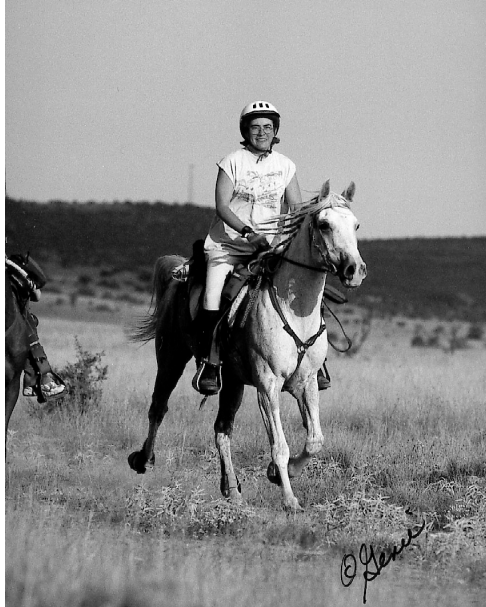


Susie Jones & Rococco Mirado “Frightnin’ Lightnin’”



AERC Decade Team



**2420 Miles, 46 ride completions.
First AERC ride: 1990 Region: SW**

Tell us about your horse. When/how did you come to get him/her? I bought Lightnin' in May 1990 from Mary Koefod (of Dana's Northlite fame). We arranged to meet at an endurance ride for me to try him out (it was in Missouri - I can't remember the name of the ride). Mary showed up 15 minutes before the 50 miler was to start: she was planning to ride the 50; I was going to use the 25 miler as my "trial ride". As she was saddling up, she pointed out the gear for Lightnin': she was gone by the time I began to saddle the horse. I used her Stubben English saddle with a girth that was about an inch too long. After a somewhat shaky start (due to my fear that the saddle would slip), Lightnin' settled in nicely and by the end of the 25 miler I was ready to buy.

What is your horse's breeding? Arabian

Sex: Gelding

DOB: 4-24-84

Horse height: 15 hands

Approx. Weight: 950

Color: Grey

Shoe 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'd just started endurance and the horse I already owned was not very well suited for the sport. I was looking for a horse that was already old enough and in good enough physical shape for 50 milers, was basically well built, and (most importantly) had a good mental attitude and a compatible personality. I wanted a horse that I could spend a few years learning the sport with: competitive ability

was relatively low on the list; although at the time that I bought him I thought he might become fairly competitive.

Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse? I started with some LD rides in 1989 on my little half-Arab. When he suffered a suspensory injury after a couple of LD rides, new acquaintances from the Ozark Country Endurance Riders (OCER) were quick to provide me with horses that needed some LD experience. Before long, I'd ridden eight different horses on rides. By the time I bought Lightnin', I'd competed in two 50 mile rides (on two different horses).

How many different horses have you ridden in this sport? Not counting the horses I rode LD when I was first getting started, I've ridden nine different horses - four of them were/are my own. Eight of the nine horses are alive and well today and at least six of them are still being used (at least occasionally) for endurance riding.

Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities? Not in any "formal" sports, but I do occasionally go trail riding with non-endurance friends and have helped a neighbor move cows (by galloping ahead and opening gates).

How many years have you been involved with horses? In endurance? I've been "involved" with horses ever since I can remember, so I guess you could say about 45 years. I learned to ride at age 6 and got my first pony at age 10. I've owned horses ever since. I first became interested in endurance in the early 1970s: I read about the sport when I was in my early teens. But it was not until 1989 that I finally met some people involved in the sport and got a chance to participate. (I grew up in Arkansas and endurance riding just wasn't "being done" in my area in the '70s.)

What got you interested in endurance riding? What was it that kept you interested? When I was a kid, a group of us would get together at about dawn on Saturday mornings and ride until dusk. When I read about endurance, I realized that it was the only sport that embodied what I liked most about horseback riding: going as far as possible in one day. What's kept me interested in the sport is the chance to travel to different parts of the country (and the world) and experience the area on horseback, in a competitive environment with people from varied backgrounds who share my interest in horses.

How old was your horse when first started? First ride? Lightnin' was 6 years old when I bought him. I believe Mary Koefod started riding him at age 3. Before I bought him, she was conditioning him by riding him to work and back (I think that was a 25 mile round-trip). I believe that the 25 miler that I rode him on in May 1990 was his first competitive event. I rode him on his first 50 miler in June 1990.

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

1st year (1990): 1 25 miler, 5 50 milers

2nd year (1991): 2 50 milers

Lightnin did not compete in any endurance rides from August 1991 through March 1993: during this time, he had an intermittent lameness, which was caused by a green ocelot.

3rd year (1993): 8 50 milers (1 1st place & BC), 1 100 miler

What mileage distance did you start with? I did the one 25 miler "trial ride" and then went straight to 50 milers: the horse had been conditioned and was ready for 50s. Although I was fairly conservative, I realize now that being naive and eager some of our early rides were done at a faster-than-ideal pace.

How long till you top tenned or 'raced'? Looking back at the rides I did from 1990 through 1993, there were rarely more than 15 horses starting the ride - 10 of the 16 rides had 10 or less starters - so I often top

tenned! The first 50 we did was MAHA (MO) in June 1990. There were 16 starters, 10 finishers, and we finished in 6th place (ride time was 7:28, so we weren't burning up the trail). The 2nd 50 we did was the Au Clair de Lune (MO - a night ride) in early August 1990. It had 10 starters, 6 finishers, and we finished 5th in 10:13. I remember that these two rides were pretty tough: we did well just to finish. We pulled at our 3rd attempt at a 50 (the Dog Days Dash (KS) in late August 1990) due to a saddle sore: the result of an over-zealous rider (me) who wouldn't face up to the fact that she shouldn't be starting the horse with an ill-fitting saddle that had already caused a "slight rub". Looking at the stats, I realize that I more-or-less raced on our 4th 50: this was the Trail of Tears (AR) in October 1990. 12 started, 11 finished, and we were 2nd with a ride time of 5:12. I remember that after that ride, Lightnin' developed an "appetite" for racing. It was probably 2 1/2 years before we were able to more or less resolve that problem.

It would be almost three years before I "raced" again - we did a couple of slower 50s, laid off for over 1 1/2 years, and came back with a number of really slow 50s (8+ to 9+ hours). The Arkansas Traveler (AR) in September 1993 was the ride where we "raced" and won 1st & BC. This ride had 9 starters and 8 finishers. The night before the ride, I realized that the only "hot shoes" at the ride were either coming off a competitive ride or preparing for a competitive ride: they wouldn't be racing. Lightnin' and I knew the trail well and he liked the trail. I remember lying in my sleeping bag thinking "hot damn... we could WIN this thing tomorrow!". We finished in 5:19 - about 30 minutes ahead of the 2nd place horse just to assure that we'd also get BC. That's the ride where Lightnin' earned the nickname "Frightnin' Lightnin".

How much time off do you give between ride seasons? My ride season generally ends in mid-to-late November and picks up again in mid-February or March. This is due more to my reluctance to compete during the cold months than a kindness to my horse (although I do think that it is good to give the horse a "break" from time-to-time).

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've competed in close to 30 100s myself, but with Lightnin' I've started 6 and completed 4. I don't have any "hard and fast" rules in this area: it really depends upon the condition of the horse and the difficulty of the ride. When determining time off after ANY ride, I look at how quickly the horse recovers. It's basically the same for determining a schedule before a ride: it depends on the condition of the horse, how difficult the terrain is going to be, and how competitive I think I want to be at the ride.

If you have done multidays, how much time off do you give after doing one? What is your schedule in the month leading up to the ride? My situation doesn't allow for me to compete in many multi-days - especially for the full "term" of the ride - but I love the multi-day format. I guess what I'm about to talk about here is one of those "don't try this at home" stories: One of Lightnin's most memorable accomplishments was finishing all 5 days of Timberon (NM) in 1998. In early 1998, Lightnin' had not been ridden in competition since February 1997: I was concentrating on another horse (who was very "accident prone"). In April 1998, I ended up jerking Lightnin' out of the pasture at the last minute and taking him to the Indian Springs (NM) 50 when the other horse turned up with a superficial cut on his ankle after I was all packed up to leave for the ride. My plan was to ride it one-check-at-a-time and pull at the first sign of problems. We ended up finishing in 7:25 - Lightnin' was very tired, but recovered quickly. In late May 1998, my "accident prone" horse and I ended up finding some buried barbwire on the side of a dirt road: this resulted in a rather nasty accident. Luckily, I was unhurt but the horse had once again sustained an injury that would sideline him for a couple of weeks. With the Timberon 5-day ride only a month away, I decided to scrap my plans to ride the horse I'd been concentrating on and to press Lightnin' into service. In early June, I took Lightnin' to the Desert Sky Riders (NM) and did a fairly easy 50 on him in 8:25. When I showed up with him at Timberon about three weeks later, the joke was that he had been sent to the "fat farm" for a week. Our average ride time was around 8 1/2 hours per day. He came through

it in great shape and was even "stronger" on day five than he was on day one. Once again, what you do after/before a ride is dependent upon too many factors to have a "hard and fast" rule. A lot depends upon your goals and your ability to adapt those goals to your horse's level of fitness.

What kind of tack do you use? I ride in a John Fallis saddle - it's wonderful. I use a Toklat woolback pad, a mohair girth, and an egg-butt snaffle (and sometimes - late in the ride - just a halter).

What kind of shoes do you use on your horse? I usually use "just regular" shoes without caulks or heels. I used pads at Timberon (and they worked well), but haven't since. I've used Easyboots on occasion, but not usually.

What kind of problems have you encountered? Early on: saddle-fitting problems. Later: Intermittent lameness problems.

What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had? The green ocelot. It is theorized that this problem was caused by too much stress on the horse's ankles when he was very young.

How did you work thru it? Time. My veterinarian told me that if I would be patient, the ocelot would "harden" and the horse would be okay, although he would probably develop arthritis, as he got older. After his layoff, he came back "just fine" for about three years: I was giving the horse joint supplements during this time. By late 1995, I was sometimes noticing a slight lameness after the rides. We moved from Arkansas to New Mexico in 1996: the change in climate definitely agreed with Lightnin'. Since I've lived in New Mexico, I have used joint supplements sparingly. I did not have him on supplements when he completed the 5-day Timberon in 1998 without any trace of lameness.

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse? I think I've already done that: our "race" in 1993 when he won 1st & BC and the Timberon 5-day in 1998. Except... now that I think about it... one more really good ride: Colfax Coal Rush (NM) 2000. This ride is "just up the road" and I help Sue Norris Romero (the ride manager) every year. Sue had "rewarded" me by giving me a free ride entry for the 2nd day. Lightnin' didn't even know he was at an endurance ride since we'd spent a lot of time up there helping Sue mark trail. I puttered around camp until all the 50s had left - talking to friends who weren't riding the 2nd day - so I didn't really get started until everyone else had been out for at least 20 minutes. Lightnin' started up the trail at a really nice, relaxed trot... probably waiting for me to start hanging ribbons... after a while, we caught and passed the "turtles"... a few minutes later, we caught and passed a couple of more riders... Lightnin' was beginning to say "Hey! What's going on here? There's NEVER other horses on this trail!" By the time we caught up to the third group of riders, he was saying, "Dammit Susie, you tricked me! This is an ENDURANCE ride!" By the end of the first loop, we were in the top 10. Lightnin' was loving it! We slowly but surely passed almost everyone - ended up finishing 2nd and BC (I'm a little bit sheepish about the BC - we were standing against horses who'd competed the day before). But what made it fun was that I was on a really willing horse that could easily do the pace and obviously enjoyed himself the whole day!

Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse? I think that was the first time we pulled: the Dog Days Dash (KS) in August 1990. I'd (very stupidly) started the ride with a slight saddle sore on Lightnin's withers. I was still very new to the sport and very excited about going to every ride I could: this is the day I learned that sometimes it's best to back off and wait to ride another day. I think it was about halfway through the ride when I realized that the saddle sore was getting worse and that I shouldn't have started in the first place. I was really embarrassed that I'd even started the ride. (According to my notes, I pulled myself: if that's the case, I'm sure the vets were making it clear that they would not approve of me continuing!)

What was your most humbling experience? Between March 1992 and March 1995, I completed 31 rides / 2310 miles without a pull - I was beginning to feel "invincible" (these rides were not all on Lightnin' - Lightnin' & I competed in 16 rides / 960 miles during this period). Between May 1995 and October 1995, I was pulled from four of six rides - three of these were with Lightnin'. Although all the pulls were for very minor issues, it was very humbling to have so many within such a short period of time. What I marvel at now is how often I DO complete a 50 or 100 miler without some at least a minor incident like a sprained ankle or a cut from some "impediment" on the trail.

What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important? Make haste slowly - I try to set the pace that is best for my horse and find that I usually end up passing other riders in the vet checks. If the ride becomes a major hassle to get to, you probably don't need to be going in the first place.

Where does your horse live? We've got 15 acres - the horses (I've got just 2 at the moment) are up in large corrals at night and on pasture all day.

What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of its life in? I think Mary Koefod had a number of horses (5-10) in fairly large, hilly pasture(s) when he was young. When I was in Arkansas, he was on various pastures that ranged in size from 5 to 20 acres and was with two to four other horses most of the time.

What are your horse's strengths? Weaknesses? I think of Lightnin' as rather "stoic" - I didn't realize what a "strong" horse he was until I got other horses that needed me to be strong for them. Lightnin' is very self confident, but you don't realize that until you deal with less self-confident animals. Over the years, I've come to realize that my confidence had been "fed" by Lightnin's sense of confidence. Weaknesses? Mentally, a tendency to "buddy up" too much with another horse if he travels to the ride with it. Physically, intermittent lameness - and this has ended up being a minor problem.

What advice do you have for new riders? It's so easy to get caught up in your horse's enthusiasm for this sport. The cardiovascular system develops more quickly than the muscles/tendons/bones, so a competitive horse "feels" like he can go faster/longer than his body is ready for - not to mention factors like herd instinct and adrenalin. In some ways, a willing horse is the worst thing for a new rider: don't believe that horse when he says "don't hold me back!" Although I consider endurance a "team sport" with some give-and-take between the horse and rider (I often allow Lightnin' to choose the pace), it's still up to the rider to make an "executive decision" if the horse isn't thinking clearly.

No ride is so important that it's worth the risk of not being able to ride another day.

Watch and listen to other riders - you can learn from both more experienced and less experienced riders. And realize that sometimes (regardless of the rider's experience) you'll see things that you don't want to learn to do yourself.

Looking back, what would you do differently? I probably would have spent more time riding Lightnin' and less time with my "more competitive" prospects. After having laid Lightnin' off due to the green ocelot, I decided that he would become my "backup horse" - no big plans for him (although I did quite a bit with him in 1993 thru 1995), I'd just keep him around in case my "competition horse" needed some time off. In retrospect, Lightnin's accomplished more for me than any other horse I've owned.

What do you feel you did right? Funny thing... probably the one thing that I "would have done differently" is the one thing I "probably did right"... with Lightnin's intermittent lameness problems, it's probably best that I didn't push him to be my "competition horse".

What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it? When I first bought him, one of my goals was to make him into a "competitive" 100-mile horse. That just didn't work out.

At the moment, my goal is reaching 3000 miles. He's got 2420 and I'm planning to continue riding him for at least one more year - probably two. We won't push it, but if it happens that would be nice.

But when I look back to "the reason I bought this horse", I realize our main goal has been accomplished. I was looking for a horse that I could have fun with while learning this sport and Lightnin' has certainly fulfilled his job. Of course, the more I learn the more I realize I don't know: there's no way I'll ever "know it all", but it sure has been fun getting to the point I am now with a horse like Lightnin'!

Describe your horse's personality? How is it like or unlike yours? For years I thought he was pretty standoffish... I've decided he's stoic. I know that I can be standoffish at times, which is possibly what attracted me to his personality. I think he shares my dry sense of humor - and we both love camping. I've come to realize over the years that he's got a lot of self-confidence... I consider myself self-confident until I encounter a horse that is not. We've worked out a system when I'm riding - I call it "auto-pilot". I pretty much allow him to go whatever pace he chooses (as long as he's not acting stupid) and we just seemed to "flow along" down the trail. Lately, he's become pretty affectionate: maybe he's getting senile, but it's kind of nice (and maybe I'm getting senile and affectionate, too!).

What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most? I really like the challenge of the 100s, although that's not Lightnin's forte. I also love the challenge of the multadays, although those are difficult for me to participate in as much as I'd like. These days, I'm looking for two to three day rides to "get my moneys worth". I don't have a 100-mile horse at the moment, but luckily my friend Genie Wunderlich will supply me with one whenever I can work a 100 miler into my schedule.

Describe your electrolyte protocol. I generally electrolyte the night before the ride, the morning of the ride, and at every vet check. If a loop is particularly long or it is particularly hot, I'll try to electrolyte approximately halfway through the loop (where water is available).

Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success? Very good quality hay (brougham, alfalfa mix - in moderation). Beet pulp.

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? I think it was around 1997 that I "discovered" beet pulp. I've found it to be most useful not only in my home feeding program, but in getting the horse more hydrated at the ride. I use pellets, so I always soak them before feeding: at the rides, I use a bit of "extra" water.

What kind of supplements (if any) do you use? I don't use any at this time - "if you don't have a problem, don't fix it" (remember: I'm also not very competitive).

Do you give any kind of joint products? I've used joint supplements in the past and will use them again if I feel like the horse will benefit from them.

How far do you usually travel to rides? At least eight hours.

Do you go to many rides outside of your region? Yes.

Name three people involved in the sport of endurance that you look up to, and why? Genie Wunderlich. Genie and I started competing at about the same time, but whereas I consider myself somewhat of a "hobbyist", endurance is her life. She's very consistent with her conditioning program and is a continual student of horse management techniques.

Jim Baldwin. A vet who rides (and who isn't afraid to state his opinion).

The Volunteer. Anyone who supports the sport by giving of his or her time (board members, ride managers, volunteers who help with rides, etc.). AERC is totally dependent upon those people who take the time to help keep the sport alive.

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner? Tell us about him/her/them. First trail partners/mentors: Kathy Crothers & Carol Patterson. The two of them got me started in 1989. Since my move from Arkansas to New Mexico, I've lost contact with Carol, but Kathy and I keep in touch and still manage to see each other occasionally at rides (and often ride together when at these rides). I'm still learning from Kathy: she's been a huge support over the years.

In choosing your next horse, what would you look for? Most importantly: personality. My main goal is to "have fun" and I can't have fun with a horse I don't like. I'll never find a "perfect" physical specimen, but for this sport you've got to have a horse with a decent build, good bone, and basically straight legs. And I like them short - 15 hands is just about as tall as I want (as I tell everyone: horses get taller at 90 miles).

Add any additional comments or stories that you can think of: I started to use this story for "the worst day we ever had", but after I thought about it, I realized it was actually a very nice ride until the very end - and since the horse did not sustain an injury, the only "bad" part was that we didn't get to finish the ride. The ride was the 100 mile "On the Road to the World" in Kansas in 1995. We'd had a really good day - we were pacing with Melissa Crain and having a blast! We came in to the 93-mile check "feeling great" and running around 10th/11th place. After timing in, Lightnin' stumbled as I was walking over to present to the vets. When I trotted out and turned around to head back to the vets, I could tell something was wrong: the vets (most of whom I knew well) appeared to almost be trying to avert their eyes so they wouldn't have to "see" what was going on. Lightnin' was trotting lame and at the end of the trot-out his pulse was 70. Within an hour, he would be perfectly fine. But he did not pass the 93-mile vet check. Of course, I was terribly disappointed, but I sure was glad to go home with a healthy, sound horse!