

Joyce Sousa & Jim Bob



AERC Decade Team



8515 Miles, 127 ride completions
First AERC ride: 1988 Region: W

Tell us about your horse: Jim Bob has been an endurance horse for 17 years. He is 22 years old. He has 8,750 miles to his credit.

Horse height: 15.2 hh

Approx. Weight: 940

Color: Chestnut

Easyboot size: 1

I bought Jim because I thought he was the most beautiful horse in the world. He was the horse of my dreams. I didn't care that he had a misshaped left hind foot from a wire cut or that he interfered with all four feet. I knew God would take care of him, and he most certainly has. When things went wrong I would pray and God would show me how to work through the problem in the most amazing ways.

I have ridden 12 different endurance horses. Four of them before I purchased Jim.

I have participated in National Ride and Ties and do some jogging.

A friend introduced Dennis and I to endurance riding 23 years ago.

Jim started endurance at the age of 5. He did 300 miles his first year. He did 1175 miles -- slow -- when he was 6. He was started on 50's. Jim top tened as a 5 year old. I did not own him at that time. I started racing Jim when he was 7. He had 3000 miles when I started racing him on 100's. We usually will leave a horse off 4 weeks after a 100, but I have on a few occasions done 100's 3 weeks apart. Jim has done 36 one-day 100's. The schedule before a 100-mile ride varies depending upon the horse. How old he is, how many 100's he has done. Jim had some of his best races when he had done a 50-mile the week before his 100. Believe me, I wouldn't advocate trying this with just any horse.

After a multiday we will give the horse 3 weeks off. We don't do any particular training for a multiday ride. As we use the multidays for our training. We just like to make sure the horses are carrying a little extra weight so we feed extra heavy.

I ride Jim in a stonewall saddle and use biothane tack and woolback pads. St. Croix eventers and pads. Sometimes I use Easyboots over shoes.

Jim has had 2 bowed tendons, a couple of suspensory pulls. Right now I think I am having problems with my saddle not fitting properly, as Jim's back is starting to change with age -- he is 22 years old, so I'm working on that.

I believe most problems can be worked out if the horse has enough time off. We gave a full year off for one tendon that had some torn fibers and we gave him 3 months off for a bang to the tendon, however there were no torn fibers.

My best ride on Jim was last year on the Cuneo Creek 100. I did that ride with my son in law, Jon Niehaus. Jon won the ride but I came in second behind him. Jim was 21 years old and I just had an awesome day.

I have had a few days with Jim that were trying to say the least. But that's the way riding is, you take the good with the bad. The most important lesson I have learned is, rides may come and rides may go, but there is only one Jim Bob. A pull is never a bad thing, very few of them are ever unwarranted.

We keep our horses at home on 21 acres. We keep all 5 of them together.

Jim's strengths are his love for racing, his sunny disposition and his size. He is rangy and tall. Jim's weaknesses is his conformation, he interferes so I have to keep splint boots on him and he has had to have special shoeing for his left hind foot.

My advice to beginning riders is -- take the time to get a good base on your horse before you do fast riding, like two years base before you try to top ten on 50's and use each ride as a stair step for your next ride.

I think what has increased Jim's longevity is the fact I have picked and chosen his rides carefully. I have tried to keep him off really rocky rides. I never run a horse over rock, my horses are trained to slow down and walk rock. We don't train fast downhill. My main goal for Jim was to keep him sound and with me for as long as I could and we are still together after 17 years. In 1995 we had a wonderful year, and yes, it was planned. He won just about all a gelding could win exception National BC.

I love competing in 100-mile rides, they definitely are my favorite. We use Kerry Ridgeway's electrolyte recipe and trace mineral supplements made for our county. We haven't given our horses any joint supplements yet.

We normally travel 9 to 11 hours to rides. We live in Northern California right on the coast, a long way from most rides. We go to many rides out of our region.

My philosophy about endurance riding is this -- I ride because I truly love the horses I ride, it's not what placing I come in. Make no mistake I love competition, but it's the partnership that I have with my horse, it's the long conversations I have with him as I figure out our strategy as we go down the trail, it's getting off his back and running down mountains thinking I can make his job easier, it's being together in the dark

of night just the two of us, me tired, him too -- hoping the finish isn't too far ahead, just maybe being able to catch one more rider before the finish, then the finish, the total joy of having completed a monumental task of a 100 mile ride -- my best friend and I.

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

Ruth Waltenspiel
Courtney Hart
Darla Westlake

Ruth has taught me the true meaning of endurance riding, to totally enjoy the gift of the day. The gift can include a pull as well as being in the top ten. Ruth has a true love for riding and working with horses. Ruth's enthusiasm today at over 25,000 plus miles is as it was for mile one years ago.

Courtney: I have the utmost respect for Courtney Hart and his knowledge about the sport of endurance. This includes the selection, training and feeding of endurance horses. He's brilliant!

Darla will always have a special spot in my heart. She's the one I chose to try to keep up to on my first competition 100 mile ride. I learned so much that day and I still apply those same techniques on my 100's to this day.