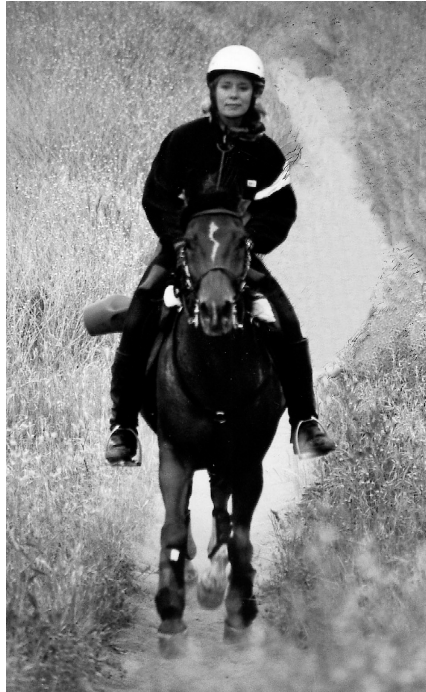


Karen Schwartz & Christagon



AERC Decade Team



3320 Miles & 61 Ride Completions
First AERC ride: 1987 Region: W

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

Chris was a 5-year-old when I bought him in 1986 from his breeders, Diablo Arabians in Danville. I'd been looking at horses all over Northern California. They described him as "unpredictable," and I guess they were right. I would never have predicted then that I'd be doing endurance rides for the next 18 years on that same horse.

What is your horse's breeding?

Chris is an Arabian, a cross of CMK (dam's line) and mostly new Egyptian bloodlines (sire's line). I am interested in the bloodlines of endurance horses, and I think this cross is excellent for producing horses with lots of stamina that are sturdy, athletic and enjoy their work.

Sex: Gelding

DOB: April 1981

Horse's Height: 14.3

Approx. Weight: 850 lbs.

Color: Bay

Shoe Size: ?

Easyboot Size: 1

Why did you decide to purchase this horse?

After doing endurance rides on several other horses for about 5 years, I wanted a horse with Top Ten potential. I tried to be very critical of conformation flaws whenever I considered buying a horse, but I fell in love with Chris at first sight and decided to ignore his conformation flaws.

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

Yes, I tried endurance riding in 1981 with my first horse, a very hyper-reactive half Arabian, but I pulled at the mid point because I was too tired to go on. I took up jogging to improve my stamina, and the next year I was able to complete my first endurance ride.

How many different horses have you ridden in this sport?

I've ridden at least four. Riding different horses helped me realize what qualities were most important to me in an endurance horse - smooth gaits, a sensible mind, an enthusiastic attitude, and not too tall so I can mount and dismount easily on the trail.

Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities?

My first love is trail riding. I don't care for arena work, but my horse and I have benefited greatly from occasional dressage lessons.

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

I've been horse crazy since age 6. As a kid growing up in the suburbs, I was never able to persuade my parents to buy me a horse, so I read everything I could find about horses and took riding lessons now and then. Years later my husband and I bought two horses for our daughters, and eventually I got my own horse, a very hyper half-Arabian, and started doing endurance rides in 1982.

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

When I discovered how much fun endurance is and what great training it is for both horse and rider, I knew I had found a sport that suited me. I went to my first endurance ride on a lark and discovered that my hare brained horse became more and more a gentleman with every mile that went by. Once we passed the 35-mile mark I was able to open maps and remove my jacket - stuff that previously would have been life threatening. With each ride we did my horse and I became increasingly attuned to each other and developed a real partnership and new goals. The following year we completed our first 100-mile at Tevis and had a wonderful time.

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

Chris' breeders probably started him at age 3 and rode him as a 4-year-old on trail rides on Mt. Diablo. They said he could "go all day." After I bought him I did some additional conditioning to get to know him before I took him to his first ride, the Fireworks 25-mile ride.

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

Looking back at his record, I'm embarrassed to see how many rides we did his first year, and I wouldn't recommend doing this. In 1987 as a 6-year-old Chris finished seven 50-mile rides, one 70-mile ride, and a 100-mile ride. By the end of that ride season he finished in the Top Ten on his last 50 mile ride and his first 100 mile ride. Knowing what I know now about conditioning and young horses, I wouldn't do this again but luckily it doesn't seem to have harmed Chris.

The following year, Chris finished six 50-mile rides and one 100-mile ride. He also began to finish in the Top Ten consistently.

As an 8-year-old Chris completed four 50's, one 60, one 100, and one 200-mile multi. He won his first 50-mile ride, his first Best Condition award, and had the overall fastest time on the 200-mile ride.

What mileage distance did you start with?

We started with a 25-mile ride when he was age 5. It was an important stepping stone on the way to doing longer distances. I did only one 25-mile ride with this horse because he showed me he could handle the distance well. If he'd had any problems we would have continued to ride 25's until he was ready for longer distances.

How long until you Top Tanned or raced?

Chris began Top Tenning rides by the end of his first year in endurance when he was age 6. Again, I must say I would not recommend this for most young horses.

How much time do you give off between ride seasons?

About four months. I don't ride much after the rains start in November until March or April.

If you have done 100's, how much time off do you give after doing one?

Usually I gave Chris one month of rest following a 100, but we once did a 4-day multi day ride just one week after doing a fast 100. I hoped the multi day ride would teach Chris to relax and slow down. Luckily we had no problems. After a 50, I liked to give two weeks of rest, but I have stretched the rest period out to a month now that he is older.

What is your schedule in the month leading up to the ride?

I don't do much conditioning between rides. If I ride Chris at all, I do mostly LSD (long slow distance) tapering to a few short, quick aerobic workouts a week before the ride.

If you have done multadays, how much time off do you give after doing one?

I like giving a month off following a multi, but this has been due more to the demands of my family life and work schedule than to any particular theory of conditioning and rest intervals. I've found that once a horse has a solid foundation of three years of conditioning work, they don't need much conditioning to stay fit if you do endurance rides regularly. When Chris is competing regularly, I consider the endurance rides themselves to be the only conditioning he needs.

What is your schedule in the month leading up to the ride?

I generally ride LSD a few times and a few short, quick aerobic workouts a week before the ride.

What kind of tack do you use?

For endurance rides I use a Wintec all-purpose saddle, Equilon pad combined with an Equalizer pad, mohair girth, biothane bridle with a French snaffle bit, breast collar, and crupper. For conditioning rides, I use a Stubben Siegfried saddle.

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

Chris wears regular steel horseshoes with no pads. I am very fortunate to have had excellent shoers. I prefer to use a shoer who has ridden endurance because they have a better understanding of the demands endurance riding places on a horse's legs and feet.

What kind of problems have you encountered?

Chris sustained a pulled suspensory in 1994, which required a year of rest for recovery. But our biggest problem has been frequent episodes of tying-up.

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

Chris' worst injury was a suspensory tear.

How did you work through it?

I consulted a veterinarian who specialized in treating equine lameness, who used ultra sound to diagnose and monitor the condition. He treated Chris initially with confinement to a paddock and anti-inflammatory medications. When the inflammation subsided, Chris was turned out to pasture for a year. He has made an excellent recovery.

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse.

My all-time favorite ride was the 1989 multiday 200-mile Capitol to Capitol ride from Nevada to California. The trail started at Washoe Lake outside Carson City, Nevada and climbed

Mt. Rose the first day, continued the next two days on the Western States Tevis trail, and went from Cool to Sacramento the final day, so the terrain and scenery were wonderful every day of the ride. Because I had ridden Chris the previous weekend on a fast 100 at Swanton, I assumed that as he was ridden day after day he would slow down on the trail and learn to relax. Wrong! He grew stronger each successive day of the ride. By the end of the four days, I had never felt more exhausted but I was also totally exhilarated that Chris had finished with the fastest time overall. Penny and Jerry Scribner managed that special ride, and I will always be indebted to them for providing the opportunity for such a wonderful experience.

Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse?

Chris and I have had our share of disappointments, but Tevis has proved especially tough for us. Although Chris Top Tended one year, we couldn't show for Best Condition because we had to leave our saddle on Devil's Thumb (the girth billet strap broke due to carrying extra weights and therefore I

didn't weigh in at the required weight at some of the vet checks until we were able to get another saddle).

Another year, we arrived at the first vet check, Robinson Flat, with Chris looking good, and passed the vet check with no problems. But a few minutes later Chris urinated dark red. Tying-up.

We started Tevis another year with high hopes, but Chris began tying-up in the first mile after leaving Robie. Returning to find no one at Robie was the worst, but thankfully the sweep riders alerted my crew to return to Robie and pick us up.

What was your most humbling experience?

Endurance riding has provided me with a wonderful variety of humbling experiences, but probably my lowest point was leading Chris many miles through the Sierras after he tied-up for the first time. This was probably due to my ignorance in feeding him grain before the ride. I had plenty of time during that long walk to think about how my stupidity had put my horse's health at risk and to resolve that I would do things differently in the future.

It's also been humbling to realize that all my efforts to train my horse to slow down and relax at competitions have made almost no difference in changing his intensely competitive temperament, so in order to slow him down, I've had to change my behavior, like being the last to leave camp at the start of each ride.

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

I've learned to listen carefully to what my horse tells me about how he is feeling. Your horse will speak to you in a 100 ways if you are attuned to him.

I've learned to keep my horse listening to me, by not putting him in situations where he can tune me out, like riding at the front at the start of a race.

I've learned that where I finish at a ride is completely unimportant in the long-term but making sure my horse enjoys the ride is top priority. Riding a horse that enjoys its work is one of life's great pleasures, and the rider must think about how to make their work pleasant for them. What's important is the quality of each ride, because it is going to live on in my memory and the horse's for a long, long time.

Where does your horse live?

My three horses live on fulltime turnout in several pastures that total about 6 acres next to our home. I've tried to approximate the ideal natural environment in the wild for any horse. There are some tall trees for shade, an open sided shed for shelter from wind and rain, and year round grazing, with green grass in the spring.

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

Before I bought him Chris was in a pasture on Mt. Diablo with other horses, probably young geldings. When I brought Chris to the stable where I boarded, I didn't realize how important it was to keep him in pasture, and I rented a paddock for my convenience. Chris wanted to be in the pasture adjacent to his paddock, so he jumped out of the paddock, uphill, into the pasture. I quickly got the message, and he has been in pasture ever since. Maybe, because he exercises himself while in pasture, I haven't had to do a great deal of conditioning with him.

What are your horse's strengths? Weaknesses?

Strengths: Sometimes I wonder if Chris could be a physiological freak in the sense that he has never required much conditioning, yet he can go far and fast and long without undue fatigue. His pulse drops quickly, and it's usually difficult to tell if he is breathing at all. He seems to enjoy attacking steep hills. His feet are tough, and he has short, stout cannon bones. He is a very smooth gaited horse, and doing a 100-mile ride on him was truly a pleasure. At age 24 he shows few signs of aging, but I doubt he will ever be able to do another 100-mile ride.

Weaknesses: Chris' biggest weakness is his intensely competitive attitude during an endurance ride. Even during a casual trail ride he is willing to stop only very briefly to graze or rest, but during an endurance ride he wants to continue down the trail no matter what, refusing to stop to drink or eat or rest. That can become very stressful for both horse and rider.

In addition, his conformation is far from perfect: he has a bench knee and chronically contracted heels, though he goes barefoot 6 months a year.

What advice do you have for new riders?

Early in Chris' career, Courtney Hart posed a question: are you interested in this horse as a competitor who could be used up in a few years or as a companion who will continue to be a part of your life for many years. Though I felt attracted to competition, I realized that I enjoyed riding this particular horse so much that companionship was more important to me. That distinction between competitor vs. companion has guided all my subsequent decisions regarding Chris and has motivated me to have his welfare as my first priority. I have blundered in a variety of ways with him. I've tried to learn from my mistake and have seldom repeated the same mistake, just made new ones.

If you cherish your horse and focus on making every ride mutually enjoyable, you will both benefit. I try to ride in a mindful fashion, focusing on what my horse and I are experiencing, making sure my horse is enjoying the work, and try to resist the impulse to let adrenaline fog my judgment.

Looking back, what would you do differently?

I wish I'd found this sport earlier in my life. When I rode my first endurance ride, Cory Soltau's Mt. Diablo 50, at age 40, it transformed my life. Endurance has made it possible for me to ride in beautiful places I'd never have seen otherwise, with all kinds of interesting people I would never have encountered otherwise. The sport has taught me to be more self-reliant and confident and to keep an open mind. It also has been a stimulus for improving my physical fitness and searching for creative solutions to problems as they arise.

What do you feel you did right?

I found a good horse, shared many fun adventures with him, and managed to keep him healthy, sound, and enthusiastic about doing endurance for almost 20 years. I'm thankful that I didn't use him up in a few fast years riding at the front of the pack.

I have given Chris the best veterinary and farrier care possible. I credit staving Chris off as Adequan at age 14, before he had any lameness problems, with heading off any arthritic problems.

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

When I bought Chris my biggest goal was to Top Ten occasionally. Except for our dismal record at Tevis, he has completely exceeded all my goals for him. Now my highest goal for him is to achieve all his potential without exceeding it.

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

Chris is a "horse's horse," aloof and uninterested in humans. He cares only about other horses and cries pathetically if he is separated from his pasture buddies. He has always been the alpha horse in the pasture, even when I kept him for many years at a large boarding stable. He is almost impossible to catch in the pasture, but once I catch him he is well behaved and respectful, but never affectionate. Except for his over-competitive temperament, he has no vices. On an endurance ride he wants to pass every horse he sees ahead on the trail. If he is in front, he worries about other horses catching up with us and wants to rush along.

Chris and I are alike in that we both can get pretty bullheaded if I allow us to get caught up in a competitive situation.

What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most?

I like any distance ride, but I like 100's best because they offer the most challenge in managing your horse well enough to finish. My next choice is multi-day rides because of the great training opportunities they offer, as well as the camaraderie with other riders. I miss doing 100's, but I don't do them anymore because Chris can't handle the distance. Unfortunately, my work schedule hasn't been compatible with doing many multi's. I think that 50's are too fast and pressured for an older horse like Chris, but he seems to thrive on them.

Describe your electrolyte protocol.

I use loose salt in a syringe filled with applesauce during rides. Before competition, I add loose salt to his beet pulp for several days.

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

Yes, Chris eats plain oat hay and LMF Senior daily, along with a ration of beet pulp mixed with a little grain, and all the pasture grazing he wants. I offer him alfalfa only after a competition, because it encourages him to eat.

I try to follow Susan Garlinghouse's guidelines and have seen a significant improvement in Chris' hydration and a decrease in his problems with tying-up.

Are there any major changes you've made to your nutrition that you feel made a noticeable improvement or solved a problem?

Beet pulp has been helpful in keeping Chris properly hydrated, which helps to prevent tying-up.

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

Loose salt and multi-vitamins.

Do you give any kind of joint products?

Adequan injected intramuscularly.

How far do you usually travel to rides?

No more than three hours away because of the risk of dehydration and subsequent tying-up. I hope my next horse will be able to handle longer trips.

Do you go to many rides outside of your region?

No. I don't have the time now nor do I have a horse that can take the stress of longer trailer trips. I look forward to exploring new trails when I retire. One ride I've always wanted to do is the Old Dominion 100 back in Virginia, and I would like to ride every multi day ride across all the regions.

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

There are so many admirable people in endurance, and beyond the ones you hear about all the time, there are all the lesser known riders who are the backbone of the sport. They are the consistent riders, people who put in the miles and ride happy, healthy horses year after year after year. They may not be in the Top Ten always or even often but they finish almost every ride and they're good sports.

Beyond these unsung heroes, there are some outstanding people who have had a long-term impact for the betterment of endurance riding. I think of riders like Becky Hart, Julie Suhr, and Hal Hall, as well as veterinarians like Todd Nelson and Kerry Ridgway, because they gave us in-depth insights about the sport or provided us with role models we can admire and emulate. Courtney Hart impressed me with his ability to analyze equine conformation, assess training programs and pick out winners, and some of his ideas still influence what I do today. But I'm most grateful to him for prompting me to think about what kind of relationship I wanted with my horse, competitor or companion, and I credit much of Chris' longevity in the sport to him.

I also appreciate the ride managers who put on excellent rides in the West region year after year.

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner?

My longtime friend Marilyn Russell, who has been called the "Mother of All Endurance Riders," filled in many of the gaps in my horsemanship and helped me to accomplish my endurance goals. Marilyn is a gifted teacher, and her enthusiasm for endurance riding is contagious. She is also a wonderful storyteller who makes any endurance ride she has been on sound like the ride of a lifetime. She's a horsewoman in the very best sense of the word and has always been very generous in sharing her time and her advice with aspiring endurance riders.

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

Finding the Next Great Horse is, from my experience, largely a matter of luck and looking in all the right places. I like to study the conformation and way-of-going of every horse I encounter on endurance rides and try to educate myself about picking out the best horse. I also like to think I look for everything we're

supposed to look for, like sturdy cannon bones and good feet, proper conformation, cooperative temperament, etc. But I've also seen very knowledgeable and experienced endurance riders pick the lesser of two horses, so there is something more involved in picking the best horse. Maybe that's because there is an intuitive quality that makes a rider "click" with a certain horse. Like falling in love at first sight or being struck by lightning, there is an element of luck involved.

Add any additional comments or stories that you can think of:

Thank you for including Chris in the Decade Teams, a very special club we are honored to be a part of. You had a great idea in putting together this questionnaire and information, which allows us to examine factors leading to a horse's longevity in endurance riding. Maybe we'll finally find some clues as to what practices and/or training principles result in extending horses' performance longevity. I enjoyed reading the accounts of other Decade Teams and gleaned some good ideas.