



# AERC Extra Summer 2023

Vol. 14 – No. 3

Quarterly-ish Newsletter from the American Endurance  
Ride Conference (skipped winter this time around, sorry!)



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Welcome to the Summer 2023 edition of AERC Extra, AERC's online newsletter. Bonus: Clicking on anything in **red** will link you to that place on the web. We encourage you to contribute to the Extra by sending in your stories to the AERC office.

## Shake It Up 2023: My First Ride

story by Jennifer L. Martin • photos by Becky Jones



Jennifer and Valor at Shake It Up

I finally put the excuses aside and took SPA Valor to ride the Shake It Up LD in Kentucky. I work a lot of hours and keep telling myself that we, as a team, had no business showing up for an endurance ride. I was having a hard week, and one of my favorite people ask me to come and I spontaneously said yes. The whole drive there, I told myself just ride the first 15 mile loop and I can drop if it's too much for my horse or me.

I was terrified of the start, and if my horse would handle the excitement or not. A very cool woman apparently recognized the fear in my face and offered to let us start with her mare and her, after the field took off. She said they would be riding slow, just to finish. I gratefully accepted her offer. Just know that her idea of a slow start and mine were two completely different speeds. Her single-footer was ridiculously fast!

We were scrambling and rushing, and I was hanging on hard. I now know that my horse can buck in a gallop, going uphill. I also know that I can ride it. My riding partner looked at us in our awkward state of frantic confusion and told me I looked miserable, stressed and tight. She told me to breathe and trust my horse. I breathed, I trusted and let go.

I had the most amazing reaction from my most amazing horse and the rest of the first loop was magical. Very fast and magical. I learned that my partner and her mare had completed Tevis. We came in hot and I worried that I had pushed my horse too hard, but at least I rode the 15 miles and had a blast.

I unsaddled him and my friends gave him a quick sponge. He pulsed in at 42.

Trotted out beautifully. So, now what? I guess we go again.

I left before the single-footer and headed out on loop 2. They quickly caught us and we partnered up for the second loop. Somewhere out there, I left the stress of a complicated client. I worked through the pain and worry over a loved one who is not well. I overcame the fear and excuses of never being in good enough condition to ride endurance. I left the stalking fan seat and became a participant in something I have wanted for so long.

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## Shake It Up . . .

We picked up another riding pair on the way in and shared stories of the trail. I could feel that Valor was getting tired and was so happy when we got within sight of the finish line. My amazing friends met us, helped us untack and sent us in to the vet. He pulsed in at 48. He trotted out sound. We came in ninth place. It was so unexpectedly emotional.

It was only 25 miles but what a journey for us. I made the seven-hour drive home two days later and called my husband from the driveway. I actually needed help out of the truck and had to walk down stairs backwards for two days, but this ride reset my heart and mind. Endurance riding is so much more than riding the miles and passing a vet check. I really wasn't expecting that.



## A new idea for AERC ride signage

by Mickey Smith

Last year during my first summer of putting on endurance rides as a ride manager I worked really hard to make sure that the trails were well flagged. I want to make sure riders don't waste time trying to figure out where to go or worse yet have them get lost. The fall ride near Moab, Utah, called the Moab Canyons Ride is a three-day event and has more than 200 miles of trail to be flagged. With the help of friends and family it takes us more than a week of hard out driving and riding to flag this course. Like many other rides it is common for one color course to go one direction along a trail while another course travels the same part of the trail going a different direction. Needless to say, it is complicated, especially when multiple trails come together which is where riders can take a wrong turn.

So, this past winter I came up with a plan for a new style of corner marker. Paper plates have been used on past rides, but they get blown over, ruined in the rain, or eaten by cows (really)! I wanted to use something durable and reusable so that I didn't need to make new signs every year. So we took some old window blinds and repurposed them into trail signs. My daughter Tyler and I painted the strips of plastic material (@ 3" x 10") and cut them into arrows of the appropriate colors. Then I made a sign plan so that the volunteers who help me flag the course would know what sign goes where.

This spring we tested the new signage plan and plastic signs at the **Canyon Rims Ride** just south of Moab. I had many of the riders tell me that the signs were very helpful, especially on the tricky corners or even on regular corners the arrow shaped signs made it quick and easy to confirm that they were going in the right direction. We also wrote on the arrow shaped signs with simple directions such as "Vet Check" or "Camp" which confirmed for the riders that they were heading in the right direction. The new signs seem to have served their purpose of being visible and helpful as no one got lost!

I will be making more signs this summer in preparation for the fall event, the **Moab Canyons Ride** in mid-October! I hope to see you all there!

## New York Adventure 2023, and Then Some

by Dodie Sable

I knew in 2017 when I began my career as an endurance ride manager that I wanted every rider to have an adventure at my ride, hence the ride name choice. I planned my ride to be on a holiday weekend so that all adventures would be a little more special (and riders would have ample time to recover from their adventure before returning to work). Little did I know that 2023 was going to be the year of exceptional adventures.

I begin this story with the Canadian Adventure.

Eva Hyland (photo at right) had worked with her horse Etaya Safeerah conditioning and getting ready for New York Adventure. She was too excited as this was to be her horse's second attempt at a 50 mile ride. She and her friend Chrystal packed their trailers with great attention to detail. One trailer was carrying the horses, the other trailer was carrying all the gear, horse panels and food for horses and people. The horse-carrying trailer crossed the Canadian border without a hitch.

Eva watched them pull through and enter into American territory and waited her turn. Her husband, Lawrence Hyland, was driving and as they crept through the border line, she was getting more and more excited. When asked for their identifying paperwork, oops . . . Eva's visa was expired.

Wait, what? Oh, my husband can go through but not me? Oh dear . . . Eva is Polish but per-



## New York Adventure . . .

manent resident in Canada and although married to a Canadian, she still has to keep her visa current. Imagine her dismay to find out that on a holiday weekend the backup on getting an online renewal is until Tuesday.

Sadly, she sent her husband through to deliver the gear and bring her horse back. Eva stayed behind in a small town, reading a book and quietly praying for the visa approval. Meanwhile, everyone at the ride was trying to come up with a plan to sneak her across the border. We all knew of her predicament and were calling in favors from everyone we knew associated with border crossings.

Then there were the “helpful” suggestions. Cry really hard, men at the border hate crying women. Have her cling to the undercarriage of the trailer. Put her in the trailer wearing a horse costume. Dress her up as a doll and throw her in the trunk. Let someone else ride her horse so he got his ride in (oh, that was not an option, he is her heart horse!). Find a large drone, put herself in a box, and deliver the box over the border. And so on . . . several of these options sounded very adventurous.

In the meantime, her horse made it to camp and they prepped him to go back to Canada when Eva’s husband arrived. Fortunately, they came in a day early so there were stalls available for the other horses since the panels were with Eva’s husband. As soon as he arrived, many hands helped unload the gear and then get her horse loaded up. We, at the ride, were very sad to see her husband and horse leave camp.

About two hours after they left, we get a call. Eva had managed the four Ps. With great amount of patience, perspiration and persuasion, Eva persevered and got her visa renewed. Now, her husband is almost back to the Canadian border and he tells her to get a taxi or Uber to bring her over because he wasn’t chancing coming back to Canada and then not being able to get back into the USA.

Ha! She flew over the border, hopped in the truck and then they drove back to camp, arriving late in the evening. I had already approved a morning vetting for them, I was just too excited to see that she would make it. Our wonderful Dr. Art King vetted her in the dark. This horse had now traveled 15 hours in a trailer, arrived late at night and will be riding the 50 in the morning. And, in true adventure fashion, they were so concerned with getting to camp that they forgot to stop and do the grocery shopping, so both trailers of people had no food to eat. They were on an adventure diet.

## Our second Ride Camp Adventure

In the meantime, my dear friend Rachel Lodder had entered the 75 mile ride but arrived at camp to check in and asked to drop to the 50 mile ride. I teased her, but totally got the “ride for enjoyment” portion of her request. We dropped her to the 50 and she had brought a second horse that would be competing in the 30, ridden by my treatment vet, Dr. Julie Gray.

A side note here, Dr. Julia saved our ride! My original treatment vet totally forgot to put our ride on her schedule and when I called in April to verify all was good, she had booked a family vacation and could not attend. I reached out to Dr. Pam Karner, who always saves me from a huge mis-adventure, and she suggested Dr. Julia.

Night passes without anyone yelling “loose horses” (chuckle), which is a win in my book. Mary Coleman made breakfast sandwiches for the volunteers and vets on ride morning, because we had to get up at an ungodly hour. The 75 mile riders are ready at 5:30 am and leave camp like they’re out for a stroll. I can barely see them going out in the heavy fog that rolled in overnight. I love the longer



**50 mile on October 19**

**100 mile on October 21**

**Davy Crockett National Forest • Texas**

Photo ©  
John Nowell

Information/Registration

**[TXenduranceriders.com/NC.html](http://TXenduranceriders.com/NC.html)**

Ride Managers: Linda and Bo Parris

Head Control Judge: Nick Kohut, DVM

## New York Adventure . . .

distance riders, so sane and calm leaving camp.

After they leave, and before the 50 mile riders descend upon the trail to burn it up, Dr. Art and I go out on trail to monitor the 10 minute stop-'n'-go. We would see all the 75 mile riders and all the 50 mile riders at this SNG. The following story is coming to you from the recounting of several people involved, gossip from the 50 mile riders as they come into the SNG, and from eyewitnesses. I hope I get all the hysterical facts straight.

The 50 mile riders are preparing to go out on their ride and there is some commotion out in the camp field. As the first riders go out, there is some yelling and some whooping and then some "LOOSE HORSES!" being screamed about.

As the 50 milers are leaving, two blanketed grey Arabians decide that they are better able to win the ride if they do it without the encumbrance of a rider. They swiftly ditch their pen and make their way out on trail. Happily following other horses that have began their 50 mile adventure, these two horses were having the best time of their lives.

The world's greatest trailmaster, Jim, took out after them on his quad. Our stoic ambulance driver, Dan, got hitched and headed out on trail to pick them up and haul them back. One of the 75 mile rider's crew husband, Dean, took off after them on foot (he said he should have signed up for the equathon as he did the miles on foot.) A couple pleasure riders staying in camp for the weekend headed out on their horses hoping to track them down.

Little did these two silly Arabians know that their New York Adventure was not going to get them out of working. These were Rachel's horses. Yes, the same Rachel (chuckle). One of them, Dakar, has completed several 100 mile rides and is old enough to know better. The second one, Tolo, was probably the adventuresome troublemaker as he is young and full of himself. They gallivanted around and I'm told that they did about eight miles before they were caught and brought back to camp. All riders, 75-50-30, are out on trail at this point and I suspect these two horses were sad they got off course and couldn't win.

In true enduring endurance fashion, Rachel quickly switched from the 50 mile to the 30 mile ride. She and Dr. Julia started out well after all the other 30 mile riders. Yes, they completed. Yes, they earned the turtle award. Yes, they also earned their names forever imprinted in this story! They had 15 minutes left when they crossed the finish line. Their horses vetted fine and Rachel's only comment about this adventure was, "This is the fastest turtle ride, ever."

Meanwhile in the vetting area, Dr. Art asked Eva's husband at one point, "How's things going?" His response to Dr. Art? With a serious face, he said, "The horse, my wife or the marriage?" We all rolled on the ground.

The day passed very quickly. No overtimes even though we went from 35° days Thursday and Friday to 85° on the day of the ride. Rid-



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### Letter to Dodie Sable from Linda Ferguson:

First off, thank you for all you do to make your ride just as you would want to ride it — well-marked, thought-out loop distances, great vet care, super accommodations, awesome prizes, and THE best ride photographer anywhere!

Secondly, Rachel Lodder mentioned you might be doing a write-up about her two runaway horses. Here is one of Carien's excellent photos with me riding my "Breeze" (Menominee Windstorm) and Rachel's two renegades racing up behind me.

At this ride we earned a 50 mile completion and qualified for our Decade Team award.



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## New York Adventure . . .

ers were hot, horses were hot, vets and volunteers were hot, but everyone kept a smile on their face (maybe to prevent heat exhaustion? I'll have to try that).

Back to the Canadian Adventure. Eva is coming into the finish line, crossing in fifth place, tying with Chrystal Woodhouse. I personally witnessed her horse's completion vetting. She trotted out like he had just done a pleasure ride, tail flipped up over her back. Eva crouched on the ground at her head, waiting in anticipation for the final verdict. When the vet said "completion," she sprung up in the air like a kangaroo, throwing her arms up in a moment of pure joy, yelling with grand enthusiasm. Her horse didn't even flick an ear at her victory shout. Lovely horse!

And I had my own adventure this year. Entered in my ride this year were three of my homebred horses, two of them in the 75 mile ride and one of them in the 50 mile ride. I always tear up when my breeding program shows up at my ride. This year was exceptional.

That photo of Linda Ferguson and Menominee Windstorm on the prior page? They earned their Decade Team at my ride. This was a 10-year long adventure for Linda, with a finale worth writing about! CONGRATULATIONS, LINDA!

My personal horse, Bombardier NPF (aka Bee), ridden by Dawn, ran second all day long in the 75. Bee completed a full 90 minutes ahead of third place. It was her first 75 mile ride. Our goal this year was to slow her down. Well, I can honestly say that didn't work. Appaloosas are amazing.

Her half-sister, Da Bomb NPF (aka Merri), ridden by Audrey, and younger than Bee by two weeks, finished turtle in the 75. Merri had done her first 100 mile ride in 2022 and I was so happy to see her entered in the 75 mile at my ride. Did I tell you Appaloosas are amazing?

Grasshopper NPF (aka Hopper) finished third in the 50 taking all the honors of best condition and high vet score (congratulations to Geneva Soule). I am 100% certain that Geneva and Hopper will have a long and exciting career in this sport.

We closed out our 2023 New York Adventure ride with many happy riders and well loved horses. Thank you to everyone that attended and a HUGE thank you to all my volunteers this year. They worked very hard and did a fabulous job.

# Check Horse Pastures for Poison Plants

by Kentucky Equine Research Staff

Horses turned out on good-quality pasture usually won't ingest poisonous plants as long as there are other choices. However, if pasture is overgrazed or forage is in poor condition because of drought, some horses will sample weeds or tree leaves they normally wouldn't touch. Many of these dangerous plants have a bitter flavor that discourages horses from taking more than a small taste, but very hungry animals will sometimes be forced to graze on whatever they can find. The consequences might be colic, neurologic problems, or even death.

Horse owners and property managers should check fields for dangerous plants and trees several times a year, as not all plants will be growing in every season. Some pasture plants that pose a danger to horses are nightshade, milkweed, blue flax, poison hemlock, and but-tercups. Trees and shrubs in the toxic category include black walnut, wild cherry, yew, locust, horse chestnut (buckeye), red maple, and oak.

Plants and trees may not be equally dangerous during all seasons and at all stages of growth, and some parts carry toxins while others are not a risk if ingested. For instance, wilted leaves of wild cherry and red maple trees are particularly toxic, but munching a fresh leaf or two most likely won't hurt the horse.

Horses that are challenged by another factor may be at increased risk for plant poisoning. It is suspected that several horses in Texas were fatally poisoned when they ingested silverleaf nightshade after being dewormed with an ivermectin product. Horses that are weakened by illness or malnutrition may also be more susceptible to the effects of toxic forage.

To protect horses in your care, follow these management steps:

**Ask** an agricultural extension agent or pasture specialist to walk your turnout area to help identify dangerous plants and tell you how to get rid of them.

**Avoid** turning horses out in pasture that is overgrazed or in poor condition.

**Provide** hay in the field if forage is not sufficient.

**Check** fields after storms and high winds to be sure tree branches have not fallen into the field.

**Keep** an eye on horses that have been turned out into a new pasture, and check with a veterinarian if they show signs of colic or neurologic problems.

Article courtesy of [Kentucky Equine Research](#).

*Send your story for the next Extra!*

Mail your Word document and photos to [endurancenews@aerc.org](mailto:endurancenews@aerc.org) by September 15, 2023

# About the Armadillo

The June issue of *Endurance News* carried a few Armadillo Ride reminiscences. Here are all the others we couldn't squeeze into the magazine. Hope they whet your appetite for this ride, which will be the site of the **AERC National Championship** rides this October!

**Eron Howell.** My very first LD endurance ride was a wet and wild water experience. Donna Murphy, who back then was new to endurance as well, encouraged me to come to Bo and Linda Parrish's Armadillo Ride in the East Texas piney woods. We were a lot younger then and so excited to be at ride camp meeting new horse people. During the night it started to rain, and rain, and rain. Between the rain dripping here and there and being excited about a totally new adventure, I fitfully slept in the tack room of my two-horse trailer. With it still pouring rain in the morning, I thought for sure the ride would be canceled last minute. But we decided to saddle up and cover the horses just in case it cleared up and they held the ride. It didn't stop raining, but the ride started anyway so off we went! Three of us were trotting nose to tail with only a small space between us along winding trails in the deep part of the woods. Then suddenly, crash! pine needles smack in my face! In the space between tail and nose a pine tree fell with the trunk barely missing my horse and me. He jumped through the branches and kept on keep going. I don't know how we were not killed. Dumb luck, or the Newbie Endurance Angel for sure. Undaunted, with torn rain slicker and scratches all over, we splashed on and made it in time back to camp. We passed our vet check and were elated to have completed our ride. It didn't matter at all that we were almost the turtles. Ride managers, Linda and Bo Parish (now friends) did give me a fun award for "almost dying on trail." I was so sore, dirty, and totally hooked. To this day it is one of the wildest and wettest rides I have ever been on. What a great introduction to endurance!

**Ann Goosby.** The year was 2002. At this time my daughter was starting this amazing sport we knew we would rock. I had five LD rides under my belt so of course I knew everything about endurance and horses. What could stop me moving up to 50s? Only minor issue was that my horse wouldn't cross creeks or puddles, but that shouldn't be a problem, as the weather was looking beautiful for the weekend. At the ride meeting, Linda talked about the trails and then the dreaded words "rain" and "creeks" were spoken. The forecast had changed! I was awake all night worried about whether we should ride. It was pouring rain the next morning at the start, and the first loop was exhausting because I had to get off and lead my horse across every creek crossing. I even lost my glasses! In the hold, I went to my trailer to pour the water out of my boots and change clothes, then back out on trail as the creeks were getting deeper and slicker. Now just one more loop to go! The last 10-mile loop had been changed to 15 miles on the forest roads, due to all of the water. I was at the last creek crossing, and Beau was refusing. I was exhausted and I could not face getting off again. I spent a long time staring at that creek thinking that drowning would be easier than the next couple of miles. Suddenly, Beau jumped the creek and we were airborne! I landed back in the saddle and off we went to the finish line. That night my daughter and I looked out my trailer window not able to move from being cold and wet. We were watching the 100 milers going back out and decided we were done with this crazy brutal sport! But endurance riding is kind of like childbirth, and the next morning at the awards when I saw Bo and Linda's smiling warm faces, and I was ready and eager for the next ride. Over 20 years later I am still attending the Armadillo and enjoying the sweet hospitality of Bo and Linda Parrish. This is by far my favorite ride.

**Sylvia Sazama.** After riding the very, very hot Unicorn Hunt I was so counting on this to be cooler, it is the same trails, just a different ride camp, down the road. In camp on Friday it was so hot, Robin, Kerry and I went for a real short ride and we were sweating like crazy, but that afternoon a cool front came through which made the temperature perfect for ride day. We started the 55 in front with no intention of staying there. Nordik led the first loop of 17.3 miles, and the trails were well marked and clear. Tommy Robicheaux caught up with us at some point during the loop, and we continued riding together. Most of the water for horses out there was a couple ponds and puddles, which our horses seemed to prefer over the tubs of water. After the first hold, it was Tommy's turn to lead. His horse was very energetic, and he was talking to me, but my saddle had a squeak and I couldn't hear him. He turned in the saddle to repeat what he'd said, and his saddle slipped and boom! he fell. He was stuck and his horse stepped on him before Tommy was able to get free. He was unharmed, which was good because I was too busy laughing to help him. It was a slow motion, "oh sh\*\*\*" sort of fall that you just can't stop from happening. He re-saddled and we continued on the rest of the ride without incident. We were at the finish line at 5:00 pm — eight hours and 15 minutes of riding time — 13th and 14th. So another 55 in the books! We had breakfast and awards Sunday morning before heading home.

**Todd Hezeau.** October 17, 2009, Fortune and I had our first 100 mile completion at the Armadillo. Fortune was by no means a fast horse, in fact she disliked endurance for the most part but she was willing to accommodate me and my passion. We were on the last loop and I don't even know what trail it was but it had rained that week and there were holes along this trail, which is one of the many old forest service roads out there, and those holes were filled with water, so we had to traverse them on the side of the trail, weaving to avoid the next one.

I kept hearing what sounded like whispering behind the trees next to us so I turned my headlamp on, but no one was there. I turned it off and the whispering continued. Sounded like a man and a woman. Fortune didn't seem to be distracted by them so I blew it off and continued down trail but it went on and on for a good distance of that part of the trail. We had earlier been surprised by Bo Parrish, the ride manager, on his 4-wheeler. He takes care of his 100 mile riders out on trail in the dark in that he will be at intersections as the rider comes along and moves on to the next intersection and waits for the rider. I think that is awesome. But the whispering was definitely not Bo, and when we came to the next intersection he was there waiting for us. I told him about the whispering and he just laughed and went on to

## Armadillo . . .

the next intersection. Eventually we found our crew on the road waiting for us and I told them about the whispering and they laughed, until we saw a light in the woods way off in the distance. That was creepy as it was probably about 2:30-3:00 am. Luckily we were not far from camp. We crossed the finish line at about 3:30 am, got our completion, and finished our first 100. Never knew if someone was really there or if it was a hallucination.

**Carol Weber.** The seed was planted when I saw a post encouraging riders to come to the Armadillo Ride in 2022 in preparation for participating in the AERC Nationals being held there in 2023. Kennard, Texas, is only 600 miles away and I'd heard so many good things about the hospitality of Bo and Linda Parrish. It sounded like a great adventure and wonderful way to end a tough season of competing, and I was thrilled when Wendy Renae Cooper agreed to go with me. The food was amazing! The Parrish family provides home-cooked meals all weekend. The chicken and dumplings were to die for Friday night. The fried fish and fresh fried potatoes were just what everyone needed after a long day's ride on Saturday. I'd never eaten so well at a ride! And the ride itself – it was surreal. Because we had to get on the road Sunday morning early, we rode the 30 mile LD. I will never forget the smell of pines as the sun filtered through the trees. I thought to myself all that was missing were fairies dancing as the dew sparkled off the pine needles. Magical is the only word to describe it. The first loop was a little over 17 miles. We knew we were making good time and vetted through easily. The second loop flew by and before I knew it we were done. Our horses pulsed down right away and they said we both were in top ten! Best condition judging happened right after completion. We didn't know how we had done because the ride meeting wasn't until the next morning. While we were on the road, I got a text and couldn't believe we won best condition and high vet score! We had worked on so many things together last year. Saddle fit. Feed. Electrolytes. It was all worth it. It was a ride I will never forget with a great friend who took me up on an offer for a crazy, last-minute trip to ride our dragons through a magical forest. And in case you're wondering, we plan to go back in 2023 to ride in the National Championship 50 miler.

**Darolyn Butler.** Armadillo 1998. I was doing a lot of 100 mile rides during that time period. I had a really great horse, DJB Conquistador, who had proven himself countless times and a 100 mile ride was pretty much a breeze for him. The race went pretty normal, until the last 10 mile vet check out on trail. Conquistador had developed a very slight limp and he had been so good it was hugely disappointing. And only 10 miles to go! In the dark with flashlights the vet, my crew, and I examined his feet over and over and could see nothing wrong. Since the lameness was slight, the vet said I could lead him in the last 10 miles, and if he wasn't worse, he could get a completion. So off I went thinking, "Ten miles is a nothing burger!" Bo Parrish got worried about me walking along on foot at 3:00 am in the dark woods, so he sent Mark Dial out to walk with me the last three miles or so. My ligaments had gotten so strained and pulled, when I would try to go up the ravine crossings, Mark almost had to push me from behind to get me to the top. I think my body was zeroed out more than it has ever been in any of my previous 20,000 or so miles of endurance riding, nor in the 20,000 that I have done since. At last we made it in with a couple of hours to spare. Before we tried the last trot-out, we did a quick hoof check once again, and there it was — a small stone in his foot! We plucked it out and trotted our final trot-out. Not me, because I was totally lame myself by then. With the rock no longer there, he trotted out totally sound. Just an amazing end for the night!

**Tracy Kelley, DVM.** I want to preface by saying that as someone who has done endurance from coast to coast, Armadillo truly is one of my favorite rides. The magical quiet of the seemingly unending Davy Crockett Forest is like a sanctuary. In 2014, I had two horses I needed to get 50s on at that ride. Normally I would have ridden one and my kid would have ridden the other, but we were trying out a new horse to potentially purchase so I needed someone to ride the second horse. A lady that helped us condition volunteered (I'll call her Jane). While she was a fantastic rider, Jane had never done a 25 miler, much less a 50. I told her that distance would be out of the question, but she insisted. Against my better judgment, Jane and I saddled up for the 50. Things started out contentious from the start when she pronounced she had made a mixtape for us to listen to on the ride. I had to explain that the quiet woods were the highlight of this ride and we were not going to taint it with her mixtape. It was a HOT day. Thankfully my kid got pulled on the first loop, because on loop two, Jane pronounced she needed to stop and go to the bathroom. I patiently held the horses while she stalked into the woods. Soon violent bowel sounds were emanating from her direction. She stumbled back, climbed on, and off we went . . . for perhaps another mile. She had to stop trotting and walk. Over and over. The gal shot diarrhea all over that trail off and on for the rest of the ride. When we got back to camp she was worthless, just literally collapsed on the ground while my kid vetted and took care of the horse. I begged her not to go back out but she insisted she was fine. By the end (miraculously we did finish at the back of the pack) she was urinating blood. She confessed afterwards she had taken an arsenal of meds prior to the ride, including muscle relaxers. Come to find out, her mother had told her doing the 50 was a bad idea — she would rather have died out on that trail than give up and prove her mother right. After all the work was done at the end of the ride (she laid on the ground and watched us) she suddenly had the strength to rise up and join in for the FABULOUS catfish dinner. I will now always chuckle when I ride that forest, recounting the not-so-magical sounds coming from the woods that day. I should have let her play the mixtape.

**[Click for information about the AERC National Championship Ride!](#)**

# The 2023 OD 100: Riding Through the Fire

by Jaime McArdle

*It does seem appropriate that the culmination of the “Green to 100” journey, Jaime and Khaleesi would ride through a fire on the top of the mountain.*

Every detail of this ride weekend was expertly orchestrated. I should clarify: not that I expertly orchestrated it — that is way above my skillset. It was orchestrated by the one who can orchestrate temperatures, thunderstorms, and fires.

I have to thank my official mentor for most of this journey, Lynne Gilbert, who along with Kate Lawrence (who has helped me many times with ideas and amazing organizational suggestions and great conversation sharing some training rides) were incredibly helpful in dialing in my prep for this ride. I hate prep and I hate packing, it's the thing I think I'm weakest at and it seems to take so much effort and focus for me to do, I put it off. With their advice, the prep work really paid off! When Iva and I arrived at ride camp we had everything done and settled in a few hours including check-in and vet-in. We found ourselves sitting in our chairs, sipping sparkling waters, admiring the horse eating in her pen and talking about how nice it feels to be so far ahead of the game. Everything had a particular calm about it for this ride — even down to the fact that I had zero truck or trailer trouble (which every other ride this year has had something go wrong).

As for the details way beyond my pay grade: the weather was in our favor with highs predicted 78-81°, the low for the ride start was 48° (cooler than I like, but great for K) and the low overnight during the ride was in the 50s. Humidity was low as we've been in a dry spell, that means trails were dry and no mud to contend with. These details were good for us, but most good things come with a flip side. Dry trails also mean all of the dirt roads were relentlessly hard and concussive, and even more, the dry meant a forest fire had started on the mountain the early morning before the 55 mile ride on Friday. The amazing OD staff (led by Diane Connolly) rerouted the second loop of the trail after the ride began and before any riders got to that section. That meant they were able to pull marking on the old trail as much as they could without going into the fire itself- and mark with great clarity the new trail that we were assured was “almost” exactly the same distance.

This also I found fascinating that the fire was in the place where there was already an alternate trail ready to go. In fact, when the AERC National Championship ride was held at the Old Dominion a few years back this was the section they rerouted for the trail that year. They did not have to figure out a reroute, only to go make the changes. So, in fact, we ended up riding the same trail they used for the National Championship ride.

The reroute took out what was in my opinion the worst climb of the day, that happens in the worst heat of the day as well. It's a segment of trail I've done in the 55 mile rides I've completed in years past and it's my least favorite segment. I always get off and walk because the climb is so steep and relentless my horse is never going any faster than I can walk and so it makes sense to save her the effort of also carrying me while I could walk. It never seems to end and when the worst of it is over and you feel like you've gotten somewhere, you realize you are still climbing just less steep. Then when you begin to descend it's steep and lots of loose rocks, so my horse slips a bunch on the footing. Last year I got back off and ran down the mountain on foot so we could make up some time and go faster than I would be safe riding it.

The new route still had to go over the mountain, so it didn't save us elevation, but it had a different way to do the climb that I thought was a better route for the up side. The problem with the reroute is it left us all with seven miles of downhill gravel road that was dry as bone, slippery with loose gravel and concussive without a break. The route apparently weeded out a fair amount of riders on the Friday 55 with lameness issues at the Laurel Run vet check and we were all cautioned to take it easy on that deceptive stretch of road. The last half of it was pretty steep downhill as well which was particularly difficult to get much speed if you didn't want to risk injury.

I thought for my own horse, I'd take the gravel road over that climb any day of the week, but was surprised to hear every single other rider say the reroute made for a harder segment and they were not happy about the news though everyone knows you can't argue with a forest fire. The general consensus was the ride this year was particularly tough due to this issue.

Regardless, this was all out of my control from the weather to the fire, so I went to bed early (since we had everything so well dialed in) and didn't sleep hardly at all.

By the time 4:00 am came around it was down to that cold 48° and I really did not want to get out of my sleeping bag cocoon. I made the decision to sleep in my riding pants because it made getting up just a little easier and was glad I did. Mike worked on the coffee, Iva took care of the horse including getting her for a light walk around camp as I got myself ready to go.

The day began with high drama as right before 5:00 am we had a stampede of loose horses thundering through camp — unfortunately



After the ride: Jaime McArdle, Iva Jamison, Ireland's Khaleesi, and Michael Scales

some of them with their temporary fencing behind them which makes for terrified horses everywhere. I am glad K was walking with Iva instead of in her pen, however that also held some dangers as loose horses terrified and in flight do not make good decisions and could certainly get Iva and K caught up in a mess.

I found Iva nearby, slightly entangled with a loose horse, but K was calm and Iva was OK. She is about as cool as any cucumber I've known, but I think her adrenaline had shot up as I took the lead rope from her and began to intervene in Khaleesi's attention, asking her to focus on me, trust me that all was going to be well, and she could relax and let go of the crazy stuff that was now just calming down as people began to get their hands on the wild horses around camp.

We were checked in with Henry (the man in charge of all time) by about 5:25 and walking back and forth on the dirt road getting focused and prepared for the 5:30 am start. There were 13 horses and one mule that would cross the start line as the sun was just coming up, 10 of which would cross the finish line sometime the following morning.

Our first loop to Bird Haven 1 was uneventful and I had hoped to do the segment in 2-1/2 hours. We came through the meadow to the in timer at 7:55 am with a ride time of 2 hours 25 minutes. By 8:00 am we had crossed the pulse window easily at 52 bpm and were vetting through with no trouble and a recovery pulse of 48. The morning was cool which really helps a dark, muscular horse. My crew took care of everything and got us out on the second segment at 8:40 not to see me again until we reached the Bucktail check at 4:09 pm. Laurel Run check lies in between and no crew is allowed there the first time so we would be on our own the next seven hours or so.

This was the rerouted second loop, and the only time I went (briefly) off trail. This was one thing I really wanted to try to improve as it seems at almost every ride I miss something. It really costed us at Big South Fork where it is possible we MIGHT have finished had I not added six miles in the wee dark hours following the wrong colored lights at a trail crossing. This time instead of it costing us, it might have paid off because after I passed a turn, realized within maybe a tenth of a mile there were no ribbons and an intersection with no direction at all we had missed something . . . when I went back I saw the turn (there was a camper parked near there off in the woods that had distracted K. I missed the turn because she was so focused on the distraction I had gotten focused on helping her move past it, when actually turning was what we should have done.) I began to head up the correct trail again and came quickly upon Nancy Sluys and her fabulous mule Danny and from that connection, we didn't part ways until the finish line.

I had prayed for a few favors for this weekend. One of which was favorable weather including no thunderstorms; the other was a buddy to ride with so we would not be in the back alone, spending all those miles of hard trail in the wilderness never seeing another soul. I was prepared to do this ride in any weather, and I am always prepared to ride alone, but having both of those prayers answered was a grace I am thankful for.

Nancy manages and runs the Iron Mountain ride and has completed the OD I believe about five times in her career. She has both come in top 10 and come in turtle (the coveted last place) over those years. On this ride she was purposely taking the long, slow journey to use up the clock as a resource with a mule she felt likely could do the ride, but he wasn't as conditioned as she might like. She was going to take good care of him and not push him more than his tough mule system could thrive. Doing our first 100 with a mule was fitting somehow, certainly it was divinely appointed because that mule ate every blade of grass he found out there, and the frequent stop for a quick bite encouraged K to eat a ton along the way; and his determination to walk EVERY SINGLE HILL NO MATTER HOW SMALL THE INCLINE saved our strength and got us through each vet check with flying colors. I think it was mule magic that gifted us such a strong finish for this first 100 completion for us.

It was true the last seven miles of hard-packed, pounding dirt road of this segment was concerning. We trotted when we could and took care not to pound too hard too long, but also not walk it all which would take forever. When the road got steep, probably about four miles to Laurel Run, I dismounted, loosed my saddle slightly, rolled up the stirrups and committed to jog the final section in myself. I hike and jog with K all the time so this is familiar territory, however I ended up on foot longer than I'd have chosen if I realized it. I took on a downhill jog of 6-8 mph which I hoped would save the pounding on her legs not adding my weight to hers. The ride photographer Becky Pearman (who is amazing in every way) caught us in the last 1/2 mile to the vet check jogging in together which is fun because I now have a photo memory of that — which turned out to be the only part of the ride I did on foot.

I jogged all the way to the in timer at Laurel Run at 12:18 pm. This is one of the two toughest trail loops now in the bag. We traversed the distance in just under three hours and 40 minutes (just what the distance was I'm not sure, I was told the reroute trail was the same



The "mule team" — we joined up with Nancy Sluys and Danny on Loop 2 and stayed together until the bitter end. Photo © Becky Pearman.

## 2023 OD 100 . . .

distance as the original route: 16.5. My Strava record suggests it was a little over 19. I know these things have variable accuracy — and I am certain I did not go more than 1/4 mile of trail. Regardless we made it!). We pulled tack and were pulsed in up the hill four minutes later at 44 bpm, sound with all “A” scores, pulse recovers to 48 and an out time of 1:07 pm.

Nancy and I left Laurel Run together to take on the big gravel road we had just descended toward my favorite loop of the day. This is the ride to Bucktail and thanks to the awesome drag rider program that Duane manages I’ve already ridden it twice and knew what to expect. Being a favorite doesn’t make it easy. It begins with a four-mile relentless climb in the sun and heat of the day. Then we head into my favorite scenery of the ride — beautiful grass trails and single track through pretty woods. There are no serious climbs after the gravel road, but there are plenty of rocks.



The field in and out of Bird Haven. Photo © Becky Pearman.

It’s a bit deceptive because the grass trails look so inviting and ready to take a carefree trot or even canter through, but the trails are embedded with rocks that are easy to trip over or land wrong on if you aren’t taking care. The loop is listed at 14.5 miles — the shortest yet of the day — but it still took us three hours (and two minutes) to get through it. Thankfully a bonus perk to riding with Nancy is she sings some of her original songs about endurance riding! We actually spent some of this loop singing to each other to pass the time.

We arrived together at Bucktail glad to see Mike and Iva waiting for us at the in-timer at 4:09 pm; within two minutes we’d pulled tack at the water troughs and pulsed in the heat of the day with minimal sponging at 64 bpm with a recovery of 60. The Bucktail trot-out lanes have landmines of rocks and debris in them and K and I both found ourselves tripping out and in! The vet said she saw some potential off steps but she was thinking it was the surface not an injury. That proved true

but gave Iva the job of butt massage through that hold to ensure she wasn’t getting tight. Everything else was good to go and we headed to the truck where my crew had set up everything for us for the 40-minute hold.

This was the first vet check that K began to prefer browsing for grass over her prepared food. Iva had to massage in between K walking casually up and down the lane looking for her favorite spots to graze. Bucktail isn’t the most friendly for grazing being more of circular drive than a field. Still she was actively eating and seemed happy with the plan so we allowed her to make the call for herself. I found snacks myself- preferring pretzel chips and a homemade cream cheese dip along with a sourdough pizza pocket with sausage and mushrooms.

We were ready to go at our out time though I thought I’d lost Nancy and Danny and almost considered leaving without them (only because I couldn’t actually find them). Turns out they hadn’t pulsed quite as quick as K due to Danny dragging Nancy to the water trough and drinking for about two minutes straight upon arrival. We ended up waiting at the out-timer until both horses were released (5:01 for me and 5:07 for them) and we headed into the next segment which included the horrible, horrible trail that we’d ridden in deep discouragement in April at the No Frills 55 . . . the trail that had turned my mind right then and there never to attempt the Old Dominion 100 because I never wanted to set hoof on that trail ever again.

We were headed there now: the longest distance of the day (almost 24 miles) until we saw our crew again at Big 92, but broken up in between with what is called a “gate and go” as well as a “hospitality stop.” The first part clocked on my GPS recorder at 7.9 miles and was mostly open forest roads, but with that hoof-crunching quartz rock that you cannot move much on. It is terrible for footing and slows everything down. It also had over 1,000 feet of elevation gain and brought us to the “gate and go” called Waites Run at probably just after 6:30 pm (I didn’t attend to my electronics right away at this check and I’m doing backward math for this estimate).

At the gate and go you enter the checkpoint and you get an “in” time only when you come down to pulse of 64. This is the “gate” of the gate and go. As soon as a vet calls your pulse time the “hold” clock begins and you must wait 10 minutes, allow your horse to eat and drink, then you’re back on the trail again. There is no crew here, it’s a brief pause for the vet staff to be sure everyone is still doing well and make sure everyone is OK on trail. Though there is no crew they make you a freshly grilled made-to-order hamburger (with cheese if you want!) and I ate one! There is cold water (was so refreshing!), and they offer your horse a small variety of snacks including carrots, and will hold your horse so you can take a potty break.

Out of the four of us that entered together coming in at a trot since the terrain allowed it, I checked in immediately at 72 bpm. After about 30 seconds another check had us at 68, then a third check in about the same time or less had us down to 64 and we were the first to pulse down and get an out-time. The team that had caught up to us on the trail and spent the last couple miles riding along came down next, but Danny was hanging high. In this case they quickly made the call to pull off the tack (saddle and pads) and get some cool water on him which helped, but it cost maybe seven minutes or so to get his temp and heart rate to drop. Danny seemed to hang in the 70s but once he dropped tack and got some cool water he dropped like a stone into the 50s.

This was when I had a decision to make, and now looking back it wasn't really a decision, but in the moment I did weigh my options. I had the first out-time and I could leave alone and get back on trail ASAP. I could go out with the next rider who was just a minute or two behind me . . . or I could wait the seven or so extra minutes and stick with Nancy and Danny. It didn't take me long to weigh the possibilities and I made the call for good that we had partnered with the mule team, and we were now in this together. We would wait. It wasn't simply magnanimity that drove this call. I believed that they were the right partners for us for this ride. So K got a few extra carrots and I ate my whole burger and we let the out-timer know to just hold on, we'd get out of there when the mule was good and ready!

I think we trotted out just around 6:53 pm with the blessing of the vet who watched us go (that's the "go" part of the gate and go, our departure is like a trot-out so the vet has to see we are sound but they do it as we are leaving — calling you back if there is an issue), it's like an abbreviated vet check.

Now came the infamous Old Mailpath Trail which is the section I consider the most horrible. We had just climbed 1,000 feet in the first 7-8 miles, and the next section added on another 1,800 feet, all of it on unfriendly technical terrain. The "mail trail" as it's endearingly referred to is not actually that bad if it were that climb alone, but after you've had about enough of it, then you exit the rocky climb for the demoralizing Tuscarora-Three Ponds Trail which is more of a rocky mess of climb heading over the top of the mountain and starting down, which is no faster because the rocks and terrible footing. Finally you come to the turn off to Little Schloss Road, which isn't really a road at all . . . and for us it was now dark enough to turn on a headlamp, and the rocky chunks of "gravel off-road" road were tough to push through in the gathering darkness. Khaleesi would get a little speed going and then trip or slip or hit a rock and with the intelligence she possessed would suggest strongly that we should continue to walk. Danny was always incredibly sure-footed, but he was never in much of a rush to get anywhere, so he picked his way through it all beautifully but not with incredible speed.



Through the long ears; part of the trail to Bucktail. Photo © Nancy Sluys.

It was in this gathering darkness and the demoralizing slow-as-molasses pace we had been going practically since leaving the Waites Run gate and go that I was beginning to panic. The estimate to get to the hospitality stop was supposed to be around 12 miles and in the end my GPS showed 14 (I realize the GPS are not all accurate but it can be frustrating when you're getting worried as the hour is getting late, the mileage is adding up and still . . . you are not there yet). The horses were feeling the drag and becoming hard to motivate. This is when the voice was coming out of the darkness: Why did you wait at the gate and go? You should have taken that few minutes and gotten ahead . . . you should have gone with the other rider. . . . This mule is determined not to finish this ride, all he wants to do is walk and eat! How do you know you can trust Nancy — she seems confident it's all just fine, but she could be fooling herself! What if she's wrong . . . You know you are never going to do this 100 mile distance! You should have gotten an Arab that runs over the mountains and rocks like it doesn't care if it lives or dies instead of this horse that refuses to do anything she deems "unsafe." . . . You guys will never make the cut-off for Big 92. You're going home in a trailer.

I told myself to quit it. This is NOT how I live. Even if we didn't finish I decided to do it with our friends and that was more important, remember? Remember what matters? Not completing a ride and achieving a goal! What really matters is all in the how we do things. What really matters is the who that's around us, not the goals we want to achieve. I told the voice in the darkness to go away because it didn't matter now, I had made my choice, and I was with the mule for better or worse.

*And that's when a pair of riders from behind came up on us like a freight train.*

They had realized how behind they'd gotten and close to the cut-off times, and were attempting to make up some time. The sound of horses scrambling furiously through the rocky road and lights coming brighter had our animals on high alert. Khaleesi was in a slight panic not sure what was happening, but certain she didn't want to die there on the mountain so she picked up her pace. Danny was slightly less panicked, but he was getting motivated and adrenaline was kicking in like a drug. The pair from behind began to push (inadvertently) on our demoralized mounts and they began to decide they maybe could start to pick up the pace. We stayed ahead of the riders for a bit, but they were overtaking us and eventually asked to pass. To which of course we said "certainly."

This woke something up in our horses (I'm not sure if they wanted to keep up with the other steeds that passed, or if they didn't want to meet whatever had them running through in such a panic!). Regardless, they began to pick their way at a much faster rate through the dark rough trail-road and we scrambled along behind the fast-moving pair. I for one, was glad to be moving again and then prayed no one would break a leg on the loose rocks as Khaleesi occasionally tripped slightly or slid but never enough to fall or cause injury.

This went on what felt like endlessly. I'm sure it was like six hours (OK, maybe it was 15 minutes?) past my mileage estimate and at that point I had no idea when we would find the hospitality spot which had a cut off time of 10:00 pm. Finally we saw lights ahead and we pulled into Little Sluice Hospitality stop at 9:50 pm. Nancy was pleased —we had 10 minutes to spare!

*This did not encourage me.*

I did not want to do this ride on 10 minutes to spare. That felt a LOT too close for comfort!

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A hospitality stop on an endurance ride has no minimum hold time. You get to see a human; they check your number and report that you are OK (or if you are not OK!). They have cold water (what a treat), and water, snacks and carrots for the horses. They'll hold your horse while you pee (also a treat) and you can relax there as long as you wish. For me, that as long as I wished, was as fast as we could get a drink, take a pee, and get back on the road.

In my mind we were now racing the clock, or admitting defeat. The final stretch into Big 92 was four miles and we had a cut-off of arriving there and being pulsed in by 10:45 pm. Looking back, doing four miles on a clear dirt road, mostly downhill, and having almost an hour to do it was not exactly pushing the clock, however I was feeling the pressure of the ticking hand of missing the upcoming cut-offs and I basically made the call for "us" that this was a quick stop and off we go!

Nancy was graceful (I learned today Nancy means grace . . . how apt . . . and she humored me as I rushed her onward and we left before the riders that had passed us — getting quickly back on the trail by 9:55 pm.

This next four miles Khaleesi and I drove a relentless pace with occasional waiting for Danny who decided a slight incline is technically uphill and, oh yeah, right, he doesn't trot uphill. Once in a while he would grab a bite of grass, but I think he realized Jaime was starting to come a tad unglued and maybe he wouldn't push his luck on the salad bar just then. Mules are smart, you know. As the miles began to pass by at a faster pace, I began to relax . . . but not fully. We were eventually passed by the other riders who we'd leap-frogged at the hospitality stop but we still made great time on the four miles in 32 minutes to pull into Big 92 where my crew was waiting with arms open wide at 10:28 pm (now 17 minutes to spare, so the gap was widening a tad). We were now at mile 70.

I walked K to the truck in order to pull tack and that took a few minutes since the truck was not close to the in timer or the vet. By the time we walked back over to the vet, looking back I think it was more time wasted than I'd have preferred. [I think in the future if we couldn't get closer with the truck, I'd have my crew bring a bucket and sponge to the front area and I'd drop tack there, like we did at Bucktail.] With a six-minute lag which was the longest all day from in-timer to pulse time, and the furious pace we'd come through in the last seven miles or so, the patient pulse taker held on as she gradually dropped (K was closer to 68 when we first arrived, then dropped to 60). Straight to the vet who read us at 64, and after a jog out and back recovered to 60. That was all acceptable, however Dr. Bob (who has known us for many years) thought her gut sounds were quieter than he would like and at this stop our card was held for a recheck before we left.

We could all see that K was attacking everything green she could while we talked and observed her. She was hungry, eating well, and drinking (her hydration was excellent). He didn't think there would be a problem, but he wanted to be certain before we left, so her job was to get eating so he could hear the guts begin working again before we would be released. This didn't affect her out time unless the gut didn't start moving.

Back at the truck, Iva now had the job of allowing K to eat everything and anything in sight, which she did, preferring mostly grasses and weeds to her prepared food, though she did eat some of that as well, and some hay, carrots, and an apple.

This was my grumpy pants vet check. I told my patient crew that I was worried about the cut-off times, and how close we were getting to bumping up against them. The slow pace we had been stuck in for, let's face it, all told like 30 miles in the last two segments, was wearing on me and I felt like we had no chance make the finish line. I was grateful we were getting to go out again, because even if I only made it to the second Laurel Run and then got pulled for missing the cut-off, at least that would be almost 80 miles and I would have seen the entire course for the next time I try this thing again . . . because it was is a question of when we finish this ride, not if. And at that point I was about certain it was not going to be that attempt.

I tried to be gracious to them and all they did for me. I think I said thank you 50 times although it was because my black little heart did not feel thankful at all right then so I was overcompensating (I WAS thankful for them, of course, just not the position I thought I'd put myself in to not finish this thing which, when you're also on lack of sleep, you also feel like your crew came all the way out here to support you the least you could do is get the thing done so they could feel like they came for some purpose, not throw it away by making dumb decisions that cost time when you maybe should be taking the advice of everyone who says RIDE YOUR OWN RIDE . . . all of this is nonsense, but it was the low point so I just had to get through it). Mike had heated up some of his amazing famous homemade mac and cheese, and I could only eat two bites. I felt terribly ungracious all around. I was getting queasy from the stress.

The only rule I'd made for myself was not to ride a slave to the cut-off times. Not to be anxious, but do my best and accept what came. Now that the composite shoe hit the road, I was completely stressed and anxious over the cut-off times! This was exactly what I wanted to avoid, and here I was caught in the trap.

### **And yet.**

There was a call from deep in my heart that at the end of the time at Big 92 that overrode everything. It came from the remembering that truly I never doubted that I made the right call. We were in it with the mule team, and I knew it was right. It was like being tied to the mast when the sirens were singing. There was not a question that I was doing exactly what I was meant to do, but the crazed part of me still fought against the restraints I had put in place myself. Thankfully, somehow I did get a hold of myself. I took K over to the vet for a recheck on her gut sounds and sure enough they were back to good and we were given back the rider card with blessing to continue. We got the mare saddled, electrolyted and walked over to see Nancy and Danny just finishing getting ready for their out-time which was a few minutes behind mine.

As she was doing a final check of tack I asked her: Nancy . . . do you really think we can finish this thing?

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*Not a question, she replied*

Like, not a question we can't . . . or like not a question we can? I really wasn't sure I understood because it seemed to me also to be certain . . . certain for failure at this point . . .

***Oh, we can finish, and we're going to. Trust me. We've got this.***

And with that it was settled. And I believed her. We had 30 miles to go through the night and we were going to finish this thing. And with that I had peace again. And with that peace we rode out accompanied by the drag rider coordinator, Duane Martin, to do the fastest segment in the ride.

We left Big 92 around 11:21 pm and arrived eight miles later at the second Laurel Run checkpoint at 12:32 am, 70 minutes later (roughly 7 mph average). The in-timer is at the bottom of the hill, walk up halfway to drop tack, and then without a sponge of water, seeing Danny and his crew going straight to vet- we followed suit and immediately walked up the rest of the hill to the pulse and vet. That (much of it being walking) took four minutes to get a pulse of 56 after a fast pace and uphill climb to be checked in. Her gut sounds were fine (considering we didn't eat much on the road race to get here that somewhat surprised me) but this was her first line-up of grades for gait, impulsion and attitude. Well, Laurel Run is famous for having a rocky down then uphill trot-out, and we'd just run a pretty fast eight miles, so I think that's fair. She was less than enthusiastic and who could blame her now at mile 78.3 having left camp 18 hours ago. Otherwise her score card shows all As and she was cleared to go.

We had now bought a few more minutes and were pulsed in a solid 24 minutes before the cut-off. I not only had peace, but felt hope. Regardless we were cleared to Bird Haven, and no matter what happened I would make it to mile 94. And no matter what, that would be the farthest and longest we had ever ridden, surpassing the miles of Big South Fork. Even if something kept us from the finish, I was seeing new limits of the farthest we've gone.

Everyone says that the last 30 miles of the OD 100 are "all downhill back to camp" but that is a lie. Danny knows the difference between downhill and uphill, I promise you that. Because that mule can be trotting along at 8 mph and as soon as the angle changes enough to tip the scale he puts on the brakes (watch yourself because this could be a train wreck) and he goes into mule walk. And I can say we mule-walked a lot of the terrain between Laurel Run 2 and Bird Haven 2.

But even the determination of that mule not to trot uphill did not surpass the experience of riding through the fire that was to come in this segment.

Before we left Laurel Run, Diane, the ride manager, pulled us aside to explain what we were going to find on this segment. The forest fire that had demanded the reroute of the first loop into Laurel Run that morning had continued to burn without significant control from the fire-fighting efforts and there was word that it had come upon the fire break that evening. The fire break was at the road we would be traveling home.

She had sent Pete up in the truck to find out the extent of the problem and they confirmed that the fire had come to the break, but it had not crossed it. We were going to find about a quarter-mile of very thick smoke, and we would see embers, possibly some burning, but it had not crossed the road and we should be safe to pass. I have to admit I was somehow not surprised.

*Of course the 100 mile ride I would finally complete would include riding through a forest fire.*

Of course.

We were ready to go, last two riders heading back onto trail, with an out-time of 1:06 am. We had until 4:30 am to be pulsed down at our last checkpoint (which is the same as our first one that morning). We had 3-1/2 hours to traverse the almost 14 miles to Bird Haven and Nancy was pleased because that was loads of time.

The two things that concerned the fringes of my mind did not include the fire.

**First**, I have ridden this segment in previous 55 mile rides, and I remember it is NOT all downhill, and it is NOT all a smooth-sailing road. I remember thinking this segment of trail was deceptively long-feeling when I'd ridden it before. I knew we would be ending the segment with a fair amount of downhill gravel road, which would otherwise be a strength of ours (we can safely and well-balanced trot some good downhill) but at mile 90 it was a dangerous risk with tired muscles; the potential for tightening up or a slip-fall meant a place we'd normally make up time seemed like it would be costly instead.

**Second**, even if the cut-off time into Bird Haven was 4:30, that meant an out time of like 4:50 which meant the last six miles would have to be done in 40 minutes . . . which was not ideal in my opinion.

Regardless, we had made up significant time in the cool of the evening. Everyone had promised me that the hardest parts of the ride were before Big 92 and once you turned out of that checkpoint the horses KNEW they were headed home, and it's cooler overnight, and the magic kicks in. They begin to gain speed at get faster and more powerful with hope of returning to the trailer, the call of "home away from home" gets stronger as the night wears on. This was not a lie. This is exactly what happened.

Considering how much even slight uphill grade lay before us, we walked a whole lot more of the next segment than made me comfortable, but I wasn't nearly as perturbed about it. At this point we were on a track and it was going to end somewhere.

I had wondered about the fire section — I had wondered how the equines would react. I had wondered if I would need to convince K to keep going with the smoke? Would she be concerned? Nervous? How would I get her through?

When we finally did come to the increasing smoke, eventually enough to burn our eyes and throats, it had come on so gradually that the animals didn't seem to have any fear or worries. I felt bad they had to walk through this but in truth it was pretty clear until we were

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quite close, and then when we did clear it, it was again clear air. I had imagined there would be glowing embers near the road, but I was surprised to see fires burning not far from us as we continued past. I wasn't afraid, but I was paying attention. We had to walk all of that though it was terrain that the mule would have probably trotted so it was kind of a bummer to have to walk more than already we would need to! We weren't willing to increase their need for more oxygen while the air was thick, and so calmly we walked.

This segment did feel long (have I written that about all of them??), we wished the road would finally end, and then when it did we had rocks that slowed us down, then a final climb, and then the single-track in the woods that I knew would lead us to that downhill gravel road. Still, after all that, we'd have another forest road section that would take us to another dirt road that would after many turns, pop us out to an asphalt road crossing . . . that was the sweetest part of the ride because once you cross the road where they lay the sand so those with metal shoes will have some traction . . . that is when you know you're less than a mile from Bird Haven and you begin to taste the hammock and going to sleep for just a while before the awards banquet where someone will confirm that indeed you and your horse finished and thus win the amazing prize of . . . a buckle that no one else will probably ever really understand what it represents.

The horses know too. And in crossing that road they were on fire and racing each other to get along the twists and turns that lead to the stream crossing that leads to the pasture that leads to the in-time and your waiting crew!

That stretch we covered in just about 2-1/2 hours which was really not bad at all, and landed us at Bird Haven 2 at 3:37 am, directly to pulse with a 60 bpm at 3:40 am, giving us an out-time of 4:00 am. This was ideal because I have done the last six miles in around 45 minutes in past years for other rides, so 90 minutes is double that . . . as long as we didn't end up with trouble at the finish line it seemed certain now we were going all the way.

This hold is only 20 minutes and they don't require removing the tack, so we did not. I freshened up my water and used the porta-potty, changed my socks and shoes (which I'd also done at Bucktail). It's amazing what fresh socks and shoes can do! I also added a neck gaiter as the chill was beginning to set in, we gave the mare her electrolytes and in no time we were headed back into the meadow, this time down the lighted runway heading home. Back to camp.

The last loop both Khaleesi and I were truly getting impatient and Danny knew it! Mules never get impatient, I think, they are the most committed and steadfast creatures on the planet. He stopped to takes bites of grass . . . what felt like every three steps but I'm certain I'm exaggerating (I had been up 24 hours now so my estimation is unreliable) . . . and still he refused to trot up even the slightest incline.

I had told my crew we technically could get back in 45 minutes but we weren't in a hurry so maybe more like an hour was likely. As the last six miles wore on, and Khaleesi promised in typical mare fashion that if Danny paused in mid-trot for a bite of grass one more time she was going to stick her nose right up his mule butt and push him back into motion. At this hour we were slightly less amiable to the stop-and-start pace that kept giving us whiplash and the drag rider who was not intentionally pushing us, but also riding along behind, would create a small equine pile-up behind Danny when he'd stop abruptly and K would end up almost touching his rear and then threatening mortal damage to the horse behind her who was having the same three-equine pile-up experience. It would almost be funny were it not after 4:00 am.

Khaleesi had had about enough and was determined to find a moment to pass and take the lead herself, but the mule was way ahead of that trick and he cut her off at every pass — even when I tried to think ahead in my human brain and set her up to take him. We were both just so ready to get this thing tied up at this point we would be glad to let him snack his way wandering back if he would only allow us to trot on along. He would not allow it. I'm sure I'm exaggerating, but my brain was not totally reliable at that hour to have the patience and grace I would on a normal ride in the daylight. At this point I was not actually worried we wouldn't finish in time, I was simply tired, and had to pee again! So the dragging out of the clock felt more excruciating as I dreamed of the porta-potties back in camp!

I remember thinking these two are set and determined to come in as close to 5:30 as we possibly can. I think she must have a bet out there she can time it to cross the finish at 5:29! Do we HAVE to come in right at the last minute? I wondered.

Iva later told me that she never once doubted we would make this ride to the end. She said when she saw us come into Bucktail, she saw Khaleesi and how strong she looked and she said she knew. We were going to do this. That is until she and Mike were waiting with Nancy and Danny's crew at the finish line . . . and 5:00 am came . . . then 5:05 came . . . and then the other riders who were still out came in . . . and 5:10 came and went . . . still no sign of us. She said that was the moment she began to doubt . . . when 5:15 came and went she began to worry something went wrong.

Then the ding of the alarm went off that warns the possibly sleeping finish line staff that riders are on approach. Iva said there was



Photo from the vet check at Big 92 with Dr. Bob Marshall. Becky caught us as I was asking K to focus during a lot of activity and calm herself so her heart rate would stay down under the pulse criteria. Photo © Becky Pearman.

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such a cheer when that alarm sounded as those waiting to see the very last of the riders felt huge relief. When our headlamps and glow sticks came into sight they called us in: Come on! You guys got this! Go Go Go!

When we'd finally come out onto the dirt road Khaleesi took her shot to pass the mule and broke into a fast trot. She was in the last mile of her first 100 mile completion and she was ready to fly. I was torn between the fact that we actually were going to be cutting this thing a bit close in the end, I really needed to pee, and not wanting to have a pulled muscle or trip on a rock so close to the end. So I let her go, but not at top speed. I blocked the canter entirely (too risky now). As we came into the camp we slowed just enough to encourage Danny to come alongside and we headed into the lighted finish line together, ready to cross as close to a tie as we could manage.

We crossed the line at 5:19:21 am. Eleven minutes on the clock.

***We had finally done it. We rode 100 miles.***

Now if it was to become official we needed to pass the vet check. There had already been one finish line pull that morning, so it is real. I handed the horse this time to Mike who walked Khaleesi slowly toward the vetting area where we would pull her tack and get her ready to do the final vet inspection. Iva waited for the rider card to be written on by the finish timer and I got lost somewhere in between unsure exactly what I was supposed to do. I think that was the point I began to cry as I walked to catch up with Mike and K ahead. They looked so perfect walking together with the dim pink light of sunrise coming up before them.

Khaleesi dove for the water trough and tanked up with a big drink. We pulled off her saddle and switched to a halter now that the ride was over. Gut sounds had been a question miles back so I wanted her to grab some grass while we slowly wandered over to the vet. I didn't want to be in a hurry, and decided not to sponge her because it was chilly in the early morning and she didn't feel hot even after that last fast push to the finish line. I wanted her to have a chance to get her gut sounds going, but I didn't want to wait long enough to risk muscles getting stiff and have her look lame due to a cramp.

With a slow hand-grazing walk to the vet tent she pulsed at 60 with a return to 60 after her trot-out. She was completed with all A scores, excellent gut sounds, completely sound and even an A for attitude.

I had weighed her on the big scale before the ride and she came in a whopping (even for her) 1130 pounds. As we left the vet tent I remembered to stop at the scale again to see if she had lost any weight in that 24-hour extreme feat she had just pulled off. She had lost a mere 50 pounds to come in at 1080. I did not weigh myself . . . either time! She is at her heaviest of her life right now as she usually weighs in when I bring her to events around the 1000-pound range. She certainly has more flesh than I would like, but she is also covered in muscle and incredibly strong. I look at her and see a mountain climbing beast of the East, my "Athena" athlete. No, she's not typical in any way, but I'm ridiculously pleased with the depth of what she brought to this ride.

Maybe the true hero of the ride story is actually Danny the mule and his human of grace, Nancy. I know we helped each other through; there were times when K took the lead and pushed the process forward, when the mule on his own might have made camp and sat at the salad bar (slight exaggeration), and we had great fun on some of the open dirt roads racing each other playing canter ahead leapfrog in the warm afternoon. However I am certain I would not have pushed the clock to the limits that Nancy and Danny were willing to. She never wavered from the certainty that we were going to finish this ride, and do it with the poise and patience worthy of a mule. If I were alone, or if I'd gone ahead to ride with someone else who had pushed a slightly faster pace, I don't know what would have happened.

Possibly we would have finished 10 minutes sooner (there was a large gap between the first few riders in, then the rest came in I believe between 5:00 and 5:20. Finishing 10 minutes sooner does not seem worth the panic and rush to me looking back. Possibly I would have had a more tired horse who used up more of her reserve strength and could have been more likely to pull a muscle or trip and injure herself. Perhaps I'd have had a horse less enthusiastic about eating and drinking and could have gotten into metabolic issues. Perhaps – perhaps – perhaps – and all I know is we hitched our wagon to the mule and at least once contrary to my "better" judgment stuck to that commitment and I think it served me more than it did them. That mule's commitment to taking care of himself gave the space for K to do the same, and from what I observed after the finish line, I have seen her more sore and exhausted from 55 mile rides in past years than I saw after finishing this very tough 100.

Also I felt surprisingly good the day after. I was stiff and sore after the finish line, but after a good epsom salt soak and a good night's sleep, by Monday afternoon, I was out walking the dogs on our wooded trail reflecting on how little long term physical effects the ride has had on me. I feel a bit like I've done a hard workout, but I've also felt worse after finishing certain 55 mile rides as well.

I attribute this to the way in which we rode each segment allowing the horses to set the pace and not pushing them beyond what they were willing to give (yes, we sometimes asked, but we didn't force). Left to my own devices, or possibly riding someone else's ride, I can see myself using up more of Khaleesi's reserves. I would have pushed her, especially on places we had clear terrain, and more trotting especially up the hills would have demanded more from her tank of reserve strength. What is stunning to see now is just how great she came through her first 100 and how strong and powerful a horse is really in there.

I have gotten to the place where we can ride some solid 50 mile distances and not have any sign of back soreness. After this ride there is some back sensitivity, and I don't like that. However I was aware that at every check, when I went to put the pads and saddle back on her, she never protested or tried to dance around or maneuver out of the saddle going back on. Also every time I climbed on a stool, truck or water trough she always came up to me and stood still to mount. I do believe the saddle is dialed in really well — I think if anything it's the form of my riding as I get more tired. I continually reminded myself to loosen my joints and stay flexible, and as the night wore on I know

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I wasn't perfect, but I was riding with awareness and continued relaxation. I also noticed there was more soreness on her left than right sides, and without question I have more tension in my left side. I'm working on that personally but it's a fact right now.

Aside from that sensitivity where I sat for all those hours, her legs are good, I don't have any rubs or scrapes or scratches of any kind. The sidepull worked fantastic and I was able to leave it on the entire ride, only loosening the under jaw strap to give her more freedom in the jaw to eat in the vet holds. Not a rub or chafe from it.

She was also able to lay down, roll and get back up right after the ride. I have come through rides before she was so exhausted I saw her consider going down and then decide better of it, I think it's because she was so tired or sore then she probably wasn't sure she could get back up! That was after last year's OD 55, actually. That ride took the most out of her I'd seen in a while. Here we were a year later finishing the 100 mile ride in the same place and seeing a much stronger horse at the end.

And so we end the story of green-to-100 at ride camp. The journey took nine years, so it seemed fitting in the end we were given ninth place. Not only did she make it through, but she came through thriving in strength. She finished her first 100 in the top 10 which is a bonus for me. True, we only had to finish in this case to be in that group, however there were many people who for various reasons didn't come to the start of this challenging ride, and then there were 14 who crossed the start and for various reasons not all finished, so I will honor the spirit of the top 10 finish for this powerful horse.

I am incredibly pleased with how we did this, and grateful for anyone who stuck with this story to the end — this is unusually long, but also our story that began in 2014 with an unremarkable feral little filly who was born on the mountain, on the land, in the herd, and who eventually was taken home by a horse-crazy woman who wondered . . . if it were possible . . . to finish 100 miles in a day . . . with this new partner of mine. The queen of the horse people, the mare who agreed to become my partner.

Jaime is a volin teacher and endurance rider living in a rural mountain county—one of the least-population dense and without a single stoplight. Read about her endurance adventures at [GreenTo100.com/blog](https://www.greentoto100.com/blog), and her continuing adventures at [HopeHorsemanship.com](https://www.hopehorsemanship.com).

## de·re·cho [dā' rā, CHō]

### NOUN

#### US ENGLISH

a line of intense, widespread, and fast-moving windstorms and sometimes thunderstorms that moves across a great distance and is characterized by damaging winds

by Sharon Anddereg

A Derecho is classified by a swath of wind damage extending more than 240 miles with wind gusts of 58 mph or greater along most of its length. These wind events arise when storms form a continuous and narrow band of thunderstorms ahead of a cold front.

The destruction can be similar to that of tornadoes, but is typically in one direction, along a fairly straight path – hence its name, which is Spanish for “straight ahead.” Derecho damage is frequently referred to as a straight-line wind damage and can be as severe and dangerous as a hurricane.

Straddling the counties of Canada's Northumberland, Peterborough, Victoria, and the region of Durham, lies the Ganaraska Forest – a safe haven for multi-use trails for hikers, cyclists, and equestrians. The forest is managed and protected by the Ganaraska Conservation Authority who is responsible for the 4,452-hectare (11,000 acre) forest.

It was here on Saturday, May 21, 2022, that a massive Derecho windstorm caused widespread damage to more than 400 acres of land, making it the largest natural disaster since the establishment of the forest in 1947. Hundreds of trees fell, blocking trails and access routes which allow for safe recreational use. A man from Carlington who was in the forest when the storm hit was killed after being struck by one of the many trees that were felled by the storm.

On this day as well, Rob Wright, along with his wife Chrystal Woodhouse and their team of volunteers, were running their second annual **OCTRA** Memorial Endurance Ride from the property of a good neighbour. It was to be a two-day event including rides from 10 to 80 km in length for the approximately 50 riders from across Ontario and their horses who were set up at the main camp. Saturday dawned with the threat of rain and possible thunderstorms, but the 40-km riders saddled up and headed out at 7:00 a.m. followed by the shorter distances an hour later. The day progressed normally with all the short distance riders back in camp relaxing after their ride with the 40 km riders coming in as the afternoon progressed. By the time the storm hit all but four riders



Photo by Jessica Puccia @ Sandaraska Horse RV Camp



Photo by Nancy Zukewich leaving camp

and their horses were back in camp.

At approximately 2:00 p.m., an OCTRA friend who was following the storm's path safely from her home in Toronto, called Rob to warn him the storm had just moved through the city and was headed towards the Memorial Ride camp. Ride management and various volunteers raced from camper to camper knocking on doors and shouting for everyone to get their horses to safety and batten down the hatches as the massive storm was rolling in. The horses already knew, of course, and most were eager to be back inside their trailers out of the building winds, but some were severely stressed and refused to load. Within moments of the warning call the storm hit, first with the high winds and then with the pounding rain. People worked to load the final horses and secure their belongings but as the storm landed tents, chairs, tables, and clothing blew through the camp including two porta-potties as well eyeglasses that were ripped off people's faces and thrown into the wind. One of the tables from the timers' tent was last seen flying over the tops of the trees, never to be seen again. People huddled together trying to stay out of the torrential wind and rain in awe of what Mother Nature had thrown at them with minimal warning. Ride management huddled their volunteers into a camper, but it was directly in the path of the storm. For minutes, the camper rocked shaking its shocked passengers who could only hold on and just wait it out.

And then, as quickly as it had come, it passed over and was gone. However, word quickly spread about the four riders still on trail when the storm hit and most still in camp headed to the vetting area for news. A few participants who had finished their ride had already left camp with trailers in tow only to be caught in the storm with the road in front and behind blocked by fallen trees and branches. Word made it back to camp of these blocked vehicles and of the riders still stranded on trail. One rider and her panicked horse who insisted on riding through the storm, found their way safely down the trail with the rider collapsing with relief and emotion once her and her equine partner were back in camp. Volunteers from the ride rode out to check everyone was safe and to start cutting up the large trees to open the road enough for people to move out of the forest and to free a couple of vehicles that were caught in downed branches. The three riders who were together on trail had dismounted and waited out the storm while trying to keep their horses calm and under control. They waited while the storm raged, each on watch while the trees overhead swayed with the wind, their branches creating a canopy above the riders below. As they heard trees crashing and branches breaking the three horses stayed calm and stood by their riders through it all. Ten minutes that seemed like hours. A team of volunteers with a trailer was sent out to assist them. One horse was trailered out and the two others followed a shortcut home that had been hewed out of the forest just for them.

It was a stressful day for everyone but especially for Rob, Chrystal, and their crew of volunteers. They handled it with aplomb and of course with the assistance of the OCTRA family that was there with them. And although the Sunday events were not to take place, most participants refused the reimbursement offered but encouraged ride management to use those fees towards their expenses.

Ganaraska Forest was closed for the rest of the 2022 season as the Conservation Authority worked on clearing out the downed trees and making roads and trails safe again. On May 1, 2023, almost a year after the storm hit, the entire trail system and forest reopened for all users with a valid membership pass.

Wherever you ride remember to support the local trail association who keeps your equine trails available and safe. It takes volunteers and money to keep these trails accessible for our continued enjoyment so help out your local associations.

FOREST	LOCATION	WEB SITE	MEMBERSHIP
Ganaraska Forest	Millbrook	<a href="#">Ganaraska Forest   GRCA</a>	<a href="#">Recreational User Fee Schedule   GRCA</a>
Northumberland Forest	Cobourg	<a href="#">Northumberland County Forest and Trails - Northumberland County</a>	No memberships required for trail-use
Dufferin Forest	Mansfield	<a href="#">Forest   Dufferin County</a>	No memberships required for trail-use
Larose Forest	Limoges	<a href="#">Larose Forest   Ontario Trails Council</a>	<a href="#">Membership/Abonnement (oatrec-cre-ro.ca)</a>
Warwick Forest	Finch	<a href="#">Warwick Forest Conservation Area, Berwick, Ontario   South Nation Conservation Authority</a>	No memberships required for trail-use
Limerick Forest	Kemptville	<a href="#">Limerick Forest - Leeds &amp; Grenville (leedsgrenville.com)</a>	No memberships required for trail-use
Ferguson Forest	Kemptville	<a href="#">Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation - Home</a>	No memberships required for trail-use

# *Simiakia*, by Lori Windows

*It was not whimsy that had brought him together with this red horse to run this race. It was the justice of time.*

*Raised without hope or pride in his heritage, Nez Perce teenager Al George gets an unexpected second chance. A heist gone wrong ends up with him working on probation at the very Idaho ranch he and his “friends” had tried to rob, owned by Celia Bolt, who left her own rich-but-dysfunctional family to move West many years ago, and the taciturn Morgan Kyles, who has his own checkered past.*

*Over the course of the summer of 1986, Celia and Morgan work out the thorny details of their relationship, while Al regains his pride and his sense of self as he works with the ranch’s signature Appaloosas, finds love — and finally, through a deep bond with one very special horse, reconnects with his Nez Perce heritage and discovers the truth of his strange, recurring dreams of an Indian brave on a very special horse, striving to protect his people from the soldiers pursuing them.*

*For everyone involved, one summer changes everything.*

Midwest Region rider Lori Windows (AERC #2824) has 26,290 endurance miles and 1645 LD miles, and has somehow found the time to author *Simiakia*. She will be doing readings at her rides and other venues.



Notes Lori, “The book takes place in Idaho in 1986. It is about the Nez Perce heritage, Appaloosa horses, coy dogs, and endurance riding. It is best ordered through Amazon in e-book, Kindle, or print version. If you read it, please leave a review.”

## Good Bet is a ‘Good Bet’ in Endurance

by Jessica Schroeder, USTA Membership Enrichment and Outreach Coordinator

The 2022 American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) High Mileage Standardbred, presented by the United States Trotting Association, is Good Bet. The now 14-year-old Bettor’s Delight gelding earned nearly \$300,000 on the track but has found his second stride in the endurance world with new owner Lindsay Toms.

“I work for a company (Maryland Equine Dental, Inc.) that does horse teeth, and one of our clients is Winbak Farm,” said Toms. “Jimmy (Ladwig) said he had a friend that was looking for a home for his horse. Sight unseen, I drove to Delaware to pick him up. I’m honored that Jimmy recommended me and that Ben Stafford chose me. He is such a wonderful person, and he was selective with who ended up with his horse.” That was in 2019, shortly after Good Bet’s last race in February at Dover Downs. Now known as GB, his first ride was in April 2021 at Foxcatcher, in Elkton, Maryland, where Toms and GB had a rocky start and finished 21st out of 48 finishers.

“I love working with the Standardbreds and I wanted my own,” Toms said. “You can’t beat their temperament. I broke him to ride when I got him. The first time I competed him was 2021; it was a disaster of a year, we were horrible. We really just about gave it up, which is funny because of what this (2022) year turned into.

“We signed up for six rides and we only completed three. He seemed like he liked it, but he had issues like he was buddy sour, and he was really hot. . . . I took the winter and worked on really bonding with him and finding out what he likes.”

On April 2, 2022, the team went back to where it started – Foxcatcher – and finished 10th out of 47 finishers. They competed monthly through October, completing 255 ride miles to clinch the High Mileage Standardbred award.

“We did nine starts, completed all of them — we were top 10 in all of them,” said Toms. “He’s made a complete turnaround. He’s passing vet checks, he’s napping at camps. It’s really crazy because with him consistently making top 10, it’s usually Arabian/Arabian crosses. It’s been really great, I love promoting it. He’s a goofball, I love him to death now. He’s a pretty strong personality horse and I learned a lot from him.”

The team has now started their 2023 ride season and took top honors in the 30-mile limited distance ride at the Rabbit Run endurance event in New Jersey. With this spectacular start to the ride season, if you could place a future wager on the 2023 High Mileage Standardbred standings, Good Bet would be a “good bet” to be near the top.

The AERC High Mileage Standardbred award is given to the Standardbred that has the most LD and endurance miles ridden during the ride season (December 1 to November 30). Riders must be members of AERC in order to track horse and rider mileage.

Since 1996, the Standardbred Equine Program has worked with owners of off-the-track Standardbreds to educate the general public about the many disciplines Standardbreds excel at once they are retired from racing. For more information about the SEP at the USTA, visit [LifeAfterRacing.ustrotting.com](http://LifeAfterRacing.ustrotting.com).



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## **Time is running out!**

**Nominate a worthy candidate for Hall of Fame (equine/member), Pard'ners Award, Ann Parr Trails Award or Volunteer Service Award!**

**Nominations due July 3, 2023!**

**[AERC.org/2023nomination](https://www.aerc.org/2023nomination)**