

Marie Mallon & Zahin Al-Din (“Zen”)



AERC Decade Team



3035 Miles, 50 ride completions
First AERC ride: 1993 Region: NW

Tell us about your horse. When/how did you come to get him/her? I bought Zen in May of 1993. Pat Richardson called and said she might have the horse I was looking for. I rode him, had a prepurchase exam and paid \$1500 for him one week later.

What is your horse's breeding? Arabian (Naborr).

Sex: Gelding

DOB: 4-23-88

Horse height: 15 hh

Approx. Weight: 800 lbs

Color: Grey

Shoe size: 0 in front, 00 in rear

Easyboot size: 1 in front over shoes, 0 in rear over shoes.

Why did you decide to purchase this horse (or if you didn't purchase, why did you choose to use this horse in endurance)? After 5 years of casually searching for an endurance horse, Pat called me. I thoroughly checked him out, rode him and he met my list so I bought him. I have a fact sheet I copied from the Trail Blazer many years ago of what to look for in an endurance horse. I've added to it over the years but still follow it faithfully.

Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse? I really only had one other endurance horse. I was lucky enough to ride Fleet Son for a friend for an entire season. I've ridden a couple others but nothing serious.

How many different horses have you ridden in this sport? Zen is the first horse I've campaigned seriously. The other, (Fleet Son), I rode for one season. Four other horses I rode in less than 4 rides.

Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities? I ride with my kids for fun. Sometimes I ride for cattle.

How many years have you been involved with horses? In endurance? I grew up on a cattle ranch so have been around horses my entire life, I don't remember learning how to ride. I've been in endurance for 16 years.

What got you interested in endurance riding? What was it that kept you interested? I saw an article in our local paper on Heidi Smith and thought I would really like to try this sport. A short time later my parents bought two Arabs to use for cattle. Neither horse was a great prospect for endurance but a while later I was introduced to Fleet Son. I couldn't believe the way that horse could fly. I knew he would be a great horse for endurance. I taught in Culver where Jennifer Horsman lived and knew she was very involved in the sport. I talked to her and decided to try it. Fleet Son was very good and made it so exhilarating. Zen is probably what has kept me interested in endurance. He is always so willing, happy and fun to ride. I love to ride him and never get enough.

How old was your horse when first started? First ride? Zen was almost five when I bought him. He was on the racetrack but got shin buck and was retired after his first race. I conditioned him for 3 months and took him on a 50.

How many rides did you do the first, second, and third ride seasons? The first year I did one 50 mile ride, (I had a two year old, and a new baby, both human). The second year I did four 50 mile rides. The third year I did one 50 mile ride (had another baby, human).

What mileage distance did you start with? I started with 50's. I've never cared for 25's and think it teaches the horse poor endurance habits.

How long until you top tenned or 'raced'? I was in the 30's the first year, 20's the second year and third years. By the 4th year I was in the Top 10 and Top 5. I planned it very carefully and followed the goals I set.

How much time off do you give between ride seasons? I give Zen three months off completely.

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? I give Zen two weeks off after a 100 with no riding. I then ride him easy to see how he feels. I get back into riding slowly and then back into training rides. This ends up to be about six weeks between 100's. Our schedule in the month leading up to the ride depends what we've done prior to the 100. Hopefully I would have done a 50 miler two or three weeks before the 100. I would ride him a couple of times after a week off from the 50 and then take him to the 100. This is assuming he is in pretty good shape.

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've only done two multadays and could only attend for two days each. So I'm not a good representative of that schedule.

What kind of tack do you use? I just bought a Free n Easy saddle after trying it out at the PAC, it comes with booties for the pads. I use a Wintec girth, Tom Thumb bit, splint boots, crupper and rump rug.

What kind of shoes do you use on your horse? I have used steel shoes for 9 years, never wore pads and was never pulled. Since then I've tried using equi-pak and Easyboots. I prefer using shoes only.

What kind of problems have you encountered? I feel the equi-pak gives the horse too much concussion and haven't used it again. I've had a hot nail and a bad saddle fit. The saddle has been the only serious problem I've encountered.

What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had? The worst injury Zen has had was a broken nose. He broke it on the fence. We've never had a severe or serious injury from endurance riding. The saddle has been the only problem we've had.

How did you work through it? For Zen's broken nose we had surgery and they pulled it up and wired it in place. He is fine now and you can hardly see a scar. For the saddle problem we tried a couple of saddles. None of them really hurt his back he just didn't move as freely as he should. One made him move so differently that it made him sore everywhere, (front end and hind end) and we pulled. Now I have a new used saddle and have completed a 100, two 50's and a 75 in that order. The two 50's were at a multiday. I told the venders I would try the saddle on a 100 and if I finished it in good shape I would buy it. We finished happily and won BC so I bought the saddle.

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse? Wow, that is tough. Almost all my rides have been great. Probably the most fun, though, has been the multadays. The trails in Idaho are beautiful, the dry creek beds, the views of the mountains, the rolling hills and the temperature is so nice later in the year. I like to ride when it is crisp and a little cool in the fall. I also love to ride at night. Isn't that why we ride all day long in the sun, so we can canter along in the dark? I've ridden so many rides on Zen and snatches of them stick out as being wonderful but they are pieces from many different rides.

Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse? The worst day was when I tried to do a 100 with the poor saddle fit. Zen was really brave and tried his hardest. I could tell he wasn't moving out like he normally does. At 80 miles we walked in and he was ok but when we trotted it was impossible to tell exactly where the lameness was, it was everywhere. His back wasn't sore but his body was not moving freely and it made the entire package sore.

What was your most humbling experience? I guess I don't really have one, except that I do know that in all things there are greater and lesser competitions and I try to be humble and not compare.

What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important? I think the lesson I have learned is to try and go as natural as possible. If you are doing something that works don't change it. If you start doing FEI, don't let it dictate which rides you go to and when. Make it fit your schedule, not you fitting the FEI schedule. I've also learned something through circumstances but not by a lesson. I had small babies and was pregnant when I bought Zen. He came second in my life. Because of this I was not able to override him or bring him along too quickly. I thank my kids for keeping Zen sound. I'm sure I would've been out there training him too much and going to too many rides. They still keep me from overriding him and they are 13, 11 and 8. Lastly, if you are in doubt, opt for rest rather than training. Horses keep their conditioning a lot longer than we do. I've learned this out of necessity a couple of times.

Where does your horse live? Zen lives at home in a pasture. He starts getting hay in the fall.

What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of its life? Zen was in a pasture with a herd and then sent to the race track.

What are your horse's strengths? Weaknesses? Zen's strengths are his attitude and personality. He is always happy to go, no matter what. His personality is very professional. It is his profession to be an endurance horse and he takes it very seriously. No person or horse gets in his way and he does not wait for another horse. His weakness is his downhill ability. He is a slow walker downhill. He has a normal heart rate but not as low as some.

What advice do you have for new riders? Don't override your horse. Don't train every day, let the horse recuperate and let the horse rest after a ride. Relax, take more time during a ride and let him eat a couple of minutes longer. Don't get caught up in a race. Remember you have two brains to tell to slow down and yours is the easy one. Relax some more.

Looking back, what would you do differently? I would not have let FEI stuff make me feel like I needed to change my schedule. I didn't have a pull until I nominated. I would have just kept doing my own thing my way.

What do you feel you did right? I feel bringing Zen along slowly was right. We walked for the first month of training only. I did that for about five years. Then we started trotting but not much. The spring training was never rushed and I feel that has been good to build Zen up from his bones to ligaments, to tendons, to muscles, to lungs. We still walk for about 3 weeks before any trotting in the spring.

What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it? I didn't really have any lofty goals, just to keep him sound and never get pulled. We did that for nine years. Then Pat Murray suggested I nominate for Pan Am's. So that became my goal. We did end up going to Vermont for the 2001 PAC. I was lucky enough to get a Bronze medal for the team competition thanks to Jazon Wonders, Karen Vilander and Dennis Summers. I was cleanup. I didn't achieve my next goal, PAC in Troutlake, but was an alternate and enjoyed being included in everything. I still am very content in my years with Zen. My next goal is to ride him until he is 20. He is 15 now.

Describe your horse's personality? How is it like or unlike yours? Zen is very competitive, aloof and pretty. I guess we are both competitive but that is the only similarity.

What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most? We just returned from Steph's ride in Oreana, ID so right now that is my favorite. But we only did two days so that may not be fair. I would say 100's are my favorite, given the choice, I always choose the longest distance.

Describe your electrolyte protocol. I put electrolytes in his feed on Thursday night, then again Friday morning if I'm traveling a long way. Then in his feed Friday night. Saturday when I get up I give him a dose in a syringe. I give them at every vet check and at some stops if it is hot. I continue to give them Saturday night and Sunday night, sometimes Monday if it was a stressful, hot ride.

Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success? I don't think so.

Are there any major changes you've made to your nutrition program (i.e., 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? E-S-E powder (selenium), Vita-Flex Accel, Joint Combo, Fastrack.

Do you give any kind of joint products? Joint Combo (glucosamine & chondroitin), Adequan before long distances.

How far do you usually travel to rides? Usually about three hours.

Do you go to many rides outside of your region? Not very often.

Name three people involved in the sport of endurance that you look up to, and why? Jennifer Horsman taught me how to ride my horse to make him last. It has worked so far. And Darla Westlake, I love the way she wins so quietly.

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner? Tell us about him/her/them. This was the same person, Jennifer. She started endurance riding in CA in the '70's. She then moved to Culver, OR to continue her riding. I met her in the 80's and started to ride with her. She was very careful with her horses and she conditioned them faithfully. She was always happy while riding and very competitive. She had a bad hip which made her the toughest endurance rider I know. She taught me about legging them up, feeding, electrolytes and more. I still think about many things she said to me.

In choosing your next horse, what would you look for? I would like the horse to look like Zen's body type with only small changes. I would like the horse to naturally use his hind end more effectively. I would like the head carriage not quite so high. The rest would be the same; great feet, good bone, nice sloping shoulder, straight legs, nice eyes, normal wither, neck and heart girth, medium width and, of course, pretty.

All of these comments are, of course, my opinion. I have been accused of being overly cautious, so keep that in mind!