

Collective Wisdom for Endurance Riding



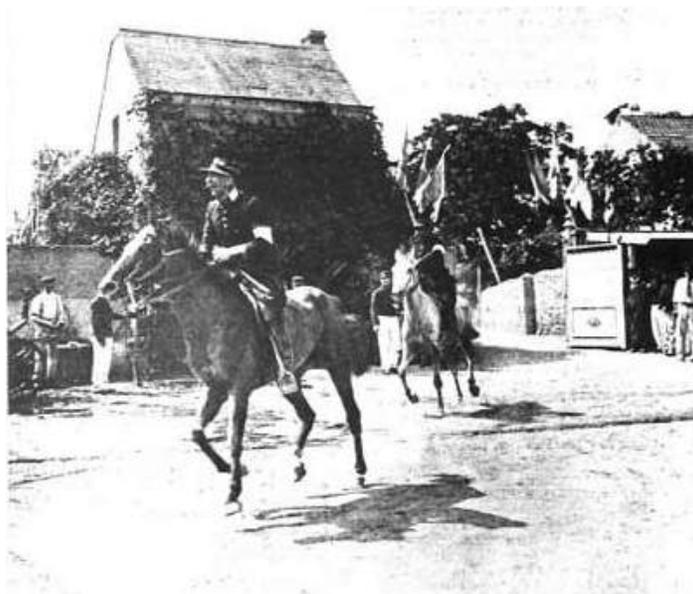
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Tips and Hints for Endurance Riding

What is Endurance Riding?



1904 - Cavalry Horse Test held in Lyons, Vichy, France

An Endurance ride is a timed test against the clock of an individual horse/rider team's ability to traverse a marked, measured cross-county "trail" over natural terrain consisting of a distance of 50 to 100 miles in one day.

Endurance riding was first developed in the early 1900s as a military test for cavalry mounts. Horses were required to go on a 5-day, 300 mile (483 km) ride carrying at least 200 lbs. The cavalry test became a civilian sport in the early 1950s. Over time the reduction of distance and time increased the number of riders and rides, and in 1978 the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI), the international governing body for World and Olympic equestrian events, recognized endurance riding as an international sport. In 2006 over 353 FEI endurance competitions were held in Europe, Asia, and the American continents incorporating over 49 countries worldwide.

In the US the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) oversees US international teams in FEI competition. The **American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC)** is the official national governing body for endurance riding in North America. All endurance riders, and all sanctioned endurance rides under the jurisdiction of the AERC, are bound by the rules and regulations of

the AERC. The AERC also maintains the ride points, lifetime mileage and awards database for each horse and rider entered in both national and internationally sanctioned endurance rides. The AERC sanctions more than 700 rides each year throughout the United States and Canada.

As well as endurance rides the AERC also offers a Limited Distance (LD) program. LD rides are anywhere from 25 to 35 miles in length. AERC rules allow 12 hours to complete a 50 mile ride, and 24 hours for a 100 mile ride. Limited Distance is allowed 6 hours for 25 miles. Ride time is pre-determined incrementally by the ride distance. The ride time includes time on the trail, and time spent in the vet check.

The modern endurance ride is unique in the horse sport world as being one of the only group/individual sports that entire families can participate in by riding together as a group during the ride, yet compete as individuals. There is no rider minimum or maximum age limitation, and the AERC awards program also offers special awards to families who have compiled the most miles in riding together.

Horses are required to pass a pre-ride vet check for soundness before they are allowed to start. Endurance rides have mandatory "holds" during the ride where horses must pulse down to meet a specific heart rate parameter -- anywhere from 60 to 68 bpm (beats pr minute) -- before they are then checked by qualified veterinarians to ensure the horses are fit to continue. Horses that do not pulse down within a specified time, or fail to pass the vet check, are pulled from the competition. Because of the nature of this sport every caution is taken to ensure the safety and health of the horses.

The ride begins as a group start when the trail is "opened" at a specific time to all riders in each mileage division. The riders are then free to go at their own pace throughout the ride as long as they do not exceed the time limit for their ride distance, or the cut-off times (if applicable) for the vet checks. Riders may run, walk, or jog alongside their horses at any time throughout the ride. Endurance is a strategic test of horsemanship. Riders are challenged with regards to effective use of pace and thorough



2004 USA-East Cranberry Endurance Ride, Southern New Jersey, USA

knowledge of abilities and level of fitness of their horse against the difficulty of the course/terrain/weather. All riders must conduct themselves according to AERC rules of sportsmanship. A rider can take up to a year or more to train themselves and a horse to be ready to compete in a 50 mile ride, and several years to compete in a 100 mile ride or an FEI level event.

The AERC website contains up-to-date information on endurance rules and rides in the US and Canada, including horse and/or rider awards, points, recognition, and lifetime mileage records.

Can my horse do endurance?

Endurance is open to all equine breeds (horses, ponies, and mules) that are 5 years and older. AERC has set a minimum age limit of 4 for Limited Distance. Endurance horses must be thoroughly trained and conditioned to meet the demands of the modern endurance competition. Any fit, sound and healthy horse or pony is more than capable of not only completing a ride, but also top-tenning (being among the first ten to cross the finish line and pass the final vetting).

Welfare of the horse is paramount in this sport, and all horses entered must pass a pre-ride examination at the ride site by a licensed veterinarian before they are allowed to start the ride. Horses must also pass additional mandatory vet examinations at specific check-points during the ride, and a final exam within 1 hour after the ride. Any horse showing lameness or failure to meet specified metabolic parameters is immediately eliminated.

Some breeds, like the Arabian horse, are genetically designed for distance and tend to predominate in this sport; but one sees many, many other light breeds out on the trail competing -- and winning -- endurance.

In determining how well your horse will do, it is sometimes best to start with a Limited Distance ride to give you an idea of your horse's capabilities, and then progress upward into Endurance.

How do I condition my horse for distance?

For a pasture fat horse or pony, the minimum time to reach a fitness level to do an LD would be two months. To do Endurance, it would take about three months if one had hills to work on; otherwise four months would be ideal. It is very important NOT to overtrain, or to drain the horse's resources so that it is too fatigued even before it is entered in the ride.

The average speed to ride an LD is about 6 mph; the average speed for endurance is 7 mph. This is about the speed of a medium trot for almost all breeds of horses and ponies.

Approximate Speeds of Gaits:

Gait	Small Pony	Large Pony	Horse
Walk	3 mph	3.5mph	3.7 to 4 mph
Slow Trot	4 mph	4.5 mph	5 mph
Medium Trot	5-6 mph	6-7.5 mph	6-8 mph
Fast Trot	6-7 mph	7.5-10 mph	9-11 mph
Canter	8-9 mph	10-14 mph	12-15 mph
Hand Gallop	12 mph	14-22 mph	15-25 mph

Gaited horses can move at significantly faster speed than a medium trot when using the running walk. A human walks at about 3 mph, jogs at 4.5mph, and runs at 5-7 mph.

Conditioning Schedule:

The best conditioning method for Endurance is called "L.S.D." -- long, slow distance. It is a method that was developed for 3-day eventing horses, and is designed to bring a horse along to a peak fitness level without compromising soundness. There are lots and lots of equestrian training books available that detail LSD work, so we won't belabor it here, but will give you a

condensed version:

Conditioning for an LD ride:

- 1st month - incorporate flat work and walks/trots cross country 3x a week at 5 mph. Increase distance in length, and speed up to 6 mph, as the month progresses and as the horse begins showing strength and improved recovery. Be careful NOT to overstress, and check horse over carefully before and after every session to make sure there are no soundness issues brewing. This is the most important part of your program - you have to be on the lookout for signs of stress or breakdown BEFORE they occur. A horse that is slightly "off" after a training session may well be more gravely "off" if you don't pay attention to the small details, and your schedule may come to a crashing halt if the horse goes more seriously lame.

Also remember it is not just the feet and legs that have to bear the brunt of the trail; it is also the saddle and tack. Your saddle MUST be comfortable for both you AND the horse, and must be one up to the job at hand. A dressage or jumping saddle may be able to do the early conditioning rides, but you have to keep a very careful eye on them - they are not designed for this type of sport (long hours at a stretch on trail). They are uniquely designed for ring work ONLY, and in that limited capacity they do very well if flocked and checked religiously. However, the natural trail is not a ring, and chances are they will start hurting your horse's back as time moves on no matter how carefully you check and recheck them for fit. So be aware that sooner or later you may find yourself - after watching all those Endurance riders floating down the trail safe and secure in their Endurance saddles - wanting to looking at some trail/Endurance saddles yourself that can do the job you want without being limited as are the flat work saddles.

- 2nd month - begin incorporating hill work - trotting uphill until the pulse reaches 190-200. Do one hill session a week, and one day of moderate work trotting distances of 6 to 7 miles at a pace of 7-8 mph.

At the end of the 2nd month a horse should be able to do an easy 25 mile ride comfortably within the 6 hour limit. When the horse can easily recover to a 60 pulse within 10 minutes of finishing, and can easily handle 12 miles at a trot within 3 hours, it is ready to enter an LD. Frankly, completing a 25 mile ride is well within the framework of all breeds, and should be viewed as fun and enjoyable.



Using hill work to condition for an LD

Conditioning towards Endurance:

- 3rd month - continue to incorporate one hard mountain or hill session a week, with pulse reaching 200-220 maximum at least twice during the session. Make sure your horse's pulse comes down below 80 after the first set, and before you begin your second set. Do not more than one days/week of moderate/hard work. Easy workouts, trotting about 6-7 miles at 7-9 mph can be done twice a week.

Remember -- you are conditioning muscles and bones for endurance, and part of a conditioning program is a **period of rest** to allow the body to recover and become stronger. You should NEVER run your horse into the ground thinking it is training. You don't have to do a 25 mile conditioning session to prove your horse can do an LD. Nor should you do a 50 mile training session to prove your horse can do endurance. Keep in mind that your horse has only so many miles in it, and to needlessly use it up in "training" is a waste of your horse. Better to do a bit less and have a fresh horse, than too much and have a drained horse.

When the horse can easily recover to a 60 pulse within 5-10 minutes of finishing work, and can easily handle a 25 mile test ride within 6 hours, it is ready to enter an Endurance ride.

Now that you have taken care of getting your horse ready for an LD or Endurance, it is time to think about getting ready for your first ride....



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