

Spring has sprung!!! Our warmer weather is finally upon us and let the riding begin! I've been doing a fair amount of trail trimming and clearing this year. More trees down over the winter months and in areas that the 4 wheelers don't go, so in some cases you have to get off and go under the downed tree and other places I've cleared a path around. The horses are learning how to be patient and navigate some technical trail.

There was a good turnout for the Spring Meeting and a thank you to all who attended. When the minutes become available to me I will forward them onto the membership. At the end of the meeting, Heather Haidysh, who is a Easyboot Distributer in NB gave a presentation on a number of different boots that are available from Easyboot. It was great to actually see the different boots and compare each one, which will give you a better idea on which boot to choose if your thinking of going that route. Heather is an ACTRA member and you can find her on Facebook!

I have already emailed you a list with the Membership number and Mount numbers. I am including them again in this newsletter. Please take the time to fill out your Ride Entry completely. If the Ride Manager doesn't have your complete information (most importantly your horses information) to fill out the Master Scoresheets, you and your horse run the risk of not receiving your miles. Fore warning...the Statistician is being very very picky this year!!! Membership cards are in the making...be patient!

Our ride schedule is shaping up quite nicely, we now have a ride every month and in Sept/Oct two rides. A thank you to Chester for being a good sport as he was snowballed into having a ride on PEI again this year!!! So I have another request. If your planning on attending a ride, please have your entries into the Ride Manager at least a week before the ride. Please pay attention to the ride schedule (and the updated ones that get sent out) as some rides may have a deadline and a late entry fee after a certain date. Remember the ride managers have a lot of paperwork to complete before the ride even starts and it is a lot easier and less stress to have the information beforehand!

I know a lot of the members are on Facebook. Here are three groups that I highly recommend joining/becoming friends; AERC:American Endurance Ride Conference, The Eastern competitive Trail Riding Association and the Endurance and Competitive Trail Riding in New England. There are some very informative questions and answers on each group. Great reading and lots of advice from riders that have been doing this for years!

It is Sunday night as I'm typing this up. Late this afternoon (making brown bread in the am) I was able to get Nova and Dunn out for a short run and saving the longer run for Izzy. Well, I hope I don't jinx the Mud Run, but I got to practice for it. The sky decided to open up and rain like there was no tomorrow!! I was soaked to the skin.....I will be watching the weather forecast for the Mud Run!!!

Happy Trails!!

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ATLANTIC CANADA TRAIL RIDING ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP FORM

NAME: _____ :

ADDRESS: _____ :

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JUNIOR OR OTHER RIDERS IN THE FAMILY

NAME: _____ BIRTHDATE: _____ :

NAME: _____ BIRTHDATE: _____ :

I WISH TO REGISTER THE FOLLOWING MOUNT WITH ACTRA (LIFETIME MOUNT REGISTRATION FEE \$25)

REG NAME: _____ **BARN NAME:** _____ :

BREED _____ **AGE:** _____ **MARE GELDING STALLION (PLEASE CIRCLE)**

BREED REGISTRY INFORMATION: _____ :

MEMBERSHIP DUES: INDIVIDUAL \$17.50 - FAMILY \$22.50 - MOUNT REGISTRATION \$25.00

PLEASE SEND MEMBERSHIP FORM OR FACSIMILE TO: GWENN DEXTER, RR #5 CANNING, NS, B0P 1H0

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN RECEIVING ACTRA LITERATURE? YES NO (PLEASE CIRCLE)

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP DUES : _____ @\$17.50 OR _____ @\$22.50 OR/AND _____ @\$25.00

TOTAL FEES SUBMITTED = _____

ACTRA Sanctioned Rides

RELEASE OF LIABILITY

Revised April 17, 2012

ACTRA 2012 Ride Schedule as of April 23, 2012

May 19th Mud Run LD – 30 miles. Entry Fee \$40.00

Coffee and doughnuts in the AM and awards supper provided. Riders are responsible for their own lunch. Judging will start at 8:30 am. Ride site is the Stanley Mosherville Hall, Rte 125, Stanley, NS. Judge is Dr. Lianne Nelson. There is no stabling, but room for pens. Please call if you are coming to either ride. Also if you have any tack you want to sell, bring it along!

May 20th Mud Run IDR – 14 miles. Entry Fee \$30.00 + Potluck

Coffee and bagels in the AM and lunch will be provided. The awards supper will be **Potluck**. Judging will start at 8:30 am. Ride site is the Stanley Mosherville Hall. Ride Managers are Lucy Rudge and Elwood Munroe. Please mail entries to; 1201 Station Road, Scotch Village, Hants County, NS, B0N 2G0. Any questions (902)757-3652

June 16th Glooscap Trail Ride JP – 16 miles. Entry Fee \$30.00 + Potluck

Coffee and doughnuts in the AM, lunch provided and the awards supper will be **Potluck**. Judging will start at 8:30 am. Judge is Marg Byers. There is no stabling, but large field for trailers and pens. Ride hosts are Bertha & Gary Harrison. Ride site – Crossroads, Parrsboro, NS. If your coming from Halifax take Exit 12, coming from New Brunswick take Exit 4 at Amherst and follow signs to Parrsboro. Mail entries to 4348 Hwy 2, RR # 1 Parrsboro, NS, B0M 1S0. Any questions (902)254-3478 or berthagary@eastlink.ca

June 17th Glooscap Trail Ride JP – 16 miles. Entry Fee \$30.00

Coffee and doughnuts in the AM, lunch and awards supper provided. Judging starts at 8:30 am. Judge is Marg Byers. See above for further information.

June 30th PEI No Frills LD – 25 miles. Entry Fee

This is a no frills ride. You will be responsible for your own meals. Ride site is the Brookvale Ski Park, 2018 Route 13, Brookvale, PEI. No stabling, lots of room for trailers and pens. More info to follow!!! Entries will be sent to Bev Elliott and a heads up that entries are to be received by June 22nd or a late entry fee will be charged.

July 1st PEI No Frills LD – 25 miles. Entry Fee

Please see above for information.

Aug 4th McDonald's Run CTR – 30 to 35 miles. Entry Fee \$35.00

Lunch and supper provided. Ride hosts: Jennifer & Adam McDonald. No stabling, large field for parking and pens. Send entries to 2020 Rte 705, McDonald's Point, Wickham, NB, E5T 4A1. Phone (506)485-5659 or email jennmcdonald@xplornet.ca

Aug 5th McDonald's Run JP – 15 miles. Entry Fee \$20.00 See above for info.

Sept 1 The Amigos Do CTR 25-35 miles Ride site is the Gillies Dairy farm, Belleisle, NB

Sept 2 The Amigos Do JP 12-15 miles More details will follow, we have a vet and may have to switch the ride days depending on her availability. Come and ride the good trails of Belleisle and enjoy the hospitality of our area. Ride contacts are Sylvia Gillies 506-485-2518 and Donna Munn 506-839-2810 dmunn@nbnet.nb.ca / mgillies@nb.sympatico.ca

Sept 29 Camp Cheputneticook CTR 35 miles \$35.00 with a **17 mile IDR \$25.00**

Sept 30 Camp Cheputneticook JP 17 miles \$25.00 Ride site is Camp Cheputneticook, 1889 Gleason Point, Rte 735, St Stephen, N.B. For anyone who has never done this ride, the scenery is very nice and there is no pavement, just back roads and woods trails. Vet Dr. Tami Matheson. Ride contact is Susan Hovey, 8961 Rte 3, St. Stephen, N.B. E3L 4W4 ph 506-466-2150 or email sears@nb.aibn.com. Max # 20 per ride category. Or Sears St Stephen, eb7496, 151 Route 170, Dufferin, Charlotte County, N.B. E3L 3X5 fax(506) 466-2151

Oct 6 Maple Ridge Ride LD 30 miles Organizers Betty Dwyer bettyd63@gmail.com

Oct 7 Maple Ridge Ride IDR 15 miles Ride Manager Eric Dwyer

Ride site is : 1 Centredale Rd., Pictou Co., NS Large field for parking trailers and setting up pens.

Great trails and Great food. Bonfire on Saturday night. Ph 902-923-1921 for more details.

Oct 20 Nova Scotia's Autumn Run 50 miles Endurance and 30 mile LD

Ride site is the Stanley Mosherville Hall, there is no stabling but room for pens. Further information will be following. Contact persons are Lynn Beazley, Troy and Tammy, etc. Phone #s to follow...

Merri Travels

A view from an Equestrian Vagabond

Shape Up! Part I

Saturday March 12 2011

Since it's that time of year for many riders – time to get back in the saddle and get your blubbery horses back into shape, I'll have a few articles and links on conditioning horses. The following is a general training article of mine that was originally printed in Trail Blazer magazine in 2007.

Shape Up!

You're one of those riders who doesn't enjoy the confinement of an arena. Your horse doesn't take well to it either. You love the outdoors and can really think of nothing better to do than spend all day in the open spaces with your horse. Maybe you'd like to have the option of adding competition to your riding repertoire. But how do you get there from here?

Whether your goal is to participate in competitive trail rides, endurance rides, or just pleasurable trail rides, start with the fundamentals of building a solid foundation of physical conditioning and mental training underneath your horse. Getting your horse fit and confident to handle any challenge, physical and psychological, is essential to a thriving partnership and success on the trail.

PART I

CONDITIONING: LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Conditioning is subjecting the horse to the stress of exercise, in gradually increasing workloads over time, allowing the horse's body systems time to adapt to each increase. This process is known as progressive loading. Not only will it maximize the horse's performance, but will also help keep the horse sound. Increasing workloads means slow and steady increase in either the duration of exercise, or the speed of exercise, but not both at the same time, approximately every week.

You have an advantage if you are working with an older horse who has previously had an athletic career. His body has already been accustomed to the conditioning program, so you won't be starting from scratch, as you would with a youngster or an older horse that has never had any kind of physical training.

What type of horse do you need for success? "Any breed of horse and any discipline of riding can compete at the North American Trail Ride Conference Novice level as long as the physical and mental preparations are made to compete at 20 to 25 miles," says Lynn Smothermon, a recreational/competitive trail trainer in Orange, California. The same applies to limited distance endurance rides and pleasure trail rides - any breed can be successful. While Arabian horses have proven best in general for long distance endurance rides, there are of course exceptions; every horse is an individual, and some may naturally do better than others despite their breeding.

Patience is a key to conditioning; it is tempting to start too soon and do too much too fast. It can take 2 to 3 years to fully condition a horse's body systems. The cardiovascular system is the first to whip into shape. In approximately 6 months, your horse may stop huffing and puffing so hard after a workout, and he may appear to be in shape. But it's the other systems that need the most nurturing and that take the longest to come round. According to Dr Nancy Loving, DVM, it can take ligaments and tendons 6 to 12 months to fully develop, and it can take up to 1 to 2 years for the conditioning of bone.

FAST IS SLOW

Ask ten different trainers, and they will give you ten very different plans for properly and carefully conditioning your trail horse. While methods always vary, the basic underlying theme and key to getting your horse fit in all these disciplines, that all trainers will likely agree to, is Long Slow Distance training, or low intensity aerobic work

Lynn Smothermon says, "In my opinion the young horse is all about slow and steady. This means spending at least 6 months to a year building hours in the saddle, with a calm confident walk as the foundation and forefront to all the other work involved – uphill, downhill, gullies, creek crossings. It's just miles and miles of patient body building work based on the horse's abilities."

For the older horse, start out with taking him 4-6 miles every other day for about an hour. This will be mostly walking, with very little trotting. After 3-4 weeks, it's time to add stress by increasing his workload. This means adding a little speed, or a little distance – but never both at one time. Either add more trotting over the same distance, or increase your training time by 15 minutes. A good rule of thumb for older horses is to increase workload on a 5 to 7 day cycle.

Over the weeks and months, you will gradually increase your horse's workout time up to a few hours, with more time spent trotting and occasionally cantering. This is a good time to begin monitoring your horse's heart-rate and recovery; it is one of the best ways to determine the progress of his fitness. In well-conditioned horses, the heart rate should be around 60 beats per minute 10 minutes after a reasonably demanding workout.

As you work on conditioning your horse, monitor his progress by observing the change in his physical appearance – you should be able to see muscle development and definition in the first month. Monitor his weight by measuring his girth. Watch and feel his legs for any signs of heat or swelling. Observe his attitude: is he enthusiastic and alert during and after his training, or is he dull and tired? Keep a log of your training schedule and progress, and his heart rate and recoveries. Take pictures every week so you can see his physical change over time.

When your horse's heart rate recovers to 48 beats per minute within ten minutes of completing his exercise, (which can take from several months to a year of training), and your goal is simply pleasure trail riding, you can maintain your horse's fitness at this level by continuing the same distance or speed of workouts a few times a week.

If your goal is competitive trail riding or endurance, now it's time to add strength training. Add some inclines to your training, or trot your horse through sand. Be very cautious in sand, however, as it's hard on tendons and ligaments. It's best to avoid trotting through sand with young horses, and be extremely wary in deep sand with any horse.

Now is also a good time to take your horse into the arena once a week as part of his workout regimen. Suppling exercises of circles and figure 8's, leg yielding and sidepassing will increase your horse's flexibility and range of motion, and therefore help prevent injuries.

If your ultimate goal is long distance endurance riding, you should add some anaerobic training to your conditioning program. Endurance rider Dr Nancy Loving gives good insight on aerobic and anaerobic conditioning in her books *Go the Distance* and *All Systems Go*.

If you are aiming for Trail Riding Competition, your first goal will be the Novice level of 25 miles. Same goes for endurance competition: your first goal should be the shorter limited distance rides of 25 miles. Depending on how your horse comes out of the ride – tiredness, weight loss, heart rate recovery – you may want to do

several more limited distance rides – no more than one a month, before you progress to a slow 50-mile endurance ride. When your horse has done several 50-mile rides and handles it well – perhaps in his second season of endurance – he may be ready for his first multi-day ride, or a longer endurance ride.

The same goes for ride competitions as it does for training: slow is better. If you want to have a fast top ten horse, spend 2 years of riding slow (especially if you are riding a young horse, a 5 or 6-year-old in his first years of competition). Your horse will stay sounder longer and go many more miles over the years.

Shape Up! Part II

TRAINING: IT'S ALL MENTAL

Lest the months of walking, laying the LSD conditioning foundation, may sound boring, it can be far from it if you take advantage of the time to have fun with your horse while you teach him different things.

While ten trainers may disagree on conditioning methods, they will agree on the importance of training your horse. "In most cases," says Lynn Smothermon, "both recreational and competitive horses must be disciplined, well educated, confident horses and partners with their owners."

Besides proper conditioning, another big advantage of the LSD training is that your horse is not rushed into speed, which may affect his mental ability to stay calm on the trail. Your horse should remain calm with several initial weeks of walking; as you progress to walking and trotting, your horse should continue to move forward calmly, and in control. If you do come to a spooky situation, it may be best to slow the horse's pace, so he can evaluate the situation and calmly deal with it, rather than trying to force a horse past a scary object. If you know you will be encountering some scary situations on the trail, bring along another friend who has a well-seasoned horse that will not react badly to these situations. If that horse is calm, your horse will much more likely react the same way – with a non-reaction, which he will carry through to the next time he encounters it.

It may very well take the same amount of time to mentally condition your horse, young or old, on the trail as it does to physically condition him. "Re-educating an older horse out of bad habits can take months of patience and firm guidance to reestablish the horse as a partner in anyone's training discipline," says Smothermon.

Take advantage of the time spent going slow for conditioning to expose your horse to all kinds of situations he may one day encounter on the trail. Go out alone; go in company, and rotate positions: be the leader, be the follower, be in the middle, be on the left side and the right side, and stay relaxed in all situations. Your horse should willingly and easily move off your legs, back up (only when asked!), respond to your seat and weight, stand still when you get on and off until you ask him to move out. Yes, your horse does get bored with the same trails over and over. Take him on different trails, go different directions. Get him used to hikers, pack horses, bikers, motorbikes, dogs, different groups of horses coming or going. Practice perfecting and hastening your transitions between the start, walk, trot, walk, stop. Teach your horse to stay on the trail, and to willingly leave the trail when you ask him. Take him through as many trail obstacles you may encounter: rocks, sand; creeks.

Encourage your horse to drink at water spots. Let him graze occasionally along the trail. Teach him to walk back home calmly on a loose rein. When you get back home, or to your trailer, teach your horse to tie to a trailer, or a tree, in case you will be in a ridecamp or camping out on the trail all night. Teach your horse to accept everything he would encounter at a vet check in competition – touching his mouth, his legs, his rear end muscles, taking his heart rate, listening to his gut sounds.

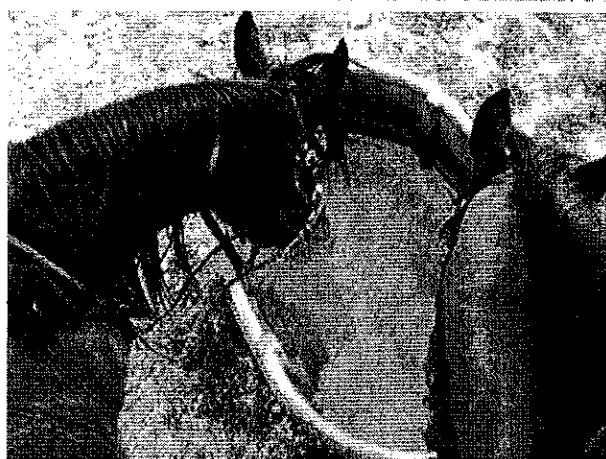
If you have friends whose horses are further along in their conditioning, resist the temptation to just follow along faster than your horse is ready for, just to have company. Ride to your own horse's training level.

When you think of all the things you can do during these months of walking and slow trotting, and you see how obedient and supple your horse is becoming, you will realize there is no limit to what you can teach him. You may find you really enjoy these training strolls with your horse and you don't want to progress to trail competition.

THE FINAL PRODUCT

Don't be in a rush to get your horse fit or competitive on the trail. Remember, slow is fast. The time you may have think you saved rushing your horse's body systems into shape can come back at you through injury and a much shorter career. Throughout all of your successful efforts of conditioning and training your horse, be it for Competitive Trail Riding, Endurance, or just Trail Blazing solo or with friends for the day, you will develop a strong horse and a unique partnership and understanding with him that will last for many years.

Endurance Etiquette on the Trail



From Wikipedia: *Etiquette is a code of behavior that delineates expectations for social behavior according to contemporary conventional norms within a society, social class, or group.*

Trail etiquette during an endurance ride can be extremely important. It's a lot like common sense. There's also a lot to be said for being polite and courteous to your fellow rider. I think it's important to have some patience and some willingness to tolerate other riders that may be clueless on the trail. I've seen many heated exchanges over the years with riders yelling at one another over some sort of etiquette infraction. That seldom does any good and often results in hard feelings.

Here is an article on the topic that Jackie Bumgardner wrote for Endurance News a while

back. It covers a wide range of etiquette – everything from camping to riding and vet checks.

I think that a lot of times, riders don't even realize that they are doing something on the trail that is annoying to those around them. This is why I try to ride my own ride while trying to have as little impact on anybody else.

If you ride a horse that kicks, put a red ribbon in the tail. Yellow for stallions, and green for a green or new horse. Kicking and unpredictable horses should be kept away from groups of horses.

I've seen lots of wrecks and mishaps occur on the trail due to riders not being more considerate or aware that they are creating dangerous situations.

One should take care never to crowd into groups of horses and should try to move away if they find themselves getting scrunched up into a group. There are times when this is unavoidable but the majority of the time it's just plain safer not to crowd horses together.

Water stops. Again, don't crowd. Hang back fifteen or twenty feet and wait for a clear opening before allowing your horse to go in and drink. If you see a horse with a ribbon on it's tail, stay back until they are done drinking and have moved a safe distance away. Once your horse is done drinking, move away from the water so that others can get in. Pay attention to how your horse is standing next to any type of water – move your horse over to one side so that others can get in if necessary. Be aware of the situation and pay attention.

It is considered polite to ask other riders whose horses are drinking if it's okay to go on when your horse has finished drinking. Usually if there are more than two horses drinking it's safe to go and most riders will say to go on. It never hurts to ask. Personally, I want my horse to know how to drink and take care of himself even if other horses are moving off and leaving him alone at the water. We can't all stand around waiting for every horse on the ride to finish drinking – so again, this is another grey area where it's best to use common sense.

Don't sponge out of water troughs especially when other horses are drinking! It may be okay in other regions, but where I mainly ride it doesn't go over well. Water on a lot of the rides has to be hauled out and it doesn't need to be polluted by sponges. Keep in mind that if you use a scoop that you should only do so when it is okay with ride management – most of the time that water is needed for the horses to drink. It's considered rude to use the water on your horse if there are 30 horses behind you that may not have enough to drink.

When your horse is done drinking make sure he isn't allowed to rub on the trough, or on other horses or riders. It's not fun to have another horse slam their head with a bit onto your knee while their rider is

oblivious and standing on the other side of their horse talking to somebody else.

Over the years I've seen situations where riders misinterpret something another rider did. For example at Bryce one year a rider on a stallion was drinking from a creek that had a narrow opening to get into it. Two other riders came up and crowded in, one horse on each side of the stallion that was already in the water drinking. The rider on the stallion pulled him back and rode off while the other two riders commented about how rude he was to leave while their horses were still drinking. It never occurred to them that the other rider thought they were as rude as they thought he was.

If you want to pass another rider on the trail then do so – and keep going. Make a point to be aware enough that if you pass other riders that you aren't then slowing down to a walk or stopping altogether. If you know you may have to make a tack

adjustment or some other stop in the next few minutes then try not to play tag with other horses. On the other hand, if another rider passes you, realize that they are likely riding faster than you and don't immediately draft off of them or try to keep up. Let them go, give them a minute or two to get ahead.

When passing, let the riders ahead know "passing on your left", etc. If you hear horses approaching from behind and are in a group, then move over so that they can get around. If the trail is narrow, you may need to move off of the trail to let them go by. It's always funny when I ride up on two horses and they both change lanes to let me go by!

When riding with others always have a healthy respect for the other horse's "space". Don't ride too close behind and if in a group try to keep from getting bunched up. I saw many kicks this summer on the XP when riders tried to ride more than two abreast on a wide road. Many horses don't like being crowded like that. Usually what happens is one of the horses is attached to his buddy and becomes overly protective of having another horse in their "space". Always watch for warning signs from your own horse as well as the other horses around you. Most horses will offer up a warning of some sort (though some don't!) — such as laid back ears, a gnarled up facial expression.

It is never okay to use another horse as brakes to slow or rate your own horse! This shows a total lack of respect and concern for the other rider and their horse. Plus it can be dangerous for everyone. If you have to, pull off the trail and dismount. Give your horse a few minutes to settle down – lead on foot if you have to. But please, don't keep running up the back of other horses or crowding them if you don't have control of your horse.

When riding with others, warn them of any dangerous sections of the trail such as holes, or tree branches sticking out. When slowing down, I like to put my hand up as a signal — of course, that only works if the person behind you is aware that is how you signal that you are going to slow down or stop. If that person doesn't know that, then say "slowing down", or "I'm going to stop". I've found that when you ride with somebody that puts their hand up to signal a change that their horse quickly learns and they will slow down automatically. I think my own horses also know the hand signals. They are creatures of habit and if you do something like that often enough it's amazing at what they pick up on.



Try and always keep a horse length distance away from horses ahead of you. More if you don't know the horse(s) ahead. When leading a group and going through dips in the trail or technical sections that require walking – keep walking until the last horse in your group has made it through the obstacle. Then it's okay to pick up the speed. Obviously some of these things may not be practical if there are 20 horses behind you on a singletrack

trail. In those cases, just use common sense and do unto others as you'd like done to you.

If I'm riding with somebody else I always like to ask if it's okay if we canter. My horses are competitive enough that I need to know that if I am cantering with somebody they won't accelerate much faster than I am going and take off. That's one reason why I often ride alone – I need to rate my horse and find it to be too exhausting to ride with others that allow their horses to go faster than I want to go. That always results in me having to pull on my horse's to keep them slowed down while their brain cells are imploding because they want to keep up with the other horse or horses. I try to avoid that kind of situation as much as possible. One thing that I really appreciate when riding with a friend is when we both agree that if we need to, we can separate and it won't hurt the other person's feelings.

I have written about gate etiquette before. When opening and closing gates on a ride – try to take turns. Unless there is somebody in the group that wants to get all of the gates. Get through the open gate quickly so the other person doesn't have to stand there waiting for you. Then, move off to a safe spot and wait for the gate person to close the gate and mount back up. Allow that person to reposition themselves in the group in the same order that they arrived at the gate. Some riders like myself will often hold a gate for several riders and tell them all to "go on ahead". That's because I (we) want to get a bit more spread out – so go on ahead. Always be sure to thank the gate person. When I say get through the gate quickly I mean at a walk – don't blast through; be considerate.

On an endurance ride I always try to give other trail users the right of way. Most often, bike riders will slow down or stop and move off of the trail. If they aren't doing that, then I will always move out of their way while saying something friendly. I try to tell other trail users that by talking to us it makes them seem a lot less scary to the horses. I also usually try to tell them how many horses may be behind me. Always move your horse away on the uphill side.

When passing horses on a two way trail, stay to the right. Horses going uphill should have the right of way over horses going downhill. When going up steep stuff, allow for some extra space between the horse in front of you so that if need be, your horse can get a little momentum going without worrying about running into the horse in front.

If you need to dismount for some reason, try to do it where there is some grass for your horse to graze on. That way the horse has something to do while you fix or adjust or do whatever you need to do. Always move off trail so that you aren't blocking it for other riders. If you can't get off of the trail for some reason and find that you are starting to cause a backup – jog on foot and lead your horse to somewhere that you can get out of the way and let the others go by. Most riders will be less likely to get irritated if you tell them you are having a problem.

Many times, each situation calls for a different way to handle it. If riders are dismounted off to the side of the trail to do something obvious like use the restroom, then ride on by. If it looks like they are having a problem ask if they need anything and/or if they'd like you to wait while they mount back up.

Always practice Leave No Trace ethics: Don't cut switchbacks – stay on the marked trail. Be aware of any damage to soft ground that your horse may be doing. Be careful not to drop any trash on the trail. Pick up other people's trash.

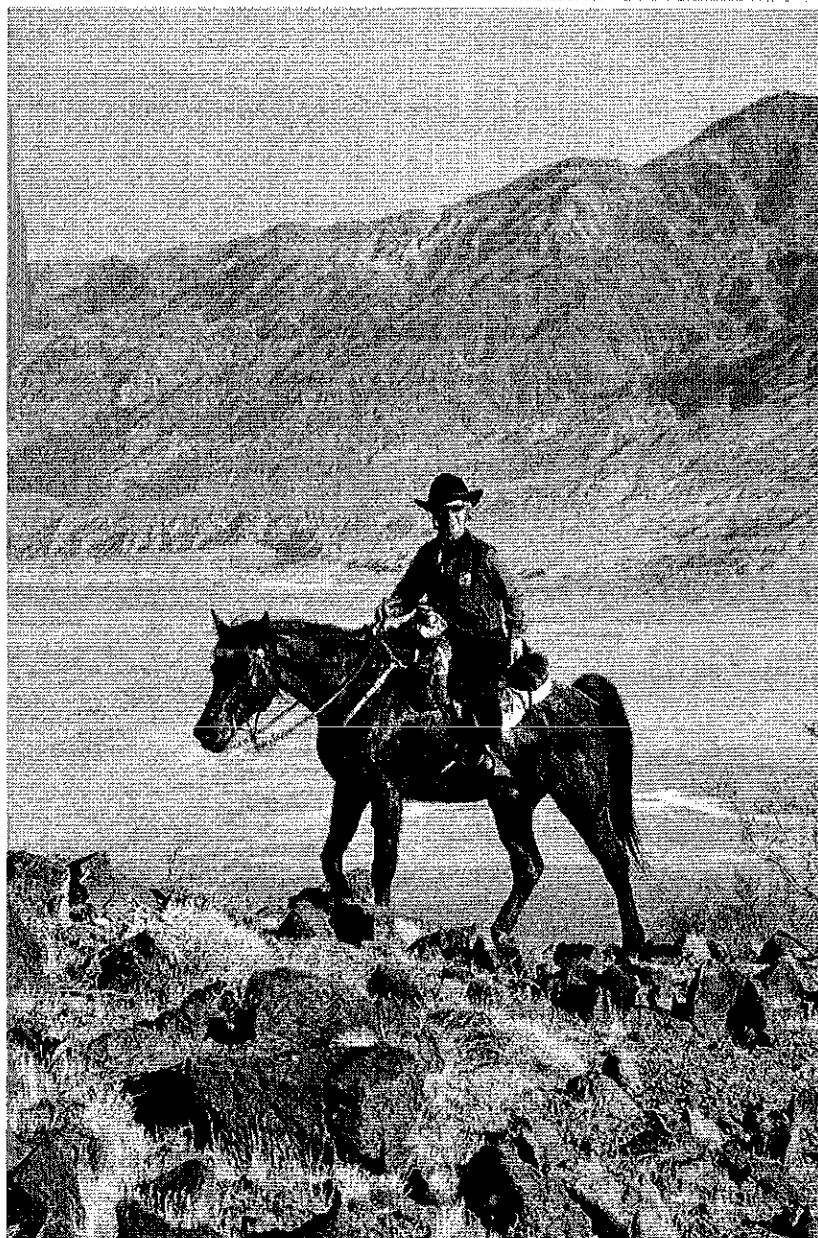
Here is a summary of some of the things that riders do that are the most annoying: Riders getting in front and slowing down or stopping. If you pass – then keep going. Don't let your horse decide he wants to eat grass and turn sideways blocking the trail ten feet ahead of riders you just went by. If you are having a lameness issue with your horse it never looks good to pass other riders. Don't tailgate other horses especially if they have just passed you and are obviously going faster than you are. Most likely, if they



caught up to you and you've been trotting along for awhile they are going faster than you. Be considerate – give those other riders a minute or two to spread out from your horse. That helps keeps the riders and the horses happy. If you want to ride in a group or ride with another rider it's polite to ask them if it's okay. They may or may not want the company.

I've certainly committed more than one of those violations over the years, knowingly or not. I've tried to learn to be more considerate and aware of what is going on, not just so I can make the ride more fun and safe for myself but for others. It's not easy having to deal with horses that get more competitive as they get fitter on rides with riders who are unknowingly driving your horse crazy. I hope this helps both new and experienced riders. Happy, safe trails! Karen

Endurance Riding: Minimizing Wear and Tear on Your Horse



Death Valley Encounter, Day 3. Photo by Steve Bradley.

In my last post I talked about trail etiquette on an endurance ride. Common sense and courtesy towards other riders is very important. I think that another topic that is also very important is about applying some of that same common sense and courtesy to your horse. Many of us are interested in longevity for our horses. We all want our horses to last a long time.

Over the years I've learned a thing or two about minimizing wear and tear on my horses. How to ride in a way that cuts down on the chance of injuries and that helps achieve long term success. Last year I rode more than I ever had before in a ride season – 3,600 miles. Bo did roughly 2,100 of that and Chief did roughly 1,500 of that. Both horses came through the season in pretty good shape and have since completed 150 miles each in the 2012 ride season.

The single most important lesson that I have learned is that my horses stay sound and can do just about anything if I keep them rated and don't let them trot faster than 10 mph. Most horses can very easily trot faster than 10 mph so this takes effort.

Using a GPS is very helpful when learning how each gait and speed feels. Some horses can be very sneaky and are able to inch up their speed. You may look at the GPS and see you are trotting

along at about 8.5 mph, then before you know it your horse has moved up what might feel to be just a hair – yet when you look at the GPS again you are going 13 mph. That is almost guaranteed to happen if you ride in a group or if your horse sees a horse ahead. Or sees a horse behind. I feel that rating a horse consistently is one of the hardest things about this sport. It's something that requires focus, determination and doesn't come easy.

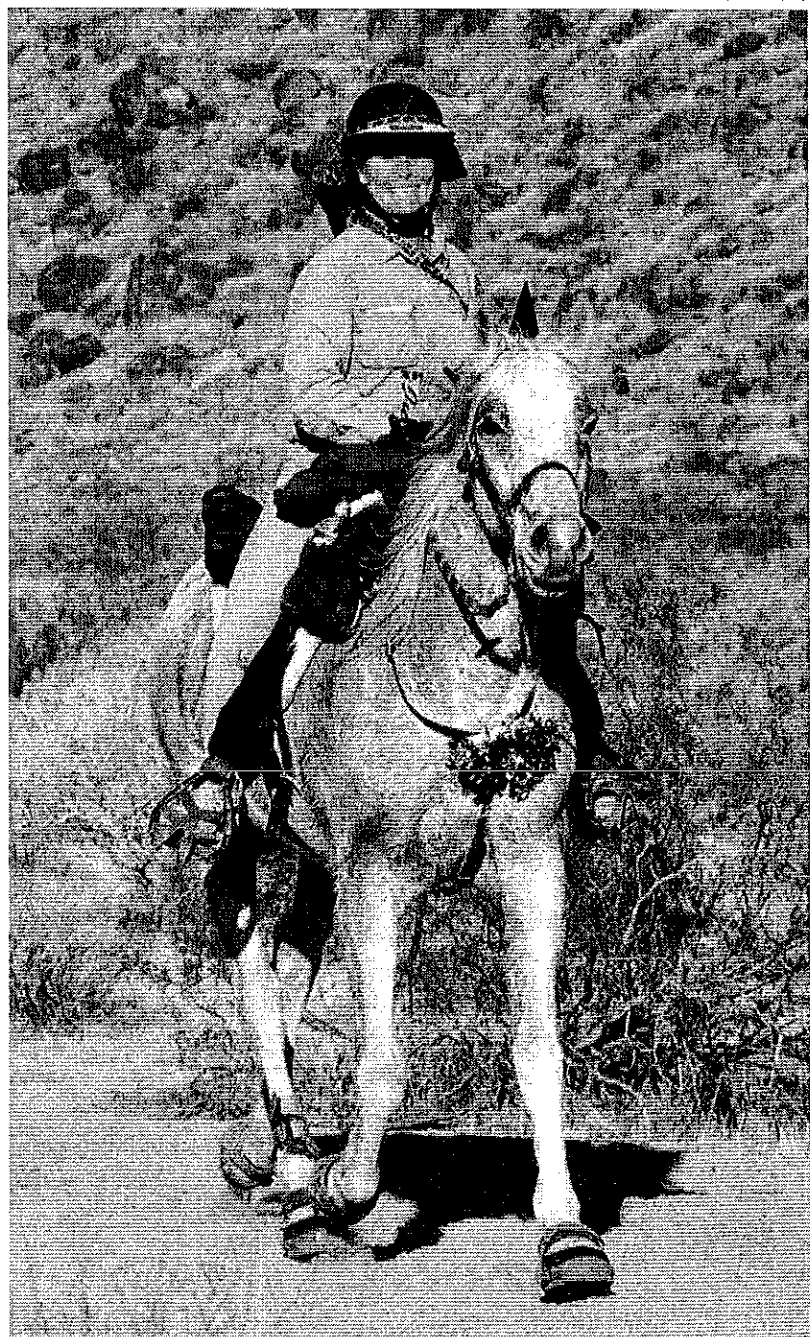
Riders who are more competitive will likely trot much faster than the 10 mph limit that I subscribe to. As long as a horse has been conditioned to go that speed they can do it and be successful. I find that it takes my horses two to three years to develop a working trot that allows them to travel even at 10 mph. It

doesn't happen over night. Once I started to keep my horse's speeds toned down and rated them more consistently I found that I had virtually no lameness issues. Now when I have a lameness with a horse it is generally not a result of how I've ridden them.

The next most important thing is to pay attention to the footing and the trail. Spend some time on foot in each type of terrain that you ride in so that you get a feel for how difficult it is for your horse to get through it. I find it is often useful for me to get off and lead down anything very steep as it helps loosen up my knees. Other riders like to tail their horses up anything steep. Either way is a good opportunity to give your horse a break.

Make an effort to walk your horse through the rocky, muddy or deep sand sections and trot where the footing is good. It helps to know the course that you are riding so that you can plan how to ride it. I find when asking other riders what the footing is like, it pays to get two or more opinions. One person's idea of rocky, deep sand or technical may be completely different than someone else's.

We knew at Death Valley a couple of weeks ago that we were going over a big mountain on technical singletrack trail that was VERY rocky. Once down the other side we knew we'd be down in the flat valley in sand washes and on excellent footing. By knowing this, I was able to walk over the hard rocky steep stuff and then make up time trotting in the good footing. Many riders did the opposite of that. Paying attention and thinking about this kind of thing can make a big difference to your horse. Think wear and tear on joints, legs, your horse's whole body and how controlling when and where you move out can bring them through the ride that day as well as through an entire career in the best condition possible.



Death Valley Encounter, day 4. Photo by Steve Bradley.

How you ride your horse through varied terrain on rides affects not only your horse but the others around you. I mentioned how there were riders at the last ride that weren't attentive enough to know that they were trotting the hardest parts while walking the easiest (on their horse) parts of the trail. This can be really irritating to others especially if you trot past them downhill, or uphill, passing them then when the footing becomes good and levels out you slow to a walk. Now those riders who were walking the steep or rocky sections and want to trot on the good footing have to pass you again. On a ride with a lot of

elevation and footing changes it can become a never ending game of tag.

I'm not sure if riders are not thinking these things through, or if they are letting their horses choose. Maybe they are so caught up in a conversation with another rider that the thought of considering the trail footing and elevation changes never crosses their mind.

A competitive horse will want to go all of the time, so it's really up to the rider to stay focused enough on the trail conditions and how rating the horse consistently can minimize the wear and tear. Our horses can go a long way, literally....if we pay attention to the details. A thinking rider is perhaps the greatest thing you can do for your horse.



How to Check a Horse's Vital Signs

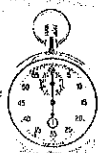
① PULSE

Normal pulse is 40–50 beats per minute for horses over two years old (higher for foals and excited, nervous horses).

- + Find the pulse under the front left of the jawbone, where there is a major artery that protrudes slightly.
- + Press a forefinger on the artery and use a clock or timer to count the beats for 15 seconds. Multiply by 4 to find beats per minute.
- + Alternatively, take the pulse behind the left elbow with a stethoscope, counting each "lub-dub" as one beat.

② HYDRATION

Dehydrated horses may be sick horses. Do a pinch test on the skin of the neck. After pinching, if the skin flattens back into place within a second, the horse is fine. The longer the skin stays pinched before flattening, the more dehydrated the horse is.



④ RESPIRATION RATE

The normal adult respiration rate is 8–15 breaths per minute. Watch or feel the horse's ribcage/belly for one minute. Count one inhale and one exhale as one complete breath. You can also watch or feel the nostrils.

③ TEMPERATURE

Normal body temperature is 99–101°F (37.2–38.3°C). Use a digital or mercury thermometer with a long string attached (to avoid losing it).

- + Shake the thermometer until the mercury level goes lower than 99°F (37.2°C). Lubricate the end of it.
- + With the horse tied or held, stand to the side of its hindquarter and move the tail aside.
- + Slowly insert the thermometer into the rectum. Leave in for three minutes (less for digital thermometers).
- + Read, and then sterilize the thermometer to avoid passing disease.

⑤ GUT SOUNDS

* Healthy horses have gut sounds; an absence of sounds may indicate colic (stomach problems). Press an ear against the horse's barrel (belly) behind the last rib. Check both sides.

