back away from them. He flipped over backwards and threw his back out badly. I got a nasty concussion and end up in the hospital, and would probably be dead if not for the helmet.

Afterwards, he couldn't be ridden for more than 30 minutes without major back soreness. To address the problem, we fairly well hit it from all angles. First, we sent him to our trainer for rehab. I think he was there 2-3 months, which was expensive, but I was committed to him. Next, we changed saddles. One of the more important things was teaching him to go properly, and not hollowed out with his head up. Lastly, I had the trainer teach me how to ride better, since I was part of the problem too. Note that I didn't look at the pad as part of the problem. The next year was mostly taken off for just trail rides, and the year after that, he completed all 15 starts.

The second major problem has been trying to find a saddle that really works. I'm a heavyweight rider, so what works for smaller people may not work for me, and I think his back just isn't the strongest. Naomi Preston suggested Steve Gonzales' SR Enduro, and it's been working great.

The other problem was we had a really bad day where he had a severe colic at a ride. We weren't going very fast – maybe something in the water, just not our day – no telling. A few weeks later, we were back doing 50's, and he's been fine since.

A third problem has been tying up. He's done this three times, twice at rides. It seems to be feed related, and riding the day before, doing a good warm-up, and not really moving out until he's really feeling good has solved it.

What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had? The back problem from the crash at the beach.

How did you work through it? See above.

What was the worst or most severe injury you have ever had relating to horses or endurance riding? My concussion from the crash at the beach.

How did you work through it? Mostly time. I was out of work for two weeks, should have been out of work for longer. I had trouble finding the right words for quite a while afterwards, which is a challenge for someone who does a lot of presentations to large groups. I can't say this enough – wear a helmet. I got hurt badly with the helmet, and would probably be dead without it.

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse? We've had a bunch of great days. Just about every day I ride that horse is a great day. I think the best was coming in top-10 at Redwoods, which is just an amazing place for a ride.

Oddly enough, one of the most fun days was a day we didn't complete. He went too fast in the first leg of a seriously hard 50, didn't feel right coming out of the vet check, so we turned around. By the time we got back, no one was there. We spent the next 4 hours just hanging out, moving around grazing, and he stood guard while I took a nap. Eventually, I saddled him back up and took the roads back to camp.

Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse? The day we crashed at the beach was just awful, but I don't remember anything past being airborne. The worst was when he had a colic, and the vets were really, really worried – we were all afraid he might die. I'll always be grateful to Dr. Jen for getting him through that, and to all the people who gave me moral support that day.

This is one of the biggest reasons I think that all rides should have a vet who is capable of giving treatment. It doesn't just happen to people who go too fast, or who are irresponsible. If not for prompt veterinary treatment that one day, we might not have gotten here.

What was your most humbling experience? My most humbling experience wasn't with this horse – I was going too fast with my first horse, he slipped trying to go over a ditch, and pulled a suspensory. By the time he was recovered from that, he had a heart problem (at 26) and died. So our very last ride ever, I feel like I got him hurt. Maybe it was just an accident, but I still feel badly.

What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important? There's a lot – go carefully over tricky ground, and the more tired the horse is, the more careful you need to be. Ride consistently – stop and go makes them more tired. If you want a horse to last, ride conservatively. Pay attention to the horse – I never decide how fast to go until we're 5 miles out and I see how he's doing that day.

Where does your horse live? Full turnout? He lives at our place, and has full turnout.

What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of it's life in? (pasture, w/ a herd, etc.) He lived in a pasture with his sire, which is a little odd.

What are your horse's strengths? The biggest thing is that he's very smart. He usually won't push himself faster than he needs to go. He's also very calm, and doesn't get excited at rides. He's also smart about how he picks his way through tricky footing, and will slow down on his own for rocks. He also just doesn't quit. He'll keep going as long as I ask him to. Perhaps not quickly, but he'll go.

Weaknesses? He's not fast, which could also count as a strength – most fast horses I've known don't take care of themselves very well. His back has been a source of problems, too.

What advice do you have for new riders? Start slow. Learn to pace – pay a lot of attention to how fast you're going, and set a consistent, steady pace.

Looking back, what would you do differently? I sure wouldn't have taken him to the beach. I also wish I'd found our current saddle earlier.

What do you feel you did right? We take our time, and do what we need to do to complete the ride. If we need to take an extra 15 minutes or even an hour in the vet check to let him rest and graze, then that's what we do. His welfare is the most important thing here, not any ride. He takes care of me, so I should take care of him.

What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it? My biggest goal was to have a horse who could keep doing this for a long time. Since this was his 13th season, and he's still in good shape, I think we did that. The other goal was to get to 3000 miles, now I'd like to see how much further we can get. Another achievement that I didn't set out to do, but was significant, was 35 completions in a row.

Describe your horse's personality? How is it like or unlike yours? We're both very persistent and won't give up easily. He's very calm, where I'm not as much that way, though he rubs off on me when we're together. He's the herd boss of our 8 horses.

What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most? (multidays, 100's, 50's, etc.) Any ride that goes well. Some days, I think it is just great to see sunrise and sunset on my horse, and we take our time. Other days, we pick it up and move a bit faster. I think 50's and multi-days are my favorites, and the 75's we've done have always been a challenge, and have been some of my best rides – oddly, 75's are the only times we've really won a race. An LD can be a lot of fun too – just got back from a 30 mile trip through Sinker Canyon at Steph Teeter's ride, and it was great – fantastic scenery.

In what ways has endurance riding made a positive influence in your life? It gives me time to think, and frees me from work worries. I also get to see some great scenery, and do it with a horse that's a joy to ride. Endurance riders are usually fun people to be around, and you can learn a lot from them.

Describe your electrolyte protocol. He gets an ounce of Endura-Max at each vet check. If it is really hot, we might start the night before. This isn't always the case – if he's drinking well, then I might back off on the electrolytes, and if he's too hot and tired and not eating as well as he should, then I might back off there too – he probably needs the electrolytes, but he doesn't need to be discouraged from eating. I also give him two rinses after the electrolytes, which seems to help him start eating again more quickly. That's something simple that I should have started doing earlier.

Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success? We don't do anything very special. Good hay, beet pulp, and Strategy when he's doing a lot of work. The biggest thing is to get a good equine dentist. We had trouble keeping weight on him until Sarah Metcalf started coming every year. If their teeth are in proper shape, then they get a lot more out of their food.

Are there any major changes you've made to your nutrition program (ie, changed from one hay to another, added something special) that you feel made a noticeable improvement or solved a problem? Get proper dental care – that's the main thing. We also have to stay away from too much high energy feed, or he'll tie up, which is where we discovered the dental issues – he was skinny, we poured on the grain, he tied up, and then we straightened out his teeth, backed off the grain, and went to a balanced processed feed. For the most part, problem solved.

What kind of supplements (if any) do you use? None.

Do you give any kind of joint products? (describe) None.

How far do you usually travel to rides? We haven't gone further than 600 miles yet.

Do you go to many rides outside of your region? Not many – we live near the northwest edge of the northwest region, so we can go over 500 miles and still be in the region. I'd like to get back to Redwoods, and some of the rides in Utah look fun.

Name three people involved in the sport of endurance that you look up to, and why? One of my favorite people is Mary Forrester. She's a great person to ride with, and has taught me a lot. She has a phenomenal completion record and I think 3 horses with more than 3000 miles, two with more than 6000 miles. She's quit doing endurance, and I do miss riding with her.

I also look up to Dennis and Sue Summers – they go a lot faster than I do, but they also have a great completion record, and tend to ride their horses for a long time – Sue's got a couple of horses with very high miles that went for a lot of seasons. They're also just nice people and have been very helpful with advice.

In my book, taking care of your horses counts a lot more than whether you win.

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner? Tell us about him/her/them. That would be my wife, Jennifer. She got me into this, and I'm very, very glad that she's taken such good care of our horses, and keeps them in condition. She tends to go a little faster than I do, and enjoys shorter distances, but that means I can turn her into crew <g>.

Describe the first rig you had and then tell us how it compares to your current rig? The first rig was a Chevy 3500 with a gooseneck stock trailer, and a tent. That lasted until we got icicles inside the tent one morning, and then we got a Featherlite with a nice LQ. We then discovered that while the Chevy could pull it, it wouldn't stop it. This led to a Ford F-550. Key thing here is to pay attention to gross combined vehicle weight rating – it's a number that matters to you and your horse's safety, not to mention whoever might be in front of you.

In choosing your next horse, what would you look for? Fairly well the same – I'd look for a calm horse who takes care, doesn't push any harder than they need to, and I'd like one with a stronger back.