

**Karen Chaton & Granite Chief+/  
American Endurance Ride Conference  
2011 AERC Decade Team**



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Day 40, 2011 XP. Karen & Chief. Photo by Nannette Young.

**Rider Name:** Karen Chaton

**Horse Name:** Granite Chief+/  
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**Region:** West

**Current Rider Lifetime Mileage?** 30,530

**Endurance:** 30,530 (12,000 of that is with Chief)

**Limited Distance:** I've done one 25 on another horse.

**Tell us about your horse. When/how did you come to get him/her?** Chief was given to me by his breeder. He thought I would be a good match for him; he wanted Chief to 'do something'. I told several of my friends about these horses in the bay area that the owner wanted to find good homes for. Nobody else was interested, I think everybody thought a 'free' horse meant something was wrong with it. That couldn't have been further from the truth! I took Chief home, dropping him off at the vet clinic on the way where they gelded him the next morning. Chief was almost 6 years old at the time.

**What is your horses breeding?** Classical Spanish and CMK, Arabian.

**Sex:** Gelding

**DOB:** 4/7/1995

**Horse height:** 15 hh

**Approx. Weight:** 930

**Color:** Fleabitten grey

**Hoof boot 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)?** I liked how this horse was put together. He had nice feet and a good disposition too. You'd never have known he was gelded so late as he was always well mannered. He had not been started yet so I was starting with a clean slate on a horse already old enough to start steady work.

**Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse?** Yes, Dream Weaver and Rocky. Chief is my third endurance horse, and I'm the only one that has ridden him in an endurance ride.

**How many different horses have you ridden in this sport?** A total of six.

**Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities?** Not so much any more. I used to show and do a lot of play days, plus trail riding.

**How many years have you been involved with horses? In endurance?** I had horses as a kid, then went twenty years without. I got started in endurance riding in 1994.

**What got you interested in endurance riding? What was it that kept you interested?** I wanted to do the Tevis. It's close to where I live, and I heard a lot of stories about it. I went camping with friends to Robie Park and was mesmerized by the stories from endurance riders who were there. It took me three

years to finally reach that goal, and in the meantime I realized that it wasn't so much the destination as the journey that was the best part. I was having a great time.

**How old was your horse when first started? First ride?** Chief was started when he was 6 years old and did his first ride after he turned 7. I like starting my horses a little older now. I started Chief out on a multiday ride.

**How many rides did you do the first, second, and third ride seasons? (list w/ distances)** Chief's first season: 100 miles. Second season: 355. Third season: 2135.

**What mileage distance did you start with? (25, 50, etc.)** I started with 50's and the goal to do Tevis. With Chief, I started him out on a 3 day pioneer ride at Mt. Carmel.



**How long till you top tenned or raced? (if you did)** I never really raced, though didn't know a lot about pacing when I started and went faster than I should have. Chief was lucky that he was my third endurance horse, as I had learned all of the hard lessons at the expense of Rocky and Weaver. Fortunately I have always been somewhat conservative so never did anything really stupid.

**How much time off do you give between ride seasons?** That is a question I ponder often. I like the horses to have as much time off as possible between a heavy ride season. Between the 2011 and 2012 ride seasons, Chief got nearly three months off and I considered that to be a fair and adequate break for him.

**If you have done 100's, how much time off do you give after doing one?** It depends on the ride, the horse and how things go. I have only done one single day 100 on Chief. I believe I gave him six weeks off after that ride, and then his next ride was a Pioneer ride.

**If you have done multadays, how much time off do you give after doing one?** Again, it depends on a lot of variables mostly depending upon how the horse comes through the ride. For doing five day rides I like to give four to six weeks off before doing another ride. Yet, there have been times I haven't done that

and Chief has handled it well. Largely because we were so conservative. You need more rest in between if you are going fast or if the horse is having difficulty of some sort.

**What kind of tack do you use? (saddle, pads, girths, bits, etc.)** A Bob Marshall Sports Saddle. Toklat pads. Mohair girths. Myler low port kimberwick. I've tried off and on to use a S-hack with Chief, and he **can** do fine with it. Other times he takes advantage. I would prefer to use something besides a bit, but he goes so well in it and I think that is kinder on him than it is to allow him to go down the trail with his head and nose up in the air, carrying himself all wrong and me fighting with him all day. So, we compromise and when I feel it's okay to do so, I'll use the S-hack. I can ride him at home in a rope halter. He knows the difference. I also like to use beta biothane trail halter-bridles, breastcollars, rope reins with a rommel and a crupper. Chief also uses one hind ankle boot. Early on he would ding that ankle every couple thousand miles. He doesn't do that anymore, but I keep using that one boot for good luck. I've been told no less than a hundred times "hey do you know you've lost a boot?".

**What kind of shoes do you use on your horse? Pads? Barefoot? Barefoot and booted?** Chief used Ground Control plastic shoes his first couple of ride seasons. I pulled his shoes in 2005 and he's now done close to 10,000 of his 12,000 miles using boots over barefoot. I am pretty careful about riding him barefoot on a ride and when I do, it's where the footing is excellent.

**What kind of problems have you encountered?** With Chief, managing his brain has always been the biggest thing to deal with. It hasn't really been a problem, but it would be if I weren't so determined to keep him from getting too wound up.



**What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had?** That's easy. It was when he tore his eyelid apart a couple of years ago. Fortunately I found it right after it happened and the vet was able to restitch it back together. That was only the start of it. Since then, Chief has had to have several surgeries to correct the eyelashes dropping into the eye causing ulcers, as well as to remove scar tissue that developed.

**How did you work thru it?** By having a really super awesome vet, and a sense of humor. Plus, Chief was a terrific patient and never put up a fuss when having medication put into his eye two or more times a day.

**What was the worst or most severe injury you have ever had relating to horses or endurance riding?** On my first ride with Chief, we fell down after he caught a hind leg in a tree branch. I broke my clavicle and needed a few stitches here and there. Chief, as scared as he was stood up and came over and stayed next to me while I lay on the ground. It would have been far worse had he taken off running about in that area. That earned him some points. Since then we have not had any riding accidents; either of us.

Knocking on wood!

**How did you work thru it?** It took a long time for both Chief and I to get our confidence and trust back in each other. I spent a lot of time doing ground work with him. For the longest time, I saw an accident waiting to happen at every dip, drop, or hole on the trail. I would often dismount a hundred times a day on a ride and lead through anything I wasn't sure of. Eventually I was able to gain my confidence and trust back in Chief, and he in me and now I trust him completely on even the most technical and scary trails. He had a hard time for a long time after that accident with horses coming up from behind. He would squoosh forward real fast with his rear tucked under him. He now can handle horses running into him from behind and will stand his ground. Fortunately he never has kicked.



**Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse?** I've had so many best rides on Chief. Each time I ride him again on an endurance ride, I think that is now my new favorite ride. Two days in particular come to mind. The first being the 40th day of the 2040 mile XP ride this summer when we rode into Virginia City. That was a pretty significant accomplishment and dream of mine and to share it with Chief was magical. The second ride would be the 2nd day of the Bryce XP when Chief reached 12,000 miles.

**Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse?** That would have to be the day his eyelid was injured. Waiting for the vet to arrive and not knowing if he had lost his eye or not.

**What was your most humbling experience?** There are so many. One in particular comes to mind, from Fort Schellbourne one year. Another riders horse had gotten loose and ran galloping away from the trail and through a barbed wire fence. The horse hit the fence and flipped over, got up and kept going. Chief watched the entire thing and was pretty wound up and hot. This was less than a half a mile out from the start, and we had a pretty gnarly steep water crossing right in front of us. I dismounted, feeling like I'd be safer to lead him through it. Only, when I hopped over the creek I slipped and fell on my face. Chief kept going up the steep embankment on the other side. The Duck was standing nearby and I could hear some choice words coming out of his mouth indicating that he was not going to be happy about having another horse running loose. I told him while standing up "don't worry, Chief won't leave me". I was forever humbled and in a good way, when Chief stopped at the top, turned towards me and waited for me to run up the hill to get to him. In a way, I felt pretty insignificant and unworthy of having a horse so devoted, when I wasn't confident enough to stay on his back and trust him. I think that was a turning point for us, and after that I started to stay on more and more for things that had previously made me nervous.

**What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important?** Every horse teaches us so much. The best lesson I've learned is that my horses tend to stay sound for thousands of

miles a year if I keep their trots tuned down to 10 mph or less.

**Where does your horse live? Full turnout?** They have 24/7 turnout and have a small pasture that they can go in certain times of the year. They have an acre lot that is dirt, and also a couple of large paddocks that have a DG base with sand on top – that keeps their feet in good shape during our wet and muddy winters.

**What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of it's life in? (pasture, w/ a herd, etc.)** Chief originally lived in Sacramento in a pasture before going to Monterey, CA where I picked him up. He had not been gelded yet so had to be kept in a separate area. That wouldn't be my first choice for a horse, though Chief developed social skills quickly and while he always has been the most dominant horse I've had, he is kind about it (never bites or kicks).

**What are your horses strengths?** I think besides his big heart and desire to go down the trail it would have to be his conformation. He has been able to do the mileage he has with so few problems because of how he is put together.

**Weaknesses?** All mental. He is super competitive. It requires a lot of work to keep him rated and from getting overly wound up.

**What advice do you have for new riders?** Read everything you can. There are lots of great resources online such as [aerc.org](http://aerc.org) or [endurance.net](http://endurance.net) There are also a lot of great blogs on the topic of horse care and endurance riding. When getting information from other riders, never rely too much on any single one source; keep an open mind and try to learn from as many different people as you can.

**Looking back, what would you do differently?** I would have been a little smarter about riding more consistently. Not sure I would have done much different with Chief as it's all turned out pretty well.

**What do you feel you did right?** I think my fear of hurting my horse has kept me fairly conservative.

**What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it?** Yes, actually I had two big goals for Chief. One was for him to be a Decade Team Horse, and the second was to reach 10,000 lifetime miles.



Death Valley Encounter. Photo by Steve Bradley.

**Describe your horses personality? How is it like or unlike yours?** Chief is the kindest, most devoted horse I've ever had. I never have to catch him, he is a lot more like a friendly dog than a horse. We're

both Type A. He loves to go down the trail and is always eager to see what is over the next hill or around the next bend, kind of like I am.

**What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most? (multidays, 100's, 50's, etc.)** Obviously – multidays! I got warped doing the long 2001 XP ride and ever since then I haven't found the challenge to be the same if I'm not trying to manage to get one or more horses through several days of rides. There is something special about having a horse that is capable to going multiple days.

**In what ways has endurance riding made a positive influence in your life?** It keeps me fit and I've met a lot of my best friends through endurance riding. Many of the very first riders I met are still good friends. I can't think of anything that isn't positive, except for maybe having to retire or losing a horse.

**Describe your electrolyte protocol.** When I started Chief, I wanted to see how he would do if I didn't syringe dose electrolyte him. I never have. Instead, I put salt in his food and he readily eats it. There have been times when I've used a powdered mix elyte in his food, but most of the time it is plain white salt. I pre-load a couple of feedings ahead of a long trailer trip by soaking a mash of either beet pulp or Elk Grove Milling Stable Mix (mostly EGM these days) – and salt. He eats it readily and maintains hydration and a good hearty appetite.



Mt. Carmel XP. Photo by Steve Bradley.

**Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success?** It is pretty simple. I feed a low NSC grass hay that has maybe 20 to 30% alfalfa in it. Chief has such a good metabolism that I can't feed him anything else between rides. Anybody that has ever seen him knows he stays very round in shape. During rides I feed EGM pellets, and at the lunch checks or on the trail I'll feed Healthy Edge Strategy, or an Omolene 200/Wheat bran mash. Chief does not like rice bran. I've pretty much stopped feeding beet pulp this year altogether as Chief likes the EGM better, and it's less expensive.

**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?** Changing my previous elyte protocol with Chief was one of the best things I've ever tried and

had work so well. The other thing (tho not nutrition related) was to keep him barefoot as that made a noticeable improvement with him too.

**What kind of supplements (if any) do you use?** For big events like the long XP ride – Platinum Performance. I also use Horse Guard Megadose vitamins. I've had bloodwork done (as well as feed tested) to know what Chief's needs are. I like to keep things simple. Fish oil capsules during a busy season; they help his recoveries.

**Do you give any kind of joint products? (describe)** Yes, I've used generic Glucosamine off and on over the years. Once Chief reached 10,000 miles I took his joint health a little more seriously and have given him Adequan and Legend. Now I am using Pentosan, which I think is the best. All injectible, never have bothered with feed through joint products.

**How far do you usually travel to rides?** Up to 650 miles for the majority of them.

**Do you go to many rides outside of your region?** Yes, I ride in a lot of different regions and would love to ride in all of them eventually. Most of the rides I regularly attend are in the West, Pacific South, Mountain, Southwest and Northwest regions.

**Name three people involved in the sport of endurance that you look up to, and why?** There are so many it will be hard. I guess if I had to narrow it down to 3 people who have had a positive influence directly by helping me in some way it would be:

1. Ann Nicholson. She is a saint, always smiling and works so tirelessly and without complaint putting on rides. I want to be like her when I grow up. I'd also like to include her husband Dave, tho he's no saint, isn't always smiling and I don't want to be like him when I grow up. He's one of the best teachers this sport has though, and I've learned a lot from him that has directly benefited all of my horses.
2. Vickie Greene, for providing a wonderful little horse named Tigger and along with it a lot of great wisdom, and I'd like to think that some of her common sense approach to horses has rubbed off on me.
3. Tom Ivers. He helped me keep my horses going and recover from injuries that they would not have recovered from otherwise (esp. Dream Weaver). He really knew his stuff and was always so gracious about helping others.





Bryce XP. Cover shot by Steve Bradley.

**Did you have a mentor or first trail partner? Tell us about him/her/them.** I kind of got started on my own, tho did do a lot of riding early on with Caralee White. She introduced me to the Vanderford's, who have always been a great influence and an inspiration.

**Describe the first rig you had and then tell us how it compares to your current rig?** Oh my – I started out with a tent and a 2 horse '76 Miley bumper pull trailer and an old Chevy truck. I now have a Ford F450 and a 3 horse LQ gooseneck trailer. The current rig is safer for traveling as often and as far as I do by myself and it is definitely a lot more comfortable.

**In choosing your next horse, what would you look for?** That is a tough one. I don't want another horse. I have Pro Bono, who hopefully has a few more years left. I hope that Chief does too, and when he needs to drop out of competitions, I'll hopefully still be able to do some trail riding or trail work/markings with him. I'm not ready yet to move on, or to even think about getting another horse.