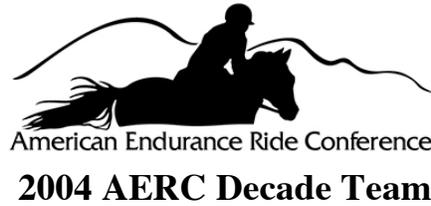


Karen Chaton & Dream Weaver



Rider's Name: Karen Chaton

Horse's Name: Dream Weaver - 5,685 Miles & 110 Ride completions, West Region

First AERC Ride: 1995

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

I found Weaver from an ad in the local newspaper. I fell in love with him the minute I saw him. He had the kindest eye, and was a nice mover.

What is your horse's breeding?

He is mostly CMK with a little Egyptian and Polish.

Sex: Gelding

DOB: St. Patrick's Day, 1990

Horse height: 14.3 hh

Approx. Weight: 1000+

Color: Chestnut w/ star

Shoe size: 1, or, Easyboot size: 2 on front, 1 on hind

Why did you decide to purchase this horse (or if you didn't purchase, why did you choose to use this horse in endurance)?

He was so well mannered and easy to handle, plus he has the kindest eye. I think it was his eyes that I fell in love with in about a half a second. I wasn't looking for an endurance horse at the time. A friend invited me to go camping with Weaver after I'd had him for about a year. We camped at Wendell Robie Park, which is where the Tevis starts. I had the best time and from that moment forward I wanted to do the Tevis. I didn't really know anything then about endurance riding. I had been taking dressage lessons twice a week and showing Weaver for the first year and a half that I owned him. We were getting tired of working in an arena and both wanted to go somewhere.

Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse?

No. I had a pony when I was a kid, but Weaver was my first horse.

How many different horses have you ridden in this sport?

Weaver was my first, then Rocky and now Chief and Zenos. Weaver and Rocky were a great team, I alternated them on multadays and they thrived on that format. I hope to do that this coming year with C and Z.

Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities?

Off and on. I've shown, done playdays and cattle drives, and ride and drives and organized trail ride type stuff as well as camping trips and search and rescue.

How many years have you been involved with horses? In endurance?

2005 was my 11th year in endurance. I had a pony when I was a kid and grew up trying to ride horses at every opportunity.

What got you interested in endurance riding? What was it that kept you interested?

Going camping at Wendell Robie Park and meeting a group of endurance riders. I was hooked! I really wanted one of those dang buckles. What kept me interested is that I discovered how much fun it is. Plus it's a great way to spend all of my excess cash (ha ha).

How old was your horse when first started? First ride?

Weaver was 5 when he did his first sanctioned AERC 50 mile endurance ride.

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

First Season: Two 50's (100 miles)

Second Season: Six rides, 350 miles including one 2-day 100 (which was part of his first multiday of 3 days)

Third Season: 575 miles including his first 75 and one day 100

What mileage distance did you start with?

50. He did a couple of 25 mile rides which at the time weren't sanctioned. At the time it was viewed as a training ride and I knew if I wanted to ride the Tevis that I needed to do 50's and then move up to 100's, so I sort of viewed everything I did until we completed the Tevis as a training ride.

How long till you top tenned or 'raced'?

During his second year he won a ride, which was due in large part because the frontrunners got lost. He also got BC on that ride. I did top ten a few rides on Weaver though by my fourth season on him I was more interested in doing the miles and wanted to see if he could do more than a 1000 miles in a single season. I had learned by then that if I wanted to do that, I needed to focus on that rather than on being competitive placement wise. I'm glad I went that route as I don't think he would have lasted as long had he been ridden faster.

How much time off do you give between ride seasons?

The ride season ends on November 30th, and the new one begins on December 1st. 24 hours????

Seriously -- I give them breaks between competitions but have found that giving them complete time off doesn't usually work well unless they are turned out into the large pasture. My horses tend to hurt themselves and do stupid things when they are allowed to get bored, so even if they aren't competing I still keep them worked regularly somehow. They are athletes and don't like to just sit around.

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?

It depends on the horse. I like to do a 50 two or three weeks before a 100 to make sure everything is okay and then do a couple of shorter rides a week leading up to the ride. Following the ride I like to take the horse for long hand-walks out onto the trails where I live and let him graze.

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?

I really like the horse to have four or five weeks between multadays. I treat most rides the same, either a one day 100 or a multiday usually work well if I do a one day ride sometime in the month before, but it just depends on what is on the schedule and how the horse is doing, what the ride is we are going to and stuff like that. I always try to ride any ride so that the horse doesn't "need" any time off afterwards. Also, so that they keep a healthy mental attitude and are happy to be ridden and to get out. I like them to be the opposite of barn sour.

What kind of tack do you use? (saddle, pads, girths, bits, etc.)

Sportsaddle, Toklat pad with inserts, mohair girth, and I've ridden Weaver more than 5000 miles in nothing but a rope halter. Sometimes I would use a vosal on him, but he always preferred to go in a rope halter. He did well in that I think in part to all of the training he had before we got interested in endurance.

What kind of shoes do you use on your horse? Pads? Easyboots?

St. Croix wide webs, and he has done almost all of his endurance miles in Easyboots. I prefer red ones, size 2 on the fronts and 1 on the backs.

What kind of problems have you encountered?

Keeping weight off of Weaver. He was always mad that he could never be fed as much or what the other horses got because he would get really heavy.

What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had?

In 2000 we were changing some of our wooden fencing over to vinyl and I had the horses locked in the paddocks. I told the workers whatever you do don't turn the horses out into the field where the fenceholes were dug – well of course that is what they did. And of course, Weaver had to go and fall in one. I didn't realize the damage that was done until he came up lame at a ride. Took him to my current vet who properly diagnosed it as a torn (or rather, shredded) tendon in his shoulder. So we rehabbed that and he healed 100%!

How did you work thru it?

Regular ultrasounds at the vets, strict rehab schedule starting with 15 minutes of walking once a day, then twice a day then working up over a period of months, along with the use of a TENS unit and instructions on how to use it from Tom Ivers. Luckily the vet gave me the ok to start riding Weaver within two weeks and that worked well. He also let me allow him to be turned out into a paddock rather than locked in a stall.

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse?

I'd like to say it was the Tevis the year we completed it in 1998. But that doesn't even come close to the 2001 XP ride. That was 8 weeks long and even tho I rode Weaver on 19 50's, every other day on that ride it was basically one long ride and one trip and one great adventure. I was so fortunate to have Weaver who was so great on that entire trip. Everything just worked for us that summer. It was a hugely emotional day that we rode into Virginia City and finished. Weaver seemed to know what the deal was, of course he had figured out that he was back home again. On that day I was riding the strongest and fittest horse that I'll ever ride.

Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse?

Probably when the vet diagnosed Weaver's hocks as fusing. That was a sad day. It turned out okay, his hocks did fuse and he has stayed sound (knocking on wood). I did take him out of competition for long periods of time while we worked thru it. During that time, he was the horse I rode the most at home and I think he put in more miles than any of the horses I was competing in endurance with. I just wanted him to be okay and didn't feel comfortable riding him if he was only able to do it because he had a joint injection.

What was your most humbling experience?

Can I only have one? Gosh, with a horse like Weaver it's easy to have a lot of those. One time we were going down a hill, and I asked him to slow down. He did. I didn't. He put his nose down and looked me in the eye. I was sitting on my butt looking back at him. I'm not sure which one of us was the most embarrassed.

What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important?

Listen to your horse and get to know him well before entering any competitive distance rides. Be consistent in your training and then make sure that is how you ride when you do compete. Know what your horse eats, how he eats, what he likes, what his pulse is his gut sounds sound like and all those little details that will signal a problem at a ride. Spend enough time with your horse in enough situations and

environments that they know to look to you if they get frightened or nervous, so that during a ride if their mind goes whacko they'll come back to YOU and not focus entirely on the other horses.

Where does your horse live?

He's on an extended sabbatical right now in New Mexico! When summer comes he'll head to South Dakota and have fun traveling around on some different trails. When he's with me at home he has full turnout and for one or two months a year for most of his life he was turned out into a large pasture with a herd of geldings.

What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of its life in?

He was 3 when I got him and up until that point had lived in a large pasture with a small herd of geldings (about a dozen). He has always integrated well with other horses and gets along with everybody. He is usually not on the bottom of the hierarchy, but is also not always at the top either. He will protect other horses in the herd from being picked on especially the younger or older horses.

What are your horse's strengths? Weaknesses?

He always ate well, drank well and took care of both of us. I can't think of any weaknesses, maybe something will come to me later. He was always so dependable and honest. I could not have gotten a better first endurance horse than Weaver. Talk about luck!

What advice do you have for new riders?

Don't worry about getting competitive right away. Put a good base on your horse before asking (or allowing) for speed. Read and learn as much as you can and remember you are riding a live animal that probably hasn't read much of what you have.

Looking back, what would you do differently?

Be more patient. Things happen for a reason, so don't hurry them and don't think the world is ending if you can't go to a ride because real life (aka Murphy's Law) intervenes. I did learn this later but from the start I wished I had realized what a gift each and every ride was and at the same time thought more about the future and how what I did at each ride could affect Weaver's longevity.

What do you feel you did right?

Paid attention to the horse. Weaver wouldn't have let it be any other way!

What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it?

To do the Tevis. Yes. Then I wanted to make 3000 miles on him so he could have his picture in the yearbook. We did that too. He was the first horse I rode over 1000 miles in a single ride season (boy you really learn a lot doing that!) Then I decided it would be really cool if he could make 5000 miles. He earned his 5000 miles at the 20 Mule Team 100. Then I wanted him to do ten ride seasons, and get to 6000 miles. That's when I was curious about how many horses have done ten ride seasons with the same rider and how the whole Decade Team thing got started. So far Weaver has made 11 ride seasons with me, and 6295 lifetime miles---he may or may not do anymore. I just want him to be healthy and happy and

I'm really proud of him and thankful for all that he has given me.

Describe your horse's personality? How is it like or unlike yours?

He is pretty easy going and laid back and loves to go down the trail. He is a hard worker and will give his all to do what you ask of him. As long as you ask in a way that he understands he would jump out of an airplane for you. He's also very sensitive and never needs to be hit or jerked around, when a simple scolding will do, and even then don't yell or he'll give you evil looks for the next two days. We're mostly alike in how we love to go down the trail, and how he always knew when I went out to the field to pick out a horse to ride that day, when I was going for him or another one. Of all the horses I've had, I think that Weaver and I could read each other's minds. We both are still working on that patience thing, especially at feeding time.

What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most?

I enjoy every ride no matter what the distance, but I like the longer ones for the most challenge and reward – multadays first then 100's. I think multadays are more of a challenge as far as managing your horse goes. After riding for 8 weeks in '01 I've never been able to view any ride that only lasts one day as being that much of a challenge for myself or for my horses. I'll be forever warped.

Describe your electrolyte protocol.

Preload with soaked beet pulp and salt for two or three days before hauling to a ride. I used to give Weaver a dose of enduramax at each water stop and after the finish. If there were a lot of water stops, then obviously not every one but usually about every 12 to 15 miles or so. Post ride I always put elytes or extra salt into his feed for a day or two after each ride. In the last few years I've been giving the horses their elytes or salt mixed into their food and have not used a syringe to give them. It's much easier this way and I think the horses prefer it -- tho in Weaver's case he has always been an extremely good eater.

Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success?

I've always tried to feed good quality hay, mostly grass. No sudden feed changes on rides.

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?

No.

What kind of supplements (if any) do you use?

Selenium/Vitamin E

Do you give any kind of joint products?

Weaver got a glucosamine shot once a month for most of his career.

How far do you usually travel to rides?

About 50 miles to 650 miles one way.

Do you go to many rides outside of your region?

I go to a lot of rides, so yes. The ones I travel to are usually the multiday rides that are in the PS, MT, SW and sometimes NW region. There is only one 5 day ride in the W region, so if I want to do multiday rides I have to go out of the region.

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

Dave Rabe, because he can ride any number of horses and I've never seen him get one in trouble. He's a smart, honest, a conscientious rider and is always doing things to help, everything from helping to clear trail, mark trail, fix things, opening gates during rides for others and the list goes on and on.

Don Funk, because of his philosophy on life and endurance in general. I started riding with Don about the time I was starting Chief and wished perhaps that I had run into Don or somebody like him back when I was starting out with Weaver. We should all be so lucky as to have the bond with our horses that Don and Geronimo have.

The Duck, because he taught me that I better know how to take care of my horse, because he isn't going to do it.

Julie Suhr for being such an inspiration.

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner?

I've had many friends that I trail rode with before getting involved with endurance. Other than that, my first trail partner would be Weaver – he and I shared a lot of time together just he and I.

In choosing your next horse, what would you look for?

I like horses with a nice personality and temperament. I like horses that don't spook and act goofy. Besides that, I want a horse that is put together well and has good feet, a kind eye and a big heart.