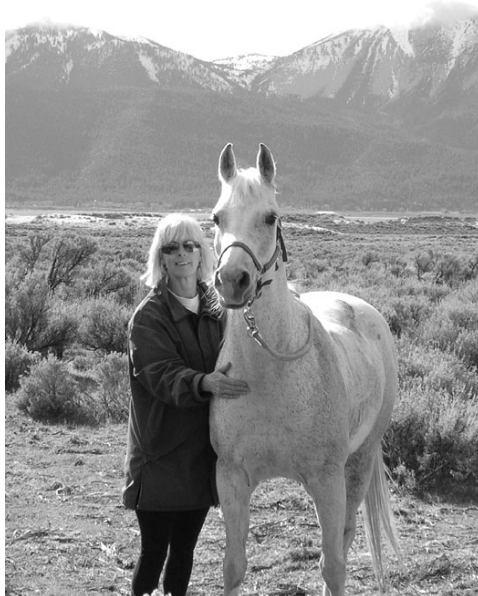


## Linda Cox & Gaichamarretto+/



American Endurance Ride Conference

**2002 AERC Decade Team**



*Photo © Laurie Anderson*

**Rider Name:** Linda Cox

**Horse Name:** Gaichamarretto+/  
(pronounced Gay-sham-a-retto) – “AMI” – 3710 Miles, 71 ride completions.

**First AERC ride:** 1993

**Region:** W

**Tell us about your horse. When/how did you come to get him/her?** We bought three acres and needed the grass to be kept down. I called my pop and asked if he would mind sending down his old gelding. I had not ridden horses in 30 years and was only going to use him as a pasture ornament. At the time, Pop was boarding Ami for his stepdaughter-in-law in Nevada, and asked if he could bring her down too. His words “she’s too nice a mare to send to the slaughterhouse” (where she was headed since she was labeled as crazy and too much for anyone to handle). I bought her for \$300 (what she probably would have gone by the pound), and I’ve been told I’ll never find the same deal again.

**What is your horse’s breeding?** 1/4 Spanish, Domestic -- 50.9% Crabbet certified by ECAHS

**Sex:** Mare

**DOB:** 6/2/85

**Horse height:** 14.1-1/2 when padded for Tevis

**Approx. Weight:** 850

**Color:** Grey (but flea-bitten now -- started out dapple, then white for many years)

**Shoe size:** Ott

**Easyboot size:** Ott

**Why did you decide to purchase this horse?** I wanted to do endurance and she was my only horse.

**Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse?** No, she has been my only partner.

**How many different horses have you ridden in this sport?** None -- just my "Toy Arab" mare

**Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities?** Sweep riding for Tevis/WS Run as a member of SOS (ham radio club on horseback), although we are sitting this year out.

**How many years have you been involved with horses? In endurance?** With horses, since I was 9 (with a 30 year hiatus, except for an occasional ride with my pop's quarter horses at his ranch). In endurance: Since November 14, 1992 (our first LD ride).

**What got you interested in endurance riding? What was it that kept you interested?** The ability to ride beautiful trails for long periods of time. This was a natural for me growing up riding with my pop on our farm in Washington. We rode every Sunday for 8-10 hrs, mainly exploring new trails. The same thing keeps me interested now, plus it is my social life as I have met most of my friends through endurance. Sharing the love of horses and camping with them creates a special bond among our horses and us.

**How old was your horse when first started?** 6 yrs.

**First ride?** 7 yrs.

**How many rides did you do the first, second, and third ride seasons?** First year -- two LDs, three 50's, although didn't complete first attempt at a 50-miler, we were pulled at 48 miles for a junior's horse problem. (We were sponsoring her after her sponsor had been pulled.)

Second year -- Seven 50's, one-100 (Tevis)

Third year -- Eight 50's, one-100 (Tevis), one 3-day/150

**What mileage distance did you start with?** 25 miles.

**How long till you top tenned or 'raced'?** 1996 -- four years, and quite by accident. Just had a good ride that day and didn't realize where I was placing.

**How much time off do you give between ride seasons?** Usually from November through January, she lounges around the pasture with an occasional trail ride. If I plan to do a ride in March, then I try to get her out a couple of times in February, 15-20 easy miles each time. Once the season starts, I usually use the ER schedule and not too much in between, unless it is a leisurely pleasure ride.

**If you have done 100's, how much time off do you give after doing one?** At least a month.

**What is your schedule in the month leading up to the ride?** Ami had better be in shape at the

beginning of that month, or it isn't going to work. Maybe do one or two rides 7-10 days in the beginning of the month; then nothing but moving around her pasture for the second two weeks before the ride.

**If you have done multadays, how much time off do you give after doing one?** Same as a 100.

**What is your schedule in the month leading up to the ride?** Same as a 100.

**What kind of tack do you use?** Her wardrobe? Saddle: Stubben Sigfried VSD; Pad: Supracor now, but used Woolbacks for the first 10 years; Girth: Leather contour girth, with elastic on one end; Zilco breast collar, biothane headstall with aluminum S-Hack with soft braided noseband; but used a Kimberwicke curb for the first 9 years. The weight of the bit, however, gave her TMJ and she hated carrying it for long rides. The compromise was the S-Hack, which she absolutely loves and moves beautifully in. Splint boots--she has ALWAYS worn neoprene splint boots, although she does not interfere. I use them as cheap insurance when it comes to a misstep (where she can hit herself), rocks and brush. It has always paid off and I have thrown several pairs away after rides because they were trashed from the trail BUT her legs were saved.

**What kind of shoes do you use on your horse?** Wide-web iron shoes with clips, the rear shoes have trailers. Pads? Never used until the last two seasons, when my farrier started her on a frog/wedge pad because she is so flat-soled and becoming more so with age.(Sean has given me a new horse with this setup) Easyboots? I have used it once in 12 years (this year, in fact, when we lost a shoe) it worked perfectly.

**What kind of problems have you encountered?** Finding a good reliable farrier who understood Ami's special needs (flat sole, long pasterns, LT/LH on fronts, brittle hoof walls on rears). I have had three great ones, and several not so good ones over the years. Right now, we have THE BEST (Sean McGee) and we worship the ground he walks on! Haha Seriously though, he has literally given me a brand new horse with what he had done for her.

**What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had?** Kicked on a training ride on the point of shoulder during the off-season. She received a severe laceration as a result, but luckily no infection or residual problems.

**How did you work through it?** Outside the necessary medical treatment, crying a lot and praying even more that it wasn't a career-ending incident.

**Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse.** I have enjoyed them all, but I think Tevis 1994 would be the best, it was surreal. Somewhere in the dark along the California Loop, something clicked between us, and our relationship bonded forever. Up until that time, she seemed to be testing me every chance she had. She wasn't mean, just didn't trust people at all. We were nicknamed "Buckaroo Blonde and her Bronc" because she bucked at every ride, and I seemed to end up on the ground sometime during the 50 miles.

Tevis was a turning point for us. I was riding my dream, one that I had since I was 14 years old living in Washington state. Unfortunately, my training/riding partner Dale Peterson was pulled at Deadwood and I had to continue on without him. It was disappointing, but he was wonderful about it. He finally got out of Deadwood, and was there to meet me at the finish line at 4:45 a.m. the next day, and we celebrated together at the BBQ. (Dale got his buckle the next year.) Dan took my photo with Julie Suhr, and I remember her telling me the first buckle was the best, it was magic and I should sleep with it under my pillow that night. I remember laying in bed that night, flat on my back, Tevis buckle on my chest, and telling Dan that I could die right then and my life would be complete. HAHAAH At that point, we were going for 10 buckles. We ended up doing Tevis three more times, receiving two more buckles. Our crew is what got us through, we could not have done any of it without them.

**Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse.** Probably this year at the National Championships at Red Rock. It was our first metabolic pull, and watching her being treated was tough. Thankfully it was a bad cramp, and she recovered by the time she unloaded from the trailer at camp, but you never know exactly how things will play out. She could not have been in better hands than with the veterinary staff at VC #3, and their treatment of her. All I could think about was the possibility of losing her--this year had been particularly rough, having put three horses down in five months, I was not prepared to lose her too. All I could think was "Oh God, please not Ami." I will never forget Susan McCartney's calm assuring professional manner as she worked on Ami, nor Barney Fleming leaning over telling me, "She is going to be all right." as he disappeared off to the next VC. Not only was Ami in the best hands, so was I.

**Addendum:** It seems every time something monumental happens, Dan is always somewhere else, usually elk hunting. This year was no exception. He was out of town for two of the serious horse problems, and hunting during the NC. Now the poor guy is paranoid to leave town anymore. hahaha Like I tell him, we cannot always predict when tragedy is going to hit us, but if he wasn't in the picture, I would always have the horses and would have to deal with whatever happens by myself anyway. It's just nice when he comes home so I can talk to him about what happened.

**What was your most humbling experience?** At the beginning of our career, we were pulled at the Castlerock Ride, and as I was leading Ami back to the trailer, she was being a horrible brat not being able to continue on, and threw herself down on the ground squealing and kicking her legs in front of another's rider's rig. The rider, who had been working on her horse, peeked around the side of the trailer, and said, "Oh my, we are having a little temper tantrum, aren't we?" I wanted to crawl in a hole--the rider was Julie Suhr, one of my idols.

**What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important?** Almost every ride has at least one surprise waiting for you (good or bad). If you go out to have fun, you are rarely disappointed, and if you place well, it is icing on the cake. When you take time to understand your horse, they will make you a better person. The world is much more exciting when you are riding your horse, so don't sweat the small stuff in life; Your horse already knows that, and that's what makes them such great partners.

Maintaining your health so you can ride produces big rewards in all other aspects of your life. Never be in such a hurry on the trail that you cannot offer help to another rider in need. You don't have to ride fast all the time, but you should ride smart.

**Where does your horse live?** She lives at home on 3 acres. She can see us from wherever she roams, and has a lean-to she can get out of the weather, but she prefers to sleep next to the redwoods outside our bedroom window. In the summer when the windows are open and I'm getting ready to turn in, she always lets out a huge SIGH to let me know she is there. It is wonderful going to sleep with that sound in your brain. Makes it feel like ride camp all year.

**What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of its life in?** She was with her dam and others on pasture at an Arabian farm in Oregon for the first four years. Then she was sold to a rancher in Southern Oregon, who tried to use her for ranch work. That did not work out, so he then sold her to a notorious horse trader, who took her to Nevada and sold her to the woman I bought her from. She was isolated once she left the herd from what I can piece together.

**What are your horse's strengths? Weaknesses?** Strengths: She is built solid and very intelligent. Her brain seems to always be engaged. She loves to make me laugh (nuzzling me until she can provoke a laugh, then standing back staring at me, then doing it again for another laugh). She takes care of herself

during the ride -- eating, drinking, etc. She never puts us in a dangerous position on the trail, always watching the trail, other horses' positions, etc. She is independent, competitive, and never seems to run out of energy. She trusts me to take care of her when she is unsure, but pushes me when she wants it her way.

Weaknesses: Long toe/low heels on front, thin hoof walls. She can get pushy at times, but not to the point it is a problem anymore.

**What advice do you have for new riders?** HAVE FUN! Don't be in such a hurry, but do get to know your horse's personality, their strengths and weaknesses, as soon as you can. Once you understand each other, you can really start working together. Keep things simple, from your feeding to your training routines. They really like consistency in their lives, just like we do. Don't be swayed by the latest fad in tack, nutrition or training methods. Research them all and find what is best for your team -- spending a lot of money doesn't translate into "the best" for your horse either. Read books, go to clinics, talk to some veterans, then evaluate YOUR horse and your goals and find a plan for yourself. I have learned so much at every ride and observing others. When we first started, my crew -- loving husband Dan -- would follow veteran riders around to see what they were doing at the vet checks. I was appalled the first time I saw a sloppy bran mash, but if Rio was having that, then Ami would too. Ask a veteran a question and you will usually get a ton of information.

**Looking back, what would you do differently?** Trusted my judgment more. Since I had been away from horses for 30 years, I thought I didn't know anything about them anymore, especially when I was picking myself up off the ground. I grew up on a farm with horses around me everyday, watching them, riding for hours, and taking care of them. Nothing really changed in the time I was away from them, except my self-confidence. Things were pretty much the same as far as the horses went, but it seemed everything else about them changed drastically. As a result, I have spent a lot of time and effort trying to catch up in those areas -- proper tack fitting, their nutritional needs, training methods, etc.

**What do you feel you did right?** Took my time to learn about my horse and her needs. I had to be extremely patient with her because before she came to us she had been very mistreated and naturally distrusted humans, especially men. Whenever I would find myself being frustrated with her, I would reach deep inside for some patience. She tested me all the time in those days, just waiting for me to do what everyone else had -- overpower her and force her to perform, giving her a perfect excuse to blow up. I gave her another way to respond, she didn't have to fight me.

**What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it?** Probably the highest would have to be completing Tevis. Yes, we achieved it three times. But then afterwards we set new goals -- mileage goals, IAHA Achievement Award goals, doing the rides that were fun. HOWEVER, the one goal I started with has never changed --to get as many miles together as we possibly could, and to enjoy them along the way. I made the statement in 1992 and it is the one I keep in my mind with every ride we do.

The top ten rides that we have done were quite by accident. I never set out to top ten, and I am usually the most surprised when we finish in the front of the pack. The multi-days were another accomplishment, but my goal is always to finish the ride, and preferably in eight hours or less. That is what I focus on.

**Describe your horse's personality? How is it like or unlike yours?** Type A, independent, sense of humor, stubborn at times, can be alone or be with a group--it doesn't matter, hates to get wet, prefers open spaces, likes to finish she starts, and looks forward to the next ride. Yep, we are the twins right down to our hair color, and I think this is why we have had some major battles in our relationship.

**What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most?** I like the multadays, but haven't been able to get off work

to them lately, so I would have to say 50's. We are finished with the 100's at this point -- takes too much out of us anymore.

**Describe your electrolyte protocol.** Since she does not syringe well, she gets her lytes (Enduralite) in a bran mash. If the ride is Saturday, then it would be Thursday, Friday nights, Saturday at lunch, Saturday after the ride, and Sunday night when we get home. At home, she has free choice minerals and salts and she helps herself to them anytime.

**Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success?** I have kept it simple throughout the years--grass hay, good clean water, on pasture all year, free choice minerals (ABC), and she is only gets feed when she is working, except for a very small amount mixed with her daily supplements.

**Are there any major changes you've made to your nutrition program that you feel made a noticeable improvement or solved a problem?** I took her off of alfalfa hay immediately when she came to our place -- it made her absolutely crazy (high energy, inattention, obnoxious). I had no idea that it was so bad for horses since we always fed it to our horses growing up -- but that was a long time ago.

**What kind of supplements (if any) do you use?** ABC free choice minerals (6 different mineral and salt choices), and ABC Plus.

**Do you give any kind of joint products?** ABC's Joint Jolt and MVP Matrix 4. After the ride, I rub her legs and large muscles with Sore-No-More gel. I have used Arnica gels from health food stores for many years. They were fairly expensive (but that's relative to having a healthy horse), so was glad when Sore-No-More came out. I have never wrapped her legs after a ride and she has moved out beautifully the next morning. If she had been injured at one time, I would have wrapped, but she has such clean legs, I just wash them down and rub them with the gel.

**How far do you usually travel to rides?** 100-300 miles. I try to stop every two hours no matter where we are going to give her a break. Ami will not urinate in the trailer, so when she has to, I hear this tapping on the trailer, I pull over and she takes care of business. I feel comfortable letting her out anywhere, even along the Interstate Highways. My friend Carol showed me how to whistle and train her to go on command--this has been a big help. Of course, like any good endurance horse, she also goes with me when we take a break on the trail. hahah

**Do you go to many rides outside of your region?** Not as often as I like, but I would love to -- .I cannot wait until I retire!

**Name three people involved in the sport of endurance that you look up to, and why.** There are so many that I admire, but these individuals have had the most influence on where we are today: The nameless vet at Quicksilver in 1992, our first (LD) ride. At the finish, Ami was fractious to say the least - rearing, jumping, and refusing to be handled. (The photos are a riot -- one minute everyone sitting around in their lawn chairs at the finish line; the next, they are running for their lives with chairs and children in hand.) This wonderful man managed to get the vitals that gave us our completion. I stood there with this wild banshee on the end of the lead more embarrassed than excited about our accomplishment. The vet put his arm around me and I will never forget what he said. "You have a very nice mare and someday she is going to make a really good endurance horse. Now, I want you to go home and start working on her ground manners, it is important for both of you." WOW. I wish he could see us now. I have always remembered his words through the years, and his kindness in delivering them. He showed great patience with us and his words were the impetus that made me jump in and stay with endurance. I have never forgotten him. (BTW, when we got back to ride camp, Ami wanted to go a

different direction to the trailer, we disagreed, and she promptly dumped me in the middle of camp. A couple of riders yelled, “get that horse back on trail, she needs to do a 50!”) haha

Then there would be the icons of long distance riding, people like the Waltenspiels, the Suhrs, Trilby Peterson, Bonnie Way, Dave Rabe, Connie Creech and on and on -- -- -- any and all the numerous riders with many miles still competing and still having fun! They are the ones who have given me the most encouragement in continuing on our path. I admire the people who “race” too, but I never had the guts for it since Ami is more of a family member and my only horse.

**Did you have a mentor or first trail partner?** Tell us about him/her/them. I was privileged to have TWO.

Beth Felton. We met through a mutual friend and we rode together for the first couple of years. I am convinced Ami has her tremendous trot by having to keep up with Devon, Beth’s 16+H paint Thoroughbred/Saddlebred gelding. Beth (and Jim, her husband) taught me a lot about LSD riding, enjoying camping out and the trail, and helping me train in a calm manner, even though Ami intimidated me to death at times. I learned to drive my rig by meeting Beth at her place 60 miles away from home, and getting the confidence to do things on my own. I will always be thankful for her getting us started the right way. Beth was the first person who recognized Ami’s potential and she encouraged me to develop it. I was too inexperienced to understand what she meant, but I followed her lead in training her and here we are today.

Dale Peterson. We met getting ready for our first Tevis and I learned how to gauge speed/time/distance with Dale. Dale also knows every inch of the backcountry, and we rode many miles of the Tevis trail training together. I never felt intimidated by the elements with us trotting all over the wilderness. One time we surprised a bear on the trail out of Michigan Bluff and chased him up the trail until he scrambled up a tree. On another occasion, Marge, Dale’s wife, drove us up to Squaw Valley, and we quietly rode through to Robinson Flat. That is what inexperience will do -- it was a month before our first Tevis, Ami was on 10-week shoes and tweaked the left rear shoe on Cougar Rock. Steve Elliot had hiked in to take photos of us (in case we didn’t make it that far on Tevis) and he and Dale pulled the shoe, wrapped her hoof in a towel and duct tape and we walked out to Robinson. Oh boy was that a dumb thing to do, but they managed to save her hoof and we ended up doing Tevis the following month.

**In choosing your next horse, what would you look for?** After soundness and conformation, I would have to say personality. I have been so hung up on “mares”, since I judge all of them being like Ami is now, that’s all I could think of owning. But then my friend Ruthie brought me back to reality with words something to the effect -- Linda my dear, I wouldn’t be so determined to find another mare, as I would be to find a good horse that you can get along with -- -- .wow, were those words of wisdom. As it turns out my next horse is already here, AND she -- yes SHE! --too has a great story of how she came to live with us (a big thanks to Ruth & Ron). I think homeless mares looking for work seem to find their way to me, so it must be part of some big plan. But the “new girl” certainly has personality and athletic ability. Just hope she likes what we do for fun because one day I hope to be writing about “our” 10 years together too.

There are lots of stories and lots of memories, but looking back, there has been an awful lot of luck handed to us as well. We have enjoyed the years with relatively few problems and many completions. On top of it all, we have met our closest friends through endurance and have seen some of the most beautiful country in the world. One day when we can no longer do this (God willing, it will not be too soon), I hope to be left with the most wonderful memories of my life and great friends with which to share them.