

DISCOVER

ENDURANCE RIDING



American Endurance Ride Conference
<https://AERC.org> • 866-271-2372

Photo taken at the Prater Mountain Ride in Idaho,
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DREAM. PLAN. TRAIN. RIDE.

If you have ridden a horse, you've probably of riding on a mountain trail as spring's first wildflowers are beginning to bloom, or across a desert where you travel in the hoof prints of long-ago horses, or over rolling hills with breathtaking vistas of trees in the peak of autumn glory.

Endurance riding makes these dreams possible. There is a bond created between an endurance rider and equine over months of training, and then through miles of competition, that is unparalleled in any other sport.

You are invited to experience this equestrian sport, which welcomes riders of all ages and equines of any breed. Endurance welcomes those who embrace our "to finish is to win" philosophy as well as riders who strive for high placings and a chance to earn top regional and national awards.

How to get started? Reading this booklet is a great first step. You're also encouraged to:

1. Join the American Endurance Ride Conference. Membership means you will receive an AERC number for you and your horse (or mule) so your mileage will be tabulated whenever and wherever you compete. You'll also receive an Endurance Rider's Handbook, educational materials, a subscription to the monthly *Endurance News* magazine, and fellowship with thousands of fellow endurance enthusiasts. Your membership dollars also support trails preservation and trail building, equine research, and education outreach.

2. Train for endurance. If you are a regular trail rider, your horse may already be ready for a limited distance ride. (Getting an

OK from your veterinarian is recommended.) If you're starting out, long slow distance is the key to building up the stamina and muscle strength required for this demanding sport (for both you and your horse).

3. Volunteer at an AERC ride. Volunteering is the perfect way to find out more about the sport, learn how a vet check works, meet endurance riders and their horses, and get involved. Call an AERC ride manager to get started.

4. Read and learn all you can. Books, websites, blogs and AERC's regional mentors provide knowledge and food for thought as you begin your endurance career.

Notice we didn't say you had to run out and buy a new saddle or tack or riding gear? Endurance riding is a great come-as-you-are sport with the motto "to finish is to win."

Want more information? Call the office, 866-271-2372 — we're in Auburn, California, the Endurance Capital of the World — and we're here to help you get started.

Visit AERC's page just for new riders:
[AERC.org/compete/new-member-info](https://www.aerc.org/compete/new-member-info)

WELCOME TO AERC AND ENDURANCE RIDING

On almost every weekend, you can participate in an endurance ride sanctioned by the American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC). Endurance riding is a recreational equine sport enjoyed by many throughout the world. In the 2019 ride year, there were 850+ rides across AERC's nine regions in the U.S. and Canada, with nearly 15,000 rider starts, and more than 500,000 miles completed. These rides consist of distances between 25 and 100 miles, and may have just a few riders or more than 100. Often there are also introductory ("fun") rides of up to 15 miles at these rides.

AERC's monthly magazine sent to all members, *Endurance News*, lists all upcoming endurance rides and has articles of interest to the members. It also includes ride results and standings in both national and regional award categories. AERC's website, AERC.org, has a frequently updated ride calendar section.

When you join AERC, you'll receive a welcome packet and an ID card with your AERC number, plus a list of mentors in your region. Be sure to register your equine as well, as AERC tracks mileage for both riders and horses by their numbers. Your first horse registration is free with new membership.

First, some basics

AERC rides are open to all equine breeds, including mules. While more than half of participants ride an Arabian or an Arabian cross, all breeds of horses can and do successfully compete in endurance rides. Each year more than a dozen breed organizations give awards for endurance participation.

No matter what the breed, it is essential that the horse be conditioned and prepared with trail work to participate in an AERC ride.

An equine must be at least 48 months of age to compete in a 25-mile ride; 60 months for 50-mile rides,

and 72 months for 100-mile rides. The rider has six hours to complete a 25-mile ride, 12 hours to complete a 50-mile ride, and 24 hours to complete a 100-mile ride. The performance of the horse cannot be enhanced nor can pain be masked by the use of chemo-therapeutic agents during the course of the ride.

Tack and camping

This sport requires no special tack or equipment. Most riders begin the sport without needing to purchase new tack or a saddle. At rides you will see horses



On the trail with a Mustang, a Mule and a Quarter Horse at the Iron Horse ride in Ohio. Photo © Peter DeMott, www.photosbypeterdemott.com

with Western, English and endurance saddles, and multiple kinds of bits, reins and saddle pads.

Endurance ride base camps are usually situated in parks, campgrounds or open fields. Typically riders camp near their horses. Riders will use motor homes, campers, vans, tents, or may even sleep in the back of their truck or horse trailer.

Some will tie their horses to the trailer, and others will use portable corrals. Some base camps are at facilities with horse corrals. Keeping your equine close by ensures you can check your equine partner before and after the ride.

For the rider

Riders wear jeans, riding breeches, running tights, even shorts. (Many are partial to bright-colored riding tights and ride t-shirts.) Footwear might be Western boots, English boots or running shoes. There is no minimum age requirement, although junior riders (under 16) must ride with a sponsor (18 years of age or older) at all times. Although helmets are recommended, they are only mandatory for junior riders. Some ride managers may require helmets at their rides.

Entering a ride

Those interested in a particular ride will request a ride entry from the ride manager. Alternately, many rides have flyers and entry forms posted on AERC's online calendar page (AERC.org) or have their own websites and/or Facebook pages.

The cost of the entry fee will vary, but can range from \$90 for a no-frills ride to \$300 for a championship-level ride. For the entry fee, the rider will be given the opportunity to participate in the ride, will receive a completion award, and will often be provided dinner at the awards banquet. The completion award may be

a certificate or a t-shirt — or it could be a custom belt buckle. The awards banquet may be potluck where the riders each bring a dish to share or it could be a barbecue steak dinner.

Many of the rides don't make money, and the entry fees just cover the costs of putting on the ride. Normally, the only people paid are the veterinarians; all others are volunteers.

Entry fees also cover the use of the base camp, insurance, permits, drug testing fees, sanctioning fees, completion awards, food, advertising, trail markings, porta-potty rental, water hauling, etc.

Vetting-in and the ride meeting

The day before the ride, the participants will present their horses to the control judge (a veterinarian) for pre-ride vet inspection. The horse's resting heart rate and body condition score will be noted. The control judge will check the horse's back for soreness, his legs for wounds or swelling or tenderness, will listen for gut sounds, will check the horse's hydration level and capillary refill time, and will then ask the rider to trot the horse out to determine soundness. All this information is written on the rider card, which riders carry throughout the ride. Once the horse passes inspection, an entry number is written on the horse's hip with a grease marker.

Later in the day, there will be a ride meeting so the ride manager can give the participants pertinent information regarding start time, trail markings, hold times, etc. The head control judge will discuss aspects of the ride that may affect the performance and health of the horse, such as expected temperature, humidity, altitude, etc. The control judge will also inform the participants what the heart rate criterion will be for the vet checks along the trail.



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The criterion is the pre-established heart rate that the horse must reach at each vet check before the hold time can begin. If the required heart rate isn't met within 30 minutes of arrival, the horse is automatically removed from the competition.

The hold time is the mandatory length of time that the horse must remain at each vet check after it reaches the heart rate parameter. During the hold time, the horse is given the opportunity to eat, drink, and is then again presented to the control judge for fitness and soundness inspection.

Ride day is here

On the day of the ride, all of the horse and rider teams will gather at the start area. At the prescribed time, the ride will start. Some riders will move out quickly and try to put distance between themselves and the majority of the pack. Other riders may choose to wait until most horses have left before starting down the trail.

The trail is usually marked with surveyors ribbon, chalk, and signs. The riders follow the marked trail until they come to the first vet check. When the rider arrives at the vet check, his arrival time is noted. When the horse has reached the heart rate criterion, the rider will request a monitor to check the horse's pulse. The time the horse reaches the heart rate criterion is then noted, and then at that time, the rider may present his horse to the control judge for inspection.

Everything that was checked at the pre-ride inspection is again checked, and the horse is again trotted out for soundness. All this information is recorded on the rider card. If the horse passes this inspection, the rider may leave the vet check at the end of his mandatory hold time and continue on the course.

Ideally, during a 50-mile ride, there is a vet check at



approximately 12 miles (with a 15- or 20-minute hold), at 25 miles (with an hour hold), and at 38 miles (with a 15- or 20-minute hold). Of course, the location and distances between vet checks are determined by the terrain and accessibility by the veterinarians.

You have up to six hours to complete a 25-mile ride, 12 hours for a 50, and 24 hours for a 100-mile ride. (This time includes all stops and hold times.)

Limited distance (25-35 miles) and endurance (50 miles and up) rides differ in their finishes. The finish time in LD is when your horse's pulse rate is recorded at the required criterion (or lower), usually by a ride volunteer or the control judge, after completing the ride course. In endurance, the time you and your horse cross the finish line is your time of completion.

After you've completed

After the ride, the horses must again reach the heart rate parameter within 30 minutes and be presented to the control judge for inspection within one hour of completing the course. The horse must have reached the established finishing heart rate and be sound at the trot in order to receive a completion.

In addition to a completion award, there are frequently awards for the first horse, top ten horses, the best conditioned horse of those top ten horses, and also awards to weight division winners in endurance distances. These awards are usually horse-related products (halters, buckets, blankets, ride t-shirt, etc.).

Why we ride endurance

Since often these rides are located on private property or in areas that are not open or readily accessible to the public, participants are given the opportunity to ride in areas from which they would normally be excluded. Some rides take place on historic trails like the old Pony Express trails, or in national forests or state park or recreation area land. Rides take place in all corners of the U.S. and Canada.

While the goal for some is to complete the course in a time faster than any of the other riders, the motto of the

American Endurance Ride Conference is “to finish is to win,” and the majority of the participants enter these rides for the sole purpose of completing the ride with a healthy and sound horse.

This sport allows the rider to work with his horse as a team, to accept the challenge of completing the course in the required time, and to ride and pace his horse as necessary to complete the ride with a sound

and metabolically healthy horse.

Since so much time is spent with the horse on the trail while conditioning and preparing for an endurance ride, a very strong bond is formed between the horse and rider, and both learn to rely on each other while meeting the test of a challenging trail.

—Terry Woolley Howe,
Pacific Southwest Region

WHY JOIN AERC?

Each fall, excitement approaches as members begin to plan for the next season’s rides and reflect on their current ride season. There are lots of obvious reasons to join the American Endurance Ride Conference, and to renew that membership each year. AERC keeps track of your miles, points and awards, and your horses’ miles, points and awards. You receive *Endurance News* every month, with interesting and insightful articles by AERC experts in veterinary medicine, trails, ride managers and others.

Most of these benefits we take for granted, but an extraordinary amount of effort goes into each one of these things, behind the scenes, to the benefit of us all.

AERC is a volunteer organization and, as such, we assume that if we go anywhere in the USA or Canada to enter an AERC ride, we can expect consistency in how the ride is conducted, the rules, the veterinary care and standards, the mileage and the spirit of comradeship in a common love of our trails and horses.

The Rules Committee, ride managers and sanctioning directors strive to maintain consistency among the nine regions of our organization in the rules of our rides, mileage, points and awards so that our overall awards really mean something and provide a fair comparison from East to West, wherever you ride.

The Veterinary Committee also works hard to provide consistent guidance in the care of our hard-working horses. Along with the Research Committee, they provide guidance on the effects of various medications, medical treatment, transportation, weight loss and other variables unique to our endurance horses.

The Trails and Land Management Committee works to keep trails open for endurance rides, and to improve and create new trails via volunteer efforts and a robust trails grant program.

The spirit of camaraderie may be the single most important reason that most of us choose to be part of AERC — we all share our enthusiasm for horse and trail. Along with that enthusiasm comes a shared set of values and ethics. Sharing those values and ethics is a privilege.

We all love our horses and value their health and well-being. We share with one another our ideas about what went wrong, or right, and how to manage the unique strengths and problems of our horses. When I began riding endurance, another rider pointed out to me that my mare had been trimmed and shod with long toes and short heels, probably more consistent with her show ring background. I began to learn.

Some time later, other riders shared their ideas



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about training schedules and nutrition. I began to learn more.

Learning more about our horses and our sport is a value that we all share and it never stops as long as you ride endurance.

We have a shared work ethic. We find the will and determination to ride hours upon hours and keep our horses sound. We support and inspire one another through it all.

Communicating this shared spirit is what keeps new members coming back. It can be easy for longtime riders to become so focused on setting up camp and preparing for the ride that we fail to notice the new rider parked next to us. If you're that new rider, don't be afraid to say hello or ask for help. Sharing with new riders is important to continue the pioneering spirit of this sport.

We endurance riders may disagree on training schedules or how a particular rule should be interpreted or even which turn is correct on the trail. But we all agree on the value of the horse and trail. As members of AERC, we share the ethics of hard work and fair play that AERC ensures us all.

And as you finish up each season, there is no doubt that, however you planned your year, it didn't happen the way you hoped and expected. Maybe it was a little

Photo © John C. Nowell,
www.remuda.amgmug.com



Michael Campbell & AH Diamond Bezska

worse or, hopefully, a little better than expected. That's just endurance riding.

Each November 30, your membership expires and you need to renew your AERC membership for new ride year, which begins December 1. When it's time to renew, remember that AERC membership has its privileges.

—Michael Campbell,
Central Region

Have questions about endurance riding? Call 866-271-2372!

The AERC National Office, located in Auburn, California (the "endurance capital of the world"), has a staff of three to help with memberships and equine registrations, to answer questions about AERC rules, or to help find a mentor near you.

We can put you in touch with your regional directors or help you find a local ride to observe or volunteer before you get started.

Endurance is both a very simple and a very complex sport, and our goal is to make it as easy as possible for you to get started!



AERC Mentors and Riding Partners

There are a host of experienced, capable riders who are available to mentor AERC members new to the sport of endurance riding. You will receive a mentor list for your region when you join AERC, or you can visit the Mentors section at AERC.org (under the Education tab). Call or email one or more mentors, until you find one who sounds most able to help you. On the same web page are Riding Partners — AERC members who will gladly partner up with new members to ride together on trails. They are happy to help share their knowledge and learn alongside you.

Please be sure to check the person's ride record and ensure your goals and riding styles are compatible before you set out on the trail together.

A TEMPLATE FOR CONDITIONING YOUR HORSE

I have started many, many endurance horses, from their first trail ride up to their first 100. I pretty much stick to the same script each time with a few variations based on each horse. For the sake of this article, let's say you are starting with a 5-year-old Arabian gelding that has done very little trail riding.

I will outline a generic plan. I should mention that before any rider starts training an endurance horse that they be skilled riders and know how to ride each diagonal and how to switch leads. This is commonly overlooked and I feel it is very important, considering what is being asked of our horses. A few riding lessons can get you familiar with this if you need help.

Months 1-3

My typical schedule would be Tuesday, Thursday and one weekend day. Each workout starts with a one-mile walking warm-up and ends with at least a half-mile walking cool-down. For the first three months I would do a lot of walking in general.

Let's say we are training in some rolling hills or mountains. On Tuesday and Thursday I would plan out a five-mile ride. I would walk or trot the flats, walk and jog the uphill and walk or get off and hike the downhill. On the weekend I would do an eight-mile ride with the same speeds. You can throw in a couple of short canters just to keep it fun. (Canter, not sprints. You would be surprised how many riders don't know the difference.)

You can see how your horse is improving on his fitness by how much easier it is getting for him to do the workouts.

Months 4-6

After the first three months I would increase my distances for the following three months. Tuesday and Thursday I would now do between six and eight miles and on the weekend do between 10 and 15.

You can increase the amount of trotting you are doing based on how the horse is feeling. You don't want a tired 5-year-old, nor do you want to create a huge extended trot. This can leave the door open to a lot of soft-tissue injuries.

I prefer to trot no more than 10.5 mph (canter for speeds above this) and some horses would be extending too much even at that speed. In my opinion, if I can see the horse's front legs extending while I am riding it at the trot, it is too much extension.

At this point — six months into training — your horse could do a 25. This is assuming you have practiced the extra needed skills to attend an event (see next article!).

Months 7-12

From months 7 to 12, I would do six to eight miles on Tuesdays and Thursdays and 15 to 20 miles on the weekends. I keep my horse's speeds the same as before, but incorporate some canter on the flats. During this time you could do an LD every three weeks, or further apart.

Other helpful information

First competitions. Once your horse can do an LD with ease, going at a mid-pack pace, he can probably do a slow 50. Once you move up to 50s I would still only do one every three weeks or further apart. The exception would be doing a multi-day ride.

Rest is important. Remember that rest after a ride is just as important as the training itself. After a 50 we always give at least one week of complete rest where the horse just lives its life out in the pasture and gets his food, then we do a week of very light riding before we go back to normal work. For a 75 it's at least two weeks off and for a 100 they get a full month of rest.

Goal-setting. The goal for your young endurance horse is not speed. The goal is a calm-minded horse that is being legged up for future years of endurance. Don't rush the process; enjoy the time and the scenery. If this is done correctly you should have a fit, sound horse that loves his job and does it politely.

Enjoy the miles and the journey.

—Heather Reynolds, Southeast Region

Heather Reynolds is a past AERC Director-at-Large and has been riding endurance since she was a junior. She now has well over 22,000 endurance miles and was the first place finisher in the first Lightweight finisher at the 2019 AERC National Championships.



Heather Reynolds and Cayucos at the 2018 Western States Trail Ride (Tevis Cup).
Photo © Rene Baylor of Gore-Baylor Photography

PREPARING YOUR HORSE FOR AN AERC RIDE

Getting your horse ready to go to an endurance ride — beyond the trail conditioning — is an important thing to not overlook. Here are a few things to work on:

- 1. Your horse will need to be able to trailer with ease.** It is a good idea to train your horses to be capable of getting in and out of different types of trailers. In the event that you need to be picked up at a vet check and hauled back to camp, your horse will know how to deal with whatever trailer comes for you.

If possible, it would be great to have your horse be able to load and unload using a straight load, a slant load, a step-up and also a ramp.

- 2. Your horse needs to be able to camp.** How you secure your horse at night is something you should practice at home beforehand. There are many options. You can simply tie to your trailer, use a HiTie, use portable corrals or an electric corral.

In my opinion, electric corrals are high-risk — they don't always have enough zap to them and other horses can run through your corral, setting your horse loose.

I personally tie my horse to my trailer, unless the ride has solid corrals or stalls available. (If tying to the trailer I always check that my lead rope is not tied too long. I tie my rope and then pull it tight to stretch it to its full length. Then I unclip the lead while holding my horse and I check that the rope is at least a foot off of the ground. The horse's nose will make up this difference if you need the horse to reach the ground.)

I also have bucket hangers on my trailer so that the horse does not knock over the bucket, and I hang a hay bag from the trailer as well.

- 3. Your horse needs to stand still while being examined.** This will be happening while there are

other horses standing around (in line behind you), possibly with trucks parking, dogs running nearby and just strange (to your horse) things happening all around. Practice this with friends, maybe while doing a group ride. Your horse needs to stand politely while someone takes his heart rate, runs their hands down his back and feels all four legs. Also, the horse must allow someone to look at his gums.

This is important, as the veterinarians look at all of our horses, and if they are all jumping around, walking on the vet, rubbing their head on the vet, stepping on the vet, etc., the vets might not want to work at these rides any more.

It is very important to be present as the horse handler during the vet exam. It is very disrespectful to not pay attention to what your horse is doing while it is being examined by the ride vet. Make your horse behave and stand still.

- 4. Practice trotting your horse out.** Your horse should pick up the trot at your cue and stay right with you without running ahead or dragging behind. Ideally you will be at your horse's left shoulder and you will trot out and back at the speed you choose.

On the trot-out, it is best to work at going the speed you want, stopping at the end of the trot distance, turning right (this is so the vet can always see your horse and you are not blocking the view), walk a couple of steps so that your horse is heading straight again (not in the middle of making its turn) and proceed with your trot cue and trot back to the vet.

When you arrive back at the vet, time it so that your horse stops where you want, not too soon and not running over the vet. With practice, this looks easy and

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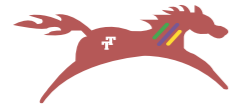
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your horse will present in a manner that makes it enjoyable to be around your horse. We trot our horses out after each training ride — it's not only good practice, it also lets you see how sound your horse is.

5. If you are riding to try to top ten, practice trotting your horse in circles. Make sure that you can trot both directions in circles with your horse so that you are ready for best condition judging if you succeed in your top ten effort.

6. Practice cooling your horse off with scoops or sponges. Some horses think this is odd at first. Do this at home on training rides. We have a bucket of water that we use to scoop a few scoops of water onto our horses after our rides, before we bathe them, just so the horses can practice.

7. Use a flashlight around your horse. You will thank me for this tip. The first time in ride camp the things that usually scare the horses are flashlights and tents.



Claude Brewer and Rushcreek Edward
Photo © Maria Phillips, mariaphillips.smugmug.com

at his next event.

The more prepared your horse is, the more fun it is for everyone involved.

—Heather Reynolds, Southeast Region

8. Put a blanket on your horse at home if he has not worn one before. You might need one at a ride and it is best if your horse knows how to wear one beforehand.

9. Make sure your horse can ride in a group, cross water and go over bridges. Also, practice safe passing (and being passed.)

10. You should feel safe on your horse. That means with or without other horses and riders around you. You might end up alone on the trail. It is important that you feel confident on your horse before going somewhere that will add extra excitement and add to your own nerves.

As you go to rides you will see what else you and your horse need to practice. Include whatever else is needed to your training and conditioning to make your horse's life as stress-free as possible

Find much more under the Education tab at AERC.org

RIDING FOR THE RISK-AVERSE

Find that riders contemplating our sport fall into one of two categories: one group believes it is all about racing and they want to know how to get out there and win as quickly as possible (a tiny minority, thank goodness) and the ones who are scared to death that this is an extreme sport and that they could hurt their horse in attempting to compete.

This is no big surprise.

For those new to the sport, endurance riding is an adventure that they are contemplating, in many cases a big bold leap of faith, and it is very exciting indeed.

Many of them are concerned that their breed of horse is not ideal for endurance competition. I wave my hand dismissively when they bring this up and shake my head, having started my distance career with a very drafty draft cross mare.

I reassure them that if their horse is sound biomechanically, and metabolically capable of eating, drinking, peeing and pooping its way happily down the trail (perhaps not all at the same time), they probably have exactly the right horse, as long as their goal is “to get around.” Almost always they nod vehemently. “Oh, I just want to finish — do you think we can?”

Some of them have never camped with their horse, particularly if they come from a dressage or eventing or showing background. They are petrified about their horse getting loose, or caught up in a rope, or if they’ll be able to ride a challenging distance the day after roughing it in a tent. The idea of hauling four hours to get to a ride is a lot to consider.

Many are surprised when I tell them that you can, in fact, “get around” (close to maximum time) with a horse by half walking and half trotting, assuming the horse has a walk and trot that move them down the trail at a decent MPH. They think you need this tack, or

those shoes/boots, or a heart rate monitor, or special feed, or hours and hours and hours of ceaseless conditioning.

Take it from me, ladies and gentlemen, I am no risk taker, no daredevil, no equestrian femme fatale. And here I am.

In many ways, I think the risk-averse are the most likely to find success, and by that I mean long-term success, competing for years and years, with the horse they own right now. I think they are the ones likely to move up from intro rides or limited distance rides to 50s and eventually 100s.

Being risk-averse means you are likely a planner.

It means that you will research your best options for securing your horse when you camp. And when you’ve made the choice, it means you will practice camping, whether it involves a Hi-Tie or an electric paddock or a picket line, or simply tying to your trailer overnight. And you will do it somewhere safe, in a riding ring or in your own barnyard.

You will figure out what charger to use, how to set it up, how long to tie your horse, with which rope and knot, and how to ensure that he can reach his hay and water without catching an eyelid on an exposed hook. The risk-averse learn how to camp safely and have success at their first ride by simply waking up to a horse who is calm and well hydrated with a belly full of hay, ready to start the ride.

If you are risk-averse, you will lay out a conditioning schedule that is conservative, smart, realistic and lands you in a place where you are ready for your first competition. Terrified that you will injure Old Dobbin, you’ll watch him like a hawk for signs of trouble — a



Patti and HV Golden Septer (Wynn)

Photo © Becky Pearmen

sore back, or a swollen leg, or shoeing issues, or something more subtle, like a dull attitude. You will learn how to use a stethoscope and will learn very quickly what is normal for your horse — his resting heart rate, how quickly he recovers, how his gut sounds on any given day.

You will schedule rest as carefully as you schedule work. You’ll add a little distance or difficulty or speed each week, but never more than one. On competition day, you will start well after the crowd leaves camp, wishing to ride your own ride, pace conservatively and “get around.”

You are in good company in endurance riding.

We fuddy-duddy types have a tendency to focus on training our horses, not just conditioning them. Training them to get in the trailer, training them to stand quietly to be tacked and mounted and vetted, training them to pass and be passed on trail without misbehaving, training them to travel down the trail at the pace we have chosen (conservatively, of course) rather than the pace of those ahead.

We check our tack three times, we make sure our feeding schedule is right on, we ensure our horses are feeling well and free from a cough or a snotty nose before we haul it to a ride. We make sure our helmet fits and that our billets have good stitching. We selected a horse that was not “too much” horse for us.

If we have a question, we ask, even if it seems like a silly little worry, because we would rather appear foolish than hurt our horse.

Cautious people look to other cautious people to

show them the way. They look around and see others flying by the seat of their pants and think, whoa, not for me, seeking out others with the same goals and the same pragmatic approach. And they are surprised to find so many birds of a feather within our sport.

Certainly, endurance riding can be viewed as an extreme sport. We ride further and sometimes faster than most people would be comfortable riding. We work hard because we are focused on having our horses and ourselves fit and ready and capable of handling the distance. Riding 25+ miles is not something that everyone aspires to do.

“Make haste slowly” is a term I use routinely. Premature speed kills, and our sport is not about speed for the vast majority of those competing. To finish is to win, and while getting around within maximum time may at first seem a challenge (and for some riders is always a challenge), the term “speed” is a relative one.

Eventually, even the most prudent riders (self included) find that it’s the right day, with the right horse, in the right conditions, to step it up a little bit in the speed department. By heavens, we even Top Ten on occasion and wahoo, do we enjoy it!

However, if something seems a little “off” about Dobbin, or the stars are not in alignment, or it is terrain, footing or weather for which our horse is not fully prepared, we are the first to back off, slow it down, or even call it a day, so we can save Dobbin for another ride, another season, another year in the future.

In the end, there’s a fable about a tortoise and a hare. And I’m pretty sure we all know who won that one.

—Patti Carey

Patti Carey is a Southeast Region rider and the creator of Endurance Essentials at HorseLearningOnline.com.

GROW WITH THE GREEN BEANS

The Green Bean Endurance Challenge was created as a membership program for riders navigating through their first 1,000 miles, however many seasons that may take. Recognizing it's not always easy being "green" and sometimes just making a connection to another rider can make a huge difference in being successful, we began offering incentives through informal team and individual challenges that recognize many levels of achievement. We also support each other when things don't go as planned.

Our motto is "Challenge. Support. Celebrate."

Who can participate? AERC members with fewer than 1,000 combined limited distance and endurance miles are eligible to participate in the Challenge Program. There is a \$15 fee per season for Green Bean membership.



Hailey (left), riding with her grandmother Lancelte Koerner, in Northern Arizona. Photo © Susan Kordish, AZcowgirlphotography.com

What does Green Bean Endurance offer? We offer awards and prize drawings to our members, educational support, and social networking. Our priority is that you ride safe and have fun while you do it. GBE is a completely volunteer-run organization and the small annual program fee helps cover things like year-end prizes, postage, supplies and website fees.

There are two programs within the Challenge — an individual and a team challenge. You do not have to choose between them; all members are "individual riders" and all members can join the optional team competition.

What is the individual challenge? All members are automatically included as an individual participant upon registration. Each horse and rider are a unit eligible for the year-end high point horse/rider unit based on the rider's experience level.

What is the team challenge? All individual members can also join a team. There are no requirements to ride together in person but some of teams do. Teams consist of up to five other members from all regions and you ride together "virtually," even if not physically. All points earned count towards the team total. Joining a team is optional.



Deb Moe, riding Pendragon Myth, leads Jenny and Josh Frerichs through their first AERC ride at the MnDral in Minnesota.

How do I get on a team? Team registrations occur at the beginning of the season, typically through February 15. Forms will be posted on the website, on Facebook, and sent via email to register your team. We work hard to help you find a team, too, if that's needed. There's no additional cost to be on a team — it's included with your GBE program fee.

How do I earn points? Of course, the most obvious is that all ride completions count towards points. In addition to that we offer many ways to earn "bonus points." These include things like reporting a non-completion of a ride, volunteering at rides, and watching or attending AERC seminars/clinics.

What are the experience levels? Riders are grouped into the following experience levels based on the rider's mileage at the start of the season: On-The-Vine: 0-99 miles, Picked: 100-499 miles, and Cooked: 500-999 miles, as well as a division just for junior riders.

What are some other Green Bean benefits? We often receive sponsorships from retailers, either as discount codes to use on their products or products to award as prize drawings. These vary from year to year — watch the website for updates. And it seems that the directors are always cooking up something new and fun each season, such as Endomondo challenges, Grow Your Green Bean Garden challenges, or who knows what else!



Junior rider Adin and Mustang Salli

How do I find out more about the Green Bean program? Our website, GreenBeanEndurance.org, has lots of information and a link to the registration form. You can also join our Facebook group: Facebook.com/groups/GBEChallenge.

Website:
GreenBeanEndurance.org

Facebook:
Facebook.com/groups/GBEChallenge

AERC AWARD PROGRAMS

Every ride completion guarantees an award (it's AERC rule 6.3). Ride managers may also award "top ten" awards, a prize for best condition winners, a top junior award, and weight division awards. There is often a "turtle" award for the last finisher, too!

Beyond that, AERC provides a wealth of awards, both annual and lifetime. Eligibility for AERC awards requires current membership; equines must have an AERC number as well.

Mileage awards

Rider mileage patches are presented for both endurance and limited distance mileage. The first patch comes at 250 miles, then 500, 750, 1000, and at each 1000 miles thereafter.

Equine mileage medallions are given for every 1000 miles; LD equines receive their first medallion at 500 miles. Equines who reach 3,000 miles will have their photo and a write-up in the March issue of *Endurance News*; those who have achieved 5,000 miles will receive a custom-embroidered blanket at convention and a photo and story in *EN*.

Annual awards

AERC has two main awards categories: limited distance (rides of 25-35 miles) and endurance (50 miles and more). These rides have different finish criteria and mileage is not combined, with only a few exceptions.

If you are seeking annual awards, you may want to plan on riding either LD or endurance in order to maximize the possibility of placing. You'll also want to focus on riding with one horse as most (but not all) awards honor one rider and one equine only.



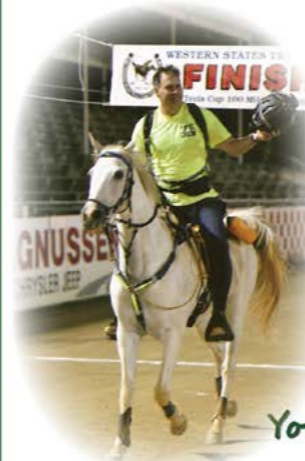
The awards are one reason you should pick your weight division and stick with it. The office can't change your division after June 1, and if you do switch weight divisions, your points do not travel with you. Likewise region changes — choose the region where you have your official residence.

The annual awards are further separated into **national and regional awards**. The national awards are presented at the national awards banquet each year at the AERC convention. Plaques are awarded to most of the national award winners.

Regional award winners, around 300 each year, earn custom-embroidered vests, jackets or a similar award for both endurance and limited distance honors.

Regional best condition-winning equines in both endurance and limited distance will receive a halter with an engraved plaque commemorating their achievement.

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For details about the following annual awards, check out the Awards section of the AERC website or see the back section of *Endurance News*. There are awards in quite a few categories :

- **Bill Stuckey Award** (high mileage rider 65 or older)
- **Bill Thornburgh Family Award**
- **Bob and Julie Suhr Spouse Award**
- **Jim Jones Stallion Award**
- **Kathy Brunjes Young Rider Award** (for riders ages @16-21)
- **National Best Condition Award**
- **National 100 Mile Award** (highest points for 100-mile rides)
- **Pioneer Award** (for 3-5 day pioneer rides)
- **Specialized Saddles Rookie Award** (for first-year members)
- **War Mare Award**

If you join the **Green Bean Endurance** program, they offer their own individual and team awards each year.

Lifetime awards

The **Decade Team Award** honors equine/rider teams who have successfully completed 10 or more years of endurance competitions. Decade Team recipients receive a Decade Team patch, a certificate, and will be listed on the Decade Team page on the AERC website. This is one of the sport's most highly regarded awards.

The **Equine Longevity Award** honors those equines and riders who have competed together for at least 50 miles per year (LD and/or endurance) for 10 years, and at five-year increments thereafter. These enamel pins are highly sought-after awards.

AERC's **Century Club** is for those rider and horse teams who have completed a ride once their ages total 100. This is an elite group of riders!

Special achievements

The **100 Mile Achievement Award** goes to equines as they complete their first, third, seventh, 10th, 15th and 20th 100-mile ride. Every quarter these equines will be listed in *Endurance News* and honorees receive a custom certificate.

Breed association awards. Based on criteria set by the associations, there are currently 14 breed associations who give prizes for AERC members each year.

The ultimate in special achievements would be the awards presented at convention to exceptional AERC members or equines: the **Ann Parr Trails Preservation Award**, the **Volunteer Service Award**, the **Pard'ners Award** and the **Hall of Fame**, both human and equine. These awards are given to the select few who have created a legacy which will be remembered well into the future.

For more on AERC awards, visit AERC.org/Awards.

Each season is a chance for members to set new goals for themselves and their equine partners. Good luck and happy trails!

WHAT A GREAT DAY IT'S BEEN

Long before the day has dawned, before birds rise . . . to sing their song

In silent darkness campers sleep, warm and snug . . . all sleep deep.

But here I shiver, chilled with cold – this horse tailer camping . . . is getting old.

A glance at my pal says she slept warm all night through,

So I just have to wake her . . . to see if it's true.

The camp still sleeps on, but the horses awake.

They know the big day is here . . . come daybreak.

After months of hard training, and miles of long trail, hours of sweat-straining, so that today . . . they won't fail.

The silence is broken by pawing and neighs, nickers and pacing . . . that break through the haze.

The camper's alarm clock awakens at last; she runs to her truck and . . . gives the horn a blast.

With shivering fingers, numb to the bone, we saddle our horses . . . and think of warm homes.

With our numbers pinned and our cards in our pockets, the control start begins . . . and we're off like rockets.

One hundred good horses pace over the trail, now horses string out . . . and some riders tail.

Once at the vet check, horses come and they go, some can go faster, but some . . . must go slow.

The hot sun beating down, or a storm stinging their face, these horses and riders . . . continue the race.

Through canyons so deep and deserts so dry, the long trail continues . . . into mountains so high.

Each rider and horse are truly as one, and none will give in . . . 'til the long trail is done.

With the trail behind and the finish in sight, the weight of the miles . . . is now getting light.

As hoofs break the dirt and the finish is crossed,

The race is now over, but all is not ended, good horsemen make sure . . . that their horses are tended.

The evening now lingers, but the night is not cold, for the whole camp is gathered . . . new friends and old.

After the meal, the awards, and some joking, the group remains gathered . . . for some friendly fun-poking.

The laughter and warmth fills every heart, then little by little . . . the gathering departs.

Back to our campers, our campfire, or tents, each of us wanders . . . from a day so well spent.

With sleep on our eyelids, and a yawn on our breath, one last check on the horses . . . and we're ready for rest.

As our heads hit our pillows, and night closes in, sweet dreams to us all . . . what a great day it's been.

Note: Originally published
the December 1979
issue of *Endurance News*

–Vicki McBride

Endurance riding: the "to finish is to win" sport!

Get started today: call 866-271-AERC or go to AERC.org

Check out membership options:

AERC.org/compete/join-aerc/

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

Modern endurance riding got its start back in 1955, when Wendell Robie of Auburn, California, set out a challenge: to ride the 100 miles from Lake Tahoe to Auburn in one day. The Western States Trail Ride, also known as the Tevis Cup, has been a summer tradition ever since.

That one ride spawned a host of other endurance rides across the country, and in 1972, the American Endurance Ride Conference was founded. With six simple rules and a growing group of enthusiastic participants, endurance riding spread across the U.S. and the world.

The rules may have expanded, but the basics of the sport have remained the same. Welfare of the horse has always been paramount, and rule updates reflect even more emphasis on safety as AERC nears its 50th anniversary.

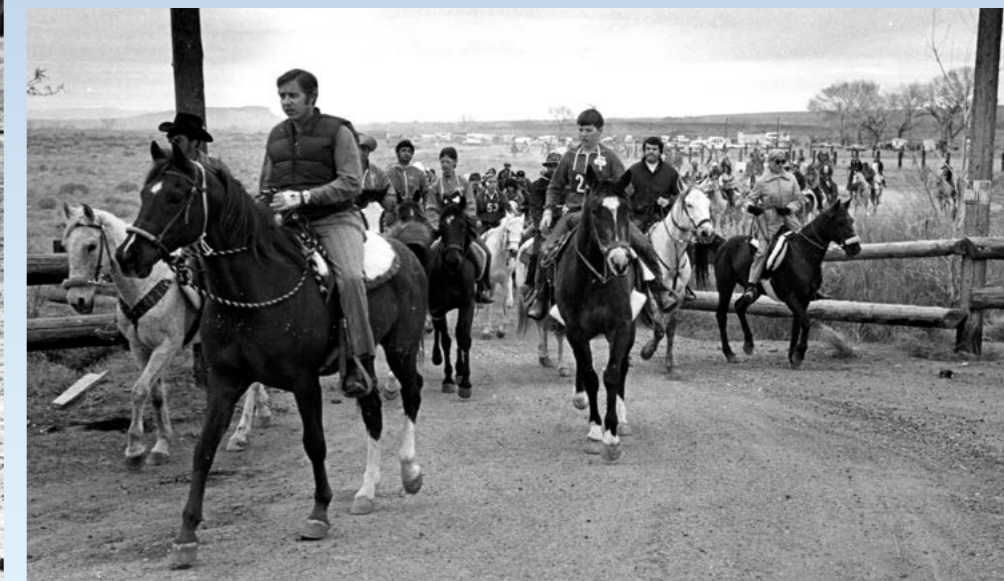
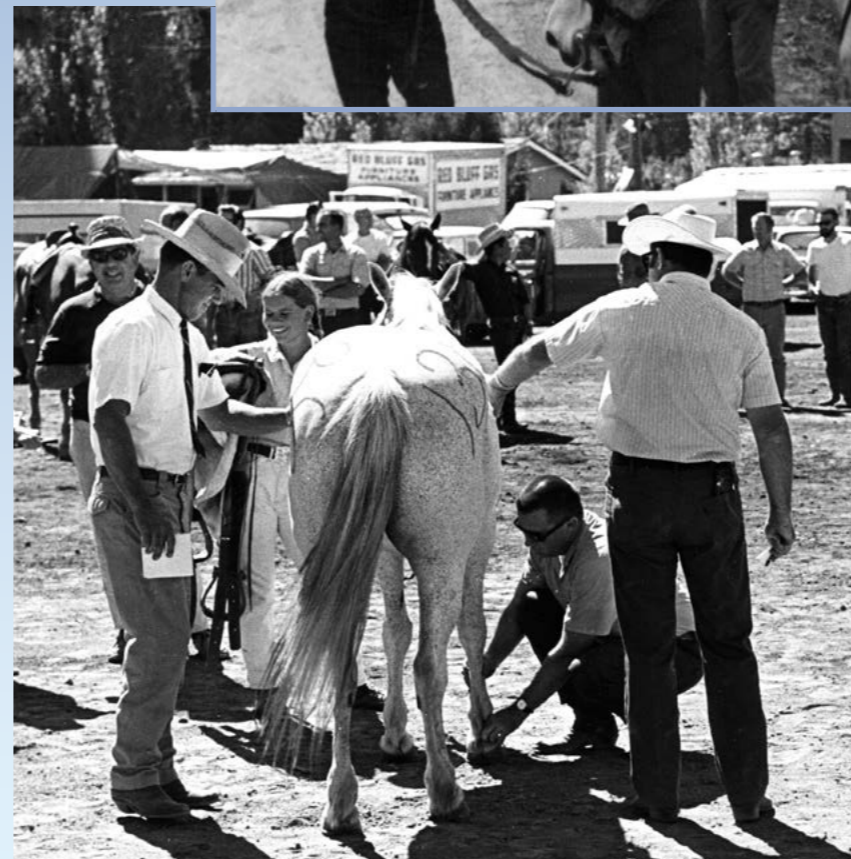
One other goal of this nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that hasn't changed is the mission to develop and preserve trails. Future generations of riders will benefit from AERC trails grants and the work of many AERC members who are out there keeping trails open for equestrians to ride, both for training and competing.

As the organization has changed and grown over the years, we know one thing never will: it's the "to finish is to win" sport, and a challenge that welcomes all riders, of all ages, on all equines.

AERC's Mission Statement: To promote the sport of endurance riding and to encourage and enforce the safe use of horses in demonstrating their endurance abilities in a natural setting through the development, use and preservation of trails. Further, AERC's mission is to maintain horse and ride records of event competition and completions, to record and provide awards to outstanding horses and riders, to ensure that all sanctioned events are conducted in a safe, fair and consistent manner, and to actively promote and conduct educational efforts and research projects that will foster a high level of safety and enjoyment for all horses and riders. The above is to be accomplished with the understanding that goals for the rider must be meshed with the abilities of the horse. Part of AERC's mission is to attract and reward members who act to insure the highest priority for their horses' immediate and long-term physical and emotional health and well-being.



Photos by Charlie Barieau



THANK YOU, ENDURANCE

It's all Al's fault. The blistering sun. The pitch dark. The sweltering heat, blinding dust, terrifying thunderstorms, and the stinging sleet. Deadly rattlesnakes, biting gnats, icy rivers, treacherous rocks, killer bogs, and perilous cliffs. Thirst, hunger, windburn, sunburn, frozen fingers. Sweat and tears, bruises, scrapes, sore muscles, and smashed toes.

The rides that last forever. The crazy horses that pull your arms out of their sockets for 50 miles. The crotchety horses that buck and toss you on your shoulder. The horse that bolts. The horse that tries to die on you. It's all Al's fault.

Laughs and cheers and joyful tears. Six thousand miles of the best trails ever. Wide, wild open spaces. Deserts, forests, canyons, mountain ranges. Pioneer trails. A Tevis buckle. Hoof beats and heart beats in 12 different countries. Splendid snow, rain, sunshine. Wildflowers, wild animals. Solitude. Companionship. Partnership. Soulmates. The best friendships, ever. The best horses, ever.

I walked into a local tack shop in north Texas one day, told the proprietor Al I wanted to find a job riding horses.

He didn't hesitate. "Why don't you try Shelley down the road? She does endurance."

"What's that?" What is endurance, I had asked.

I went to see Shelley. She hired me. I never in a million years could have imagined the consequences of that fortuitous path.

I discovered I could not only ride horses, but I could ride them all day. Sometimes all night, too. Endurance riding, I discovered, is a long distance riding sport that anybody could do. Old people, young people, daredevils, and those who wanted to be daredevils one day. The competitive. The restrained. The cautious. And it wasn't just a couple of miles that endurance riders rode, but 25 miles, 50 miles, 100 miles in one day. Or 250 miles over five days in a row. Pick your addictive bliss.

I met the best people while endurance riding. I met the best horses endurance riding, although there were a couple that were a tad challenging. But even then, the companionship in doing something so physically and mentally challenging together



forms a special bond that you don't get when you go out for a short trail ride. It is like no other bond you will ever have with another living creature. It's the closest thing to sacredness outside of religion. For some it is a religion.

Endurance riding is the Great Equalizer. It makes all people Normal. In real life, you can be rich or poor, old or young, short or tall, snooty or timid, a CEO, the king of a country, or a poop-shoveler, but you're all equal for one day when you're riding on the back of a horse for 50 or 100 miles.

It's a mutual partnership that has nothing to do with your income or job or how honorably you live. Endurance riding is not just about you. Whoever you are or however insignificant or high and mighty you may be, you have the responsibility of getting your four-legged partner healthily and safely to the end of a 25-mile or 50-mile or 100-mile ride. You can't fail to be astounded and

humbled by the ability and the willingness of your most incredible partner. It is a privilege to ride an endurance horse that doesn't stop giving, ride after ride.

It doesn't matter how bent-over you walk, or how slowly you shuffle when you get off your endurance horse. It's no big deal if you have to ask someone else to trot your horse out for you at a vet check. Walking like a cripple after an endurance ride is rather like wearing a badge of honor. "Can't walk, but I just rode 100 miles!"

The acute longing to wrap my fingers around the reins and look between the ears of my endurance horse to the trail beckoning ahead of us dominates my existence. I crave the adventures with a revered equine partner, effortlessly covering the ground, carrying me through wild spaces, cantering along the ridges, racing the thunderstorms, following the curve of the hills, dancing through the forests, skimming the deserts, and conquering the mountains.

Riding an endurance horse puts me on the top of the world. It's all Al's fault, and if I ever run into him again, I'm going to thank him. —Merri Melde

Merri's website: The Equestrian Vagabond. Excerpted from Merri's book, "Soul Deep in Horses: Memoir of an Equestrian Vagabond."