

Gail Hought & Kings Flash



AERC Decade Team

First AERC Ride: 1996 • Region: West

Tell us about your horse. When/how did you come to get him/her? A customer brought him to my husband, Eric. She had just bought him, but needed training help. Shaq had problems with people and with being ridden. After riding him for a few weeks, Eric made the comment that he felt Shaq would make a good endurance horse and that Shaq was quite nice as long as he felt you were not going to hurt him. Shaq is naturally strong with exceptional feet and legs so it was hard not to look at him as an endurance prospect for myself. By then the owner had decided he wasn't what she needed, so I bought him. My husband wasn't too happy about it at first and I have to admit the first few years had some scary moments, but both Eric and I have grown to love and admire this big black horse. He is as honest as they come, will go anywhere and I think loves the adventure of endurance riding.

What is your horse's breeding? Anglo Arab

Sex: Gelding

DOB: 8/1/87

Horse height: 15-3

Approx. Weight: 1100 pounds

Color: Black

Shoe size: 1

Or, Easyboot size: 2

Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse? Yes, a QH mare in the 70's and a QH stud in the late 80's and early 90's.

How many different horses have you ridden in this sport? Primarily the two I mentioned above.

Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities? I barrel raced for 15 years and competed in some horse show events at the same time. I also completed 3 Levi Ride and Ties and 1 National Ride and Tie Championship.

How many years have you been involved with horses? 50 years. ***In endurance?*** 33 years.

What got you interested in endurance riding? I read articles about the Tevis and the Levi Ride & Tie in the Western Horseman. They interested me more than anything else I had heard of.

What was it that kept you interested? I truly enjoy riding long distances and going places I normally would never see. I also like the relationship I have with the horse. It is important for me to be in sync with the horse I am riding. When Shaq and I are out on the trail all alone, he is a great partner. Those are the times I enjoy most, especially when we are experiencing a new trail together.

How old was your horse when first started? He was 8 when I bought him. We have never known much about his history, but it was obvious that he hadn't been on trails. First ride? My daughter, Sonia, rode

him on a LD 2 weeks after I bought him, then a 50 a month later. I rode him a great deal in training during the first years. Shaq was and is a very rough ride and can feel so full of energy that all the riding in the beginning was self-defense on my part.

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

1st season - 200 miles - all 50's.

2nd season - 400 miles - all 50's and 1st Tevis attempt.

3rd season - 355 miles - 2 - 75's, 1 - 55 and the rest 50's.

4th season - 400 miles - 2 - 100's (including Tevis), remainder 50's.

5th season - 730 miles - 1 - 100 (Tevis), 1 - 75, 1 - 55, remainder 50's.

6th season - 750 miles - 1 - 100 (Tevis), 1 - 55, 2 days of a 3 day Multi-Day, and the remainder 50's.

7th season - 1000 miles - 50's, including 2 Multi-Day, 1 - 4 day and 1 ñ 3 day.

8th season - 925 miles - 1 - 100, 2 Multi-Day, including his first 5 day, remainder 50's.

9th season - 755 miles - 2 Multi-Day (1 - 5 day and 1 - 3 day), the remainder 50's.

10th season - 860 miles - 2 Multi-Days (3 day), 1 - 60, and remainder 50's.

What mileage distance did you start with? My first ride on Shaq was a 50.

How long till you top tenned or 'raced'? He was top 10 and BC in the fall of the first season.

How much time off do you give between ride seasons? I ride much slower now days for several reasons:

1.) Shaq is a very rough ride, so I do a walk/trot routine that makes it easier on me. 2.) I try to keep it as easy for him as I can. Since he has never had any leg or serious foot problems, I would like to continue riding him as long as it remains easy and enjoyable for him. He will remain with us the rest of his life. To answer your questions: I feel he does best if he gets 2-3 fifties a month. As he ages, I think he becomes more out of shape when the rides are further apart.

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 give Shaq about a month depending on how he looks, how he feels and what kind of ride I am planning to do next.

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? About a month, again depending how he looks and feels.

What kind of tack do you use? A custom western trail saddle that my husband made about 20 years ago has been the best one on him. I have tried others, but always return to it. With all his action, it has always been a struggle to keep him from getting rubs, especially if a saddle is a little long and level. I pad him thicker now than I once did. I use Toklat woolback pads and Equipedic pads. Foam pads hold too much heat for him. For the last few years I have used the PVC cinches and wish I had discovered them sooner. Shaq's bit is a custom kimberwicke with a low port. Needless to say, I make all his other tack including his headstall, reins and breastplate. I try to give him a new set every couple of years.

What kind of shoes do you use on your horse? Pads? Easyboots? Shaq normally has steel shoes with borium on the heels (all 4) and no pads. I used Sneakers on him on two Tevis rides and liked them, but they are not practical for our local terrain because we can be quite slick for at least half the year. I like Easyboots but they are not necessary on Shaq because of his exceptional feet. I knew early on that I would probably never have another horse with such good feet. He has been ridden on all kinds of rides with only steel shoes - Tevis, DVE, Bryce Canyon, and others.

What kind of problems have you encountered? His biggest problem has been the skin on his back. When I bought him he already had major hair loss and some white. Now he has all his hair, but

more of it is white. Most of the time I watch for a back and forth rubbing that occurs on his loins. The vets have said he had damaged skin, a loss in elasticity, in that area when I bought him thus it is easily damaged.

What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had? We were at a ride in a vet check area covered with a lot of tall grass. As a very nice volunteer was holding him, Shaq stepped in a hole that had a small pipe culvert in it. No one was aware that it was there until then. When he pulled his front foot out of the hole, he had a large chunk cut from the upper part of the hoof exposing the coronary cushion. The vet immediately wrapped the entire foot. He thought he would be lame on it and didn't know how long he would be off.

How did you work thru it? We followed the vet's treatment instructions. The wound stayed very clean and Shaq was never lame. It took 11 1/2 months for the hole to grow out, but we started back doing endurance rides 4 weeks after it happened. His hoof wall stayed together even though the hole was about 2 1/2" long horizontally by the time it grew out.

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse? I have had many good rides on him, but the one that sticks out in my mind is when we received my first best condition in 1996. I had only ridden Shaq on few rides and I was determined to not trot him down hills for the first two years. I had conditioned him a great deal and he was very impressive up the long hills enabling him to top ten. I was also impressed by Shaq on all three of his Tevis completions. He had a great deal of strength throughout the hundred miles especially on the third one. It is such a tough course it is hard not to be impressed by any horse that completes it.

Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse? I can't remember any days being bad. I can get very tired riding him because of his rough gaits. Most of my struggles have been learning how best to ride him so I will not be overly tired at the end. He fortunately makes up for it by being extremely cooperative. I have always viewed his rough ride as a challenge. Probably one of the reasons that he has so many miles is that he is physically much easier to ride if the endurance rides are frequent. This seems to work well for him too. We offered to let a friend ride him at Tevis a couple of years ago. After he rode him about 6 miles, he politely declined. Now he jokes that Shaq was so rough he broke the tree in his saddle.

What was your most humbling experience? Probably looking like I had been in fight at the end of the Land of Neversweats ride. A long time ago a friend and I went to that ride and I hadn't ridden Shaq much leading up to it and because of that it was particularly hard on me. When I got home my husband said I looked like someone had beat me up. I told him why and he asked when I realize I was in trouble, I said after 10 miles. The ride was 55 miles and endurance riders never like to quit, at least not for rider reasons.

What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important? I have learned to start a ride slowly to allow the horse to warm up sufficiently. It seems they can go forever when I do that. I feel the heart monitor has been an excellent educational tool. An example of how I use the heart monitor: When riding Shaq uphill, I let him trot until his HR is 145, then walk until he is under 130, then start trotting. He never gets too tired this way and he has learned to do this automatically on his own. He is very good at patterns like this. I always try to ride far under the horse limits. I like to have them feel as good as possible at the end of the ride. I guess that is more of a multi-day mentality. Because of Shaq, I have adopted a walk/trot routine on the uphills and flat. Then downhill I walk him. I rarely trot him more than a mile continuously.

Where does your horse live? Shaq lives in a stall with a long paddock. He can come and go as he pleases. There are four horses in a row that are in the same arrangement. Shaq's is the first one just

opposite our shop door where we work most days, so he gets plenty of attention.

What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of its life in? Unknown, but we think he must have been in a stabled situation. He lounges easily and is very easy to bathe plus he has always been good about motorized vehicles.

What are your horse's strengths? Weaknesses? His willingness to go anywhere carefully is one of his strengths. He is very strong with exceptionally good feet and legs. I knew after I had him for a short time that I would probably never have another horse with such good feet (all four are white). Good feet can certainly spoil you. He is a very strong uphill horse and long gradual hills are his strong point. It doesn't matter how long we have been out, he is always happy to see an uphill. He has very good manners and I feel very safe on the ground when leading through technical areas. He will help me mount in all kinds of unusual places. He is tall and I ride him with a rather loose cinch. With his high withers, I sometimes think a rider could get off and on him without a cinch. He vets easily with high scores as he takes good care of himself, drinks early and often, usually eats his food and any other horses, if allowed. I think he vets well also because he is a naturally strong horse. He enjoys the rides and usually gives some happy bucks for the first few miles. He has good camp manners and is very easy to travel with.

His weakness: He is rough gaited and not nimble footed. I am wondering if those two things go together. It keeps me awake as I do watch where we are going.

What advice do you have for new riders? Have control of your horse and don't let him/her go too fast early in the ride. It is hard to get that control back. Luckily I was over that phase by the time I acquired Shaq. Getting longevity in a horse isn't an accident, it takes thought and work.

Looking back, what would you do differently? In regards to tack, I should have padded him with a thicker pad because of all the action in the loins. Also, if I could have afforded it, I would have ridden him on more rides the first few years.

What do you feel you did right? I had enough experience when I bought Shaq not to override him. Basically, I had to give him trail experience and the time to learn to trust that I would never ask him to do anything he couldn't do. I tried to keep his strong assertive personality. When I first bought him he refused to go through mud puddles, but in couple of years there wasn't a place he wouldn't go for me. I always feel there is nothing too tough for him. He will negotiate anything carefully.

What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it? Finishing Tevis was my highest goal and now we have 3 buckles together. With that goal reached, my goal now is for Shaq and I to do more miles together and seeing new places.

Describe your horse's personality? How is it like or unlike yours? Shaq isn't afraid, but he is suspicious, mostly of people. My husband calls him an alarmist. I think because of his background, he can be cautious about new things, but he is comfortable with endurance rides. When he gets out of the trailer and it looks like an endurance ride, he is fine. I took him to a big trail ride a couple of years ago thinking it would be simple because he had been on a 50 the week before. As the day wore on, he became more wound up. The less it was like an endurance ride, the more agitated he became.

When we do endurance rides, Shaq seems to feel we need to go the correct way and finish. I imagine he gets that from me. But I am not nearly as suspicious as he is.

What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most? I really like multi-day rides because they are a challenge and we see new very interesting places, but it is easiest to only ride a 50. I really like Tevis, too, especially

after I arrive at Michigan Bluff, but it is stressful.

Describe your electrolyte protocol. I don't give him electrolytes.

Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success? I use the variety approach. Good variety and lots of it.

Are there any major changes you've made to your nutrition program that you feel made a noticeable improvement or solved a problem? Yes, in the beginning we tried to feed him mostly grass hay, but it was hard for him to keep his weight. We feed him at least 2 flakes of alfalfa hay a day plus grass hay. We try to keep hay in front of him all the time. The alfalfa hay also gives him more energy. He has always been fed grain daily, usually 3 pounds when he's not ridden and more when he is.

What kind of supplements (if any) do you use? We have used ABC's or Platinum Performance the last 3 years and like both. His coat stays much blacker and I think they help keep weight on him. He has held his weight this year on multi-day rides better than other years.

Do you give any kind of joint products? No.

How far do you usually travel to rides? I think they average about 350-400 miles one way.

Do you go to many rides outside of your region? Yes. Many multi-day rides take place north of our area and since we are near the Oregon border, we can travel easily to them.

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

Julie Suhr, everyone's favorite. She is such a nice lady. I think she is what this sport is all about. Ruthie Waltenspiel is another rider that is generous with help and advice. There are many others, but I would add Robert Ribley because he is a very good horseman and a sane rider. I have ridden with him a few times and I really like how he approaches this sport.

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner? No, I got into the sport too long ago and lived too far away from anyone that had been doing it any length of time. Smokey Killen would toss me advice once in awhile, mainly to do Tevis because "you never know when it won't be there."

In choosing your next horse, what would you look for? A horse like Shaq, but much smoother riding.

Add any additional comments or stories that you can think of: In the beginning he had a difficult time recognizing a trail—even a road. He would try to wander into the biggest space he could find. He also had problems figuring out where another horse had gone if it disappeared around a corner or even large tree. If he didn't see the horse, it seemed he assumed that they weren't there anymore and immediately wanted to turn around to go home—which he was never allowed to do. It took patience and slow training for him to come to the realization that the horse around the corner was still there. My daughter assisted me for a few months to help get him over this. As for trail recognition, it took about a year in a half before he began to recognize that a trail was a path to follow. No one would believe that of him now because he is a very savvy trail horse.