ACTRA Ride Manager's Handbook - DRAFT

Drafted by Kim Crowell April 2026 and adapted from the AERC RM handbook

The purpose of this document is to offer a practical guide to help new and experienced Ride Managers prepare for and run a successful competitive trail ride. It is not meant to replace the ACTRA Rule Book and all Ride Managers should be familiar with the Rule Book before hosting an ACTRA sanctioned ride.

INTRODUCTION

Competitive Distance Trail rides are sanctioned by the Atlantic Canada Trail Riding Association (hereafter referred to as ACTRA or the Club). To qualify for sanctioning, a ride must meet certain standards, described in the ACTRA Rule Book as found on the Ride Types/Rules tab on ACTRA website at www.atlanticriders.ca. There are seven different types of rides sanctioned by ACTRA and each ride type has rules that apply to that particular type of ride. In organizing a ride, you must provide: equal opportunities, equal treatment and equal judgment to all competitors. This includes not only choosing and supervising the judge of your ride, but also the management of the entire event. Managing a sanctioned ride can be both gratifying and frustrating! But it's a great way for a rider to give back to the sport and for a non-riding horse lover to promote the sport. This handbook will help both the first-time and the experienced Ride Managers (RM) to produce a successful ride. Please read it carefully and be certain to read the ACTRA Rules, as it is essential that they govern your ride at all times.

TYPES OF RIDES

One of the first decisions you will make as a Ride Manager is to decide what type of ride you are going to host. The seven ride types are: Competitive Trail Ride (CTR), Introductory Distance Ride (IDR), Judged Pleasure Ride (JP), Endurance Ride (END), Limited Distance Ride (LD), Intro Endurance Ride (INE) and Ride 'N Tie Ride. The ACTRA Rule book outlines the details of each ride and how they are to be run and judged. Some of the factors you should take into consideration before choosing what type of ride to host are:

- Do you have an approximate distance of trail you are planning to use?
- Do you have permission to use the entire trail distance? Or do you need to seek permission from other landowners first?
- Is the trail you have chosen weather dependant? And if yes do you have an alternate route planned?

- Do you have the right type of person available to judge the type of ride in question? (Some rides require the judge to be a veterinarian while other's require a lay judge who is an experienced horse person.)
- Do you have a location for a base camp that has the capacity to park horse trailers and have room for temporary pens for the horses?
- Does the base camp have a water source for people and horses? Or would you have to haul water into the site?
- Are there washroom facilities or would you have to provide for a portapotty?
- Are there facilities to prepare meals for the riders? Or would you have to prepare meals offsite and transport them into base camp?
- Do you have a network of people to call upon to act as volunteers as ride personnel?

GENERAL INFORMATION

Planning and producing a sanctioned ride takes time, effort, and usually an upfront financial outlay. Few people are able to put on a sanctioned ride without a substantial number of competitors to defray the expenses in insurance, sanctioning fees, cost of a vet or lay judge, and facilities. Like any sports activity involving numbers of people and held outdoors, a great deal of effort and planning is required to assure the event runs without serious problems. A generalized timetable of things to do months ahead and hours before the ride may be useful as a check list. Once you have decided what type of ride you wish to host and the date of the ride, you can obtain a sanction request form from the ACTRA website Forms tab, or by contacting the ACTRA Sanction Director at actrasanctioning@gmail.com. Your Sanction Director must receive a sanction request form at least 30 days before the event is to take place. When choosing a date for your ride, you should take into consideration other ACTRA rides so as to help maximize attendance at each ride. A list of sanctioned rides can be found on the ACTRA website under the Calendar tab. The Sanction Director can help you in scheduling your ride. ACTRA Board of Directors may also be able to offer suggestions on ride volunteers and for a judge, as well as other useful information to help your ride run smoothly. They can also put you in touch with experienced ride managers in your area to help answer your questions and offer suggestions.

PHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Choosing a Ride Base Camp: The base camp needs to be spacious enough to hold all the expected trucks, trailers and campers. It needs to be accessible to motor homes and large trailer rigs, and it must be feasible to get rigs in and out after an unexpected rainstorm. While people can bring their own drinking water, a source of water for the horses is imperative. If the source is difficult or unsafe for horses to access, provide a pump and stock tank and keep it full. If a base camp is to be dry, or if water is unfit for people, be sure to provide this information on your ride description on the ACTRA website, or in your ride flyer or Facebook page. Mark off areas for the vet check, for ride personnel camping, and for vendors, if any. This will prevent any competitors from parking there and will eliminate the job of trying to move someone after they have already set up camp. Unless the ride is held in an established campground with restrooms, you should provide porta-potties for riders and volunteers. A general rule is one porta-potty per 25 people for a weekend. Have a supply of extra toilet paper available. A bulletin board in base camp is useful for posting a large map of the trail and various announcements, such as advising of fire danger; a schedule of events, and whether or not the riders and crews must clean up camp after themselves. Some public areas require all hay and manure to be removed. If the base camp is on private land and the owner doesn't require the manure to be removed, it is at least beneficial to the land to scatter leftover hay so it does not burn the grass underneath it.

Establishing the Trail: The nucleus of any sanctioned ride is the trail. The most important criterion for any trail is that it be the correct distance and that it be feasible and avoid obvious dangers. A ride may seem feasible on paper but may be impossible or excessively difficult in reality. Establishing the trail, which includes selecting a ride base camp and locations of out-of-camp vet checks can take months. The trail should be challenging and of interest to all entrants. Your ride may have some new riders with horses of limited trail experience, as well as some junior riders. Some of the most scenic trails cover rugged and remote terrain. Any sections that are naturally risky should be well marked and discussed in advance at the pre-ride briefing. Competitive distance riding is challenging enough without exposing horses and riders to unnecessary perils or adding hazards just to make the ride more difficult. No matter how well you have planned, weather can cause things to go awry. Dry forests can be closed at the last minute due to fire danger and excessive rain can turn the ground into a sea of mud or even prevent a ride manager from opening the trails after winter damage. Public agencies may close parks or other areas if conditions are not suitable. Early snow masks lime or dolomite markings and may blend in with light color flagging. It is a good idea to have an alternative route in case weather conditions make the original trail unsafe or not doable in time. Perhaps you may want to discuss with your sanctioning director an alternate date.

Permission to Use Land: It is essential to obtain permission from landowners, whether it be private or under city, county, provincial or federal control. Public land is not always available for competitive events where an entry fee is charged. Most agencies will have a permit form for ride management to fill out. They will usually ask for a map of the complete trail and location of the ride camp and vet checks. They will also require proof of liability insurance and a special use fee before issuing a permit. Start this paperwork well before the ride. It is also very important to get permission in writing from private property owners and be certain they understand your intentions before they sign. This should include the various entities that will be passing through their land and the frequency: horses, motor vehicles, etc., what gates will be opened and for how long, who will open and close them, and trail restoration needs, before and after the ride.

Trail Layout: Many different trail configurations are used for competitive distance rides. Some are point-to-point, where the finish line is a long way from the start. This kind of trail, while often interesting and frequently of significant historic value, is by far the most difficult logistically for both ride management and riders. These usually require more ride personnel to run efficiently. The terrain covered and access to the trail are factors that must be considered. Other types of trail are: a single loop (sometimes with a "stem" in and out of base camp, making a "keyhole" shape), a single loop repeated (such as a 25-mile loop run twice to make 50 miles), a figure 8 (which allows the major vet check to be in camp) or a daisy pattern (which allows all vet checks to be in camp). The last one is the most logistically convenient, but can cause horses to become reluctant to leave camp. Know the terrain before you plan your ride. If you don't have personal knowledge, check with people who do. Discover what conflicting activities may be taking place in the same area at the same time. These could include anything from cross-country bicycle races to cattle drives and would be seriously incompatible with a competitive distance ride. Plan your vet checks with these factors in mind: availability of level space, water (either natural or supplied), and accessibility by vets, ride personnel and crews, if they are to be allowed. Bear in mind that ample water in spring may be no guarantee of adequate water in summer or fall. Trail surface is an important factor. Pavement should be bypassed if at all possible and kept to a minimum if unavoidable; make sure the surface is free of bottles and other debris. Roads, whether dirt or paved, which sustain heavy traffic should not be used. Long stretches of graveled road are hard on horses' legs and can cause stone bruises or road founder. Rocky trails can also cause hoof and leg damage, but it is unlikely that most rides can offer rock-free trails. Dirt roads with no gravel and forest trails are ideal.

Creating or Clearing Trail: Allow plenty of time for preparing your trail, as clearing or building new trail in wooded areas can take enormous amounts of effort and time. Limbs that could cause eye damage to a rider must be removed. A rule of thumb is that all limbs reachable overhead with long-handled limb loppers from the back of a horse should be removed. Anything lying on the trail should be easily stepped over at a walk or trot. Not all horses are willing to jump. It is preferable, though not always possible, to remove all larger obstacles from the trail. Try to avoid or repair any deep gullies, and select the safest route possible for crossing creeks. Useful tools in clearing and building trail include a chainsaw, long-handled limb loppers, and two excellent fire-fighting tools, the Pulaski and the MacLeod. The latter two are available from loggers' and arborist' supply catalogs.

Measuring the Trail: Accurate trail measurement is not easy but is extremely important. Not only is it unfair for horses and riders to receive incorrect credit for their miles, but riders pace themselves based on their expectations of the ride length. A ride that is significantly longer or shorter than advertised often causes rider complaints, something ride managers do not want or need. The best measurement technique is by mechanical means, on the ground. Trucks, with 4-wheel drive if necessary, trail motorcycles, quad-runners, or mountain bicycles equipped with cyclometers all work well. A surveyors' wheel works on terrain too rugged for any other means. If it is impossible to take a physical measurement, a map measuring wheel (available from specialty catalogs, surveyors' supply or a good office supply store) can be used on a topographic map. Set the wheel to the contour designation on the map and run it along the trail as closely as possible. Add 10% to your measurement (to accommodate the twists, turns and elevation changes) and you should come extremely close to the distance registered on a truck odometer for the same section of trail. A word of caution—agencies do not always have the correct mileage on signposts. Global Positioning Systems (GPS) are becoming more affordable and provide another option in measuring your trail. The accuracy of trail measurements can be affected by the sophistication and age of your GPS model as well as the terrain. If possible, measure the trail with more than one method. Take the time to educate yourself on correct methods of taking GPS measurements as well as the specific equipment you are using.

Marking the Trail: This is one of the most important responsibilities of the ride manager, along with correct measurement of the trail and selection of experienced, competent equine veterinarians. Nothing will cause dissatisfaction with a ride more than a poorly marked trail. If possible, have several horsemen assess your markings by pre-riding sections of your trail. Refer to Rule1.2.3 in the ACTRA Rule Book for guidelines on how to mark your trail.

Marking Supplies: It is vitally important to choose marking materials that contrast boldly with the surroundings. Green and blue ribbons and striped ribbons do not show up well in forests, yellow and white are marginal if not combined with other, brighter colors. Fluorescent pink and orange are the best. Fluorescent pink or orange with polka dots also work well. Remember, too, that many men are somewhat colorblind, so polka dots would help them identify markings. Sometimes it works well to place two colors together, such as orange and blue, or pink and white. The bright colors catch the eye, while the less dominant colors can signify a different ride or a different loop of the same mileage (loop 1, as opposed to loop 2 in the multiple loop trail). Tying two colors together is also a good way to differentiate between your ride and a timber harvest area. Forestry markings are often either one color alone or several colors together, and often include wide ribbons with printing on them. Wherever possible, place ribbons on the right side of the trail, and advise of this at your ride briefing. In this manner, if the riders find themselves riding the trail and the ribbons are on the left, they will know that they took a wrong turn somewhere. There will always be times when there is nothing on the right-hand side on which to hang ribbons. In those cases, try to place a small wooden stake, metal rod, surveyor's stake or plastic pipe on which to hang flagging. A convenient method for hanging ribbons involves tying them to clothespins in advance. The ribbons are much easier to hang and remove, either from horseback or vehicle, and are reusable year after year. Clip them onto a loop of twine so they can be worn across your shoulder while hanging them from horseback, and so they will hang straight when you store them. Signs with arrows can be made by using permanent markers and drawing them on plastic plates or corrugated plastic, which can be easily stapled to trees (if allowed by landowner) or posts. Arrows can also be drawn or printed on card stock and laminated. It is best to staple a laminated sign onto a piece of plywood to keep it rigid when windy. High-visibility colored cover stock, such as pink or arrange, shows up the best just about anywhere.

Day Markings: A good rule of thumb for hanging flagging is to place one about every 1/4 mile on trail that is straightforward—call them "security ribbons" as they help assure a rider that they are on the correct trail. Arrows stapled on trees or posts are a great way to mark confusing areas and turns. Dolomite or flour arrows on the ground at turns are very helpful, as are lines of dolomite or white surveyors' tape tied across the trail not to be ridden. Warning signs indicating unmodified hazards ahead are important. A word of caution: cattle and deer will eat flagging! If there are cattle in the area of your ride, you can count on this happening. Hang the flagging out of reach or wrap it around a stake, barber-pole style. Loose and windblown flags attract cows like a magnet.

Night Markings: Trails to be ridden at night need additional identification. Light colored flagging, signs made on white card stock or white paper plates, chemical light sticks, and LED lighting are necessary. Combining a bright color such as fluorescent orange or pink with white is helpful on rides that will start in, or extend into the darkness, the color catching the eye in daylight, the white being more visible at night. A good rule of thumb is to hang the light sticks periodically in darker forested areas. Open areas, especially on moonlit nights, will not need the light sticks, except at turns and particular spots. Red light sticks can be purchased and are especially good for warning of hazards such as washouts or low hanging branches. In some cases, it is not possible to repair or remove such hazards, so it is very wise to mark them with warning indicators. A word of caution: do not hang two light sticks on opposite sides of a hazard, such as a fence, deep ditch, or cattle guard. The riders will automatically go from one light to the next without always being able to see the hazard in between. Be sure to hang light sticks in such a way as to lead the riders around the hazard, such as through a gate next to the cattle guard not across the cattle guard itself. It is a good idea to hang the light sticks on the right, as well as the flagging. Riders will soon pick up on the consistency of the markings placement and it will make ride management's job easier if such consistency is practiced at all times.

Turns and Trail Splits: At trail deviations, such as an unexpected turn off the main trail, several markings are useful. Try hanging a group of three ribbons about 12" apart (warns of a turn), then reinforce this with two ribbons on the new trail, one just after the turn and another perhaps 25 feet from the first. An arrow stapled on a tree or post reinforces the ribbons and a dolomite bar or strip of white 4 tape across the unwanted trail completes the marking. It is essential that riders can tell which way they will be turning, far enough in advance, to make the turn without slowing their pace. (If possible, mark a turn three ways - flagging, dolomite, and arrows. No one has ever complained about an over-marked trail). If your trail has a split where one loop or mileage goes one way and another loop or mileage goes another way, be sure to make a sign with advice, such as "50 milers, loop 1 to vet check 2" or "30 milers, loop 2 to finish." Add an arrow with each sign and no one should have any hesitation about which way to go. If your ride has a significant feature such as a slide, huge rock, waterfall, or steep grade, it is fun to identify it. Eventually, your ride will become known for such landmarks. Landmarks are also useful in identifying a location where a horse might have come up lame, a rider injured or become ill, or a tree had fallen across the trail since you had last been there.

When to Mark: To avoid vandalism, consumption by cattle or deer, and general weather damage, it is best to mark your trail as close to the event date as possible. Then recheck critical areas the day before or even on the ride date, if these areas are easily accessible in a timely manner. Ribbons are best hung from tree branches so that they hang vertically out in the open and have less chance of being blown into the surrounding vegetation where they cannot be seen readily. Trail marking is a complex subject, and different methods work best in different areas. Try some of the methods recommended in this handbook and develop your own techniques for success.

Vet Check Sites: As you explore areas for trails, select prospective sites for vet checks. An ideal site has the advantage of easy accessibility for ride personnel and crews—if they are to be allowed, and a relatively level area with plenty of room for horses, riders, ride personnel and crews. It is best to have a parking area adjacent to, but not in, the vetting and crewing area. A supply of water is essential, whether it is from a natural or supplied source. A water tank is desirable, along with extra buckets supplied for crews to draw water for sponging horses. Avoid allowing crews to sponge horses directly out of the drinking water, as horses often won't drink water in which there is a salt and mud buildup. The water source should be close to the crewing/vetting area. Be sure to calculate the driving time from base camp to the vet check sites so that personnel can arrive there in plenty of time to set up and be ready for the first incoming horses. Be sure to consider any additional traffic on the day of the event when calculating access time to all check points. A 100-yard walk to the vet check is not unreasonable, if it is not possible to drive exactly to the site.

Start and Finish: Pay careful attention to both the first and last miles of your trail; this is where most accidents occur. If possible, the first mile needs plenty of room for passing and no hazards to endanger the horses in the excitement of the start. If such an area is not available, consider a controlled start where the riders stay behind a vehicle or designated rider or riders who will travel at a speed appropriate and safe for the terrain. When the terrain becomes safe, then the horses and riders can move out at their own pace. The finish is also extremely important. Prepare for front-runners to be racing for the finish. There should be enough room for two or more horses to race and there should be no sharp turns, steep banks, ditches or other hazards, no vehicles, no dogs or small children, and enough room after a run-out for the horses to stop safely. Establishing boundaries of the "race course" is advisable to help to keep spectators and vehicles a safe distance from the finishing horses. Placing stakes and tying survey tape, twine or rope between them can help to create a barrier. The finish line must be predetermined and it is recommended that it is marked the day before by some means so that riders can see where the finish line is and offer them a chance to 'pre-ride' the finish. Marking the finish line can be as simple as placing two stakes or posts in the ground far enough apart so that two or three horses can safely pass between them (50 feet). One should be cautioned about placing a 'line' on the ground (by using dolomite (lime), flour, tape, etc) as some horses may shy from it or attempt to jump it. You should also be careful with the placing of the finish line staff and their supplies – tables/chairs/tents can cause horses to shy.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Budget: It is important to make out a budget early in your planning and stick with it. Allow for unforeseen expenses, and do not overestimate the expected number of entries. Your Sanctioning Director can be a lot of help to you here. Resist the temptation to go "first class" with everything on your first ride—it's easy to lose money on a competitive distance ride! When planning your budget and establishing your entry fees keep in mind the ACTRA per rider fee, vet/judges fees, cost of meals, and any cost of prizes that may come into play. While these may seem to be a small amount initially, they do add up – especially when you submit your final results.

Publicity/Ride Information: Once you receive confirmation from the Sanctioning Director that your ride has been sanctioned by ACTRA, it is your responsibility to add the details of your ride on the ACTRA Website on Calendar page. The Sanctioning Director can assist you with this task if you request assistance. Additional advertising options certainly exist with the popularity of social media. Creating a Facebook page or Event is a good way to provide additional information for riders and can help to promote your ride. You can provide a link to your Facebook page within the ACTRA online Calendar. Some ride managers also create ride fliers that can be mailed out to people in their region and/or surrounding regions. A link to you ride flier can also be placed next to your online ride listing on the ACTRA site. Placing fliers at local feed and tack stores a couple months ahead of the ride can help to promote your event to possible new people to the sport. Contacting the local newspapers about writing an article about the upcoming event can also help to get the word out. Offering a "new rider clinic" to be held prior to, or in addition to, your event might be something to consider to bring in new riders to the sport. Ride entry blanks and printed fliers can be distributed at other rides, regional horse industry events and horse shows. Whether you create a Facebook page or make a ride flyer (or both) you should include a few key items to help the riders prepare for their adventure. You should include directions to the base camp with information about what to expect for the roads into camp. Be sure to include details regarding availability of water for people and horses. You should also include information regarding the availability of meals, whether meals are to be potluck, and the distance from camp to the nearest gas station, grocery store, and cafe or restaurant. Include a schedule of when the camp will open, start times, meeting and meal times. It's also very important to include any special camp rules if there are any (no dogs allowed, limited entry, horse health requirements, containment/corrals allowed etc). Providing information on vet check procedures, criteria, and what one would expect for trails is also important. If possible, include a few photos of the trail or even a map of the trail can help to entice riders to come and help them to prepare for your ride. Of course one should also include entry information – entry fees, deadlines for entry, release(s) for signature. This can be in the form of online entry form or a form that the rider downloads and brings with or mails to you. After the ride and when you've sent the results to the ACTRA office, you might ask if you can write an article for the next ACTRA Newsletter. If so, be sure you include photographs and ask a few of the riders to provide quotes about the ride. The more publicity you can generate after your ride, the more interest you will attract for your next ride.

Food: Food for riders and crews is optional, but be sure to advise riders whether or not food is to be served or available as well as cost or non-riders. Some rides even contact a local food vendor to come in and set up a food truck. Often rides will have an awards banquet. This can be anything from a potluck to a full-fledged sit down dinner. Keep in mind the cost, as riders are coming to enjoy your trails first and foremost. As a ride manager, you will need to be sure that your vets/ judges and ride personnel are fed. Typically you should plan on some type of easy to feed breakfast – muffins, pastries, breakfast burritos and an ample supply of coffee are the typical fare. Lunches can range from a simple sack lunch to a barbecue. Don't feel that you have to provide a four-course meal, but be aware that your staff will be a lot easier to get along with if they are fed. Having a couple of coolers in the vet check area filled with cold drinks is necessary, especially when the temperatures get hot. It's also a good idea to have a few snacks available for your staff – granola bars, chips, and fresh fruit are always a hit. You should also plan on some type of dinner for your ride personnel. Again, this can be something very simple to having a banquet for everyone. If you are hosting a 75 mile or 100 mile event, it's a good idea to consider providing something late into the evening for those who are staying up waiting on riders – a simple pot of chili or stew can go a long way to make the wait a little more enjoyable. Try to assign the food service to someone other than yourself, as managing the ride is enough of a job without having to deal with food. A riding club or non-riding friend/neighbor might enjoy this activity.

Water: Access to horse water must be considered in laying out your trail and in selecting your ride camp and vet check sites. Water that is acceptable for horses may not be safe for human consumption and people must be advised of this. It is very important to state the water availability in your ride flyer and/or on your ride details. Multi-day rides, especially point-to-point ones, may have one or more dry camps. You need to state this, so riders will come prepared with adequate water containers. Vet checks should be supplied with water, if none is available naturally, you'll need to haul it in by water truck/tanker. It's ideal to provide two water troughs at a vet check, one for drinking and one for sponging. Post a sign advising riders and crews not to dip sweaty sponges in the drinking water.

THE DAY BEFORE

Rider Registration: The ride secretary and one helper should be able to handle all the pre-ride registration. Be specific about the system you choose and keep it simple. If your riders pre-enter they can come to the registration table and pick up their packets with little or no further business. If not, the entry area needs chairs, some clipboards with entry forms and pens. Riders should be prepared to show their Provincial Sport Organization membership card if not included with their entry form. Be sure to collect all fees before the start of the ride. Create a master list for each ride distance with rider name, number and confirmation of membership in the appropriate organization. It is your responsibility as RM to confirm membership is current. Rides with pre-entries can have all of this information in an envelope to be given to riders at check in. Additional items may be information sheets, advertisements from awards donors, and entries for other upcoming rides. Depending upon the type of ride, the rider may need to carry a Rider Card with them to present to the Vet at vet checks. See the ACTRA Rule Book for details on what is required for each type of ride.

Pre-Ride Vet Check: Try to set up your vet check area so that the ground is as flat and with as few holes as possible for the trot-outs. The area also needs to leave room for a line of horses to stand without endangering other riders or horses. If possible, provide each vet with a recorder (scribe), who will record all the vet's findings on the rider card. The vets will give each horse a thorough examination, record resting metabolic factors and check for soundness. Every horse in every distance needs to pass a pre-ride vet examination.

Identifying Competitors: The easiest way to identify the horse-rider teams is to assign a number to them when they enter your ride. This number is recorded on the rider packet, the vet card, the rider list and will appear on the important lists for the start, vet checks and finish. After passing the pre-ride exam, the horse needs to be marked with a livestock paint stick on one or both hips with the rider number. Yellow, pink and orange are the most conspicuous colors. You can purchase these at any farm and ranch store or check with other Ride Managers to see if you can borrow some. If you are offering two or more mileages, it is useful to identify the riders by different prefix numbers, i.e. 501, 502, etc. for 50 milers, 301, 302 for 30 milers, 701, 702, etc. for 70 milers and 101, 102, 103, etc. for 100 milers. Straight numbering i.e. 1, 2, 3 is fine if there is only one mileage. You could also use straight numbering for a 50 miler and 201, etc. for a 25 miler, 301, etc. for a 30 miler.

Pre-Ride Briefing: This is your opportunity to highlight important information (i.e. start times, vet criteria, hold times, special camp rules, trail hazards), to go over any last minute changes and to answer questions. The briefing should include a welcome to the riders and an introduction of the control judges and other key personnel. If your volunteers are from a local group, it's thoughtful to give them public credit. A description of particular points on the trail, such as hazards, difficult terrain, or unexpected turns is important, but don't try to describe every little detail. If you have marked the trail as well as you should have, riders are not likely to take the wrong trail. Keep your briefing simple and to the point, and when finished, ask if there are any questions. The head control judge will set criteria for the ride and riders should be informed of the criteria at the ride briefing. ACTRA rules require that you offer a separate ride meeting for those entered in a limited distance event. This additional meeting should cover the differences in the completion criteria and offer the opportunity for any newer riders to ask questions. If you have a number of first time riders it can be beneficial to have one of your control judges available to help answer any questions they may have. If you have a large number of first time riders it can be beneficial to have a specific meeting for them to go over all of the ride events in detail and answer more specific questions they may have.

RIDE PERSONNEL AND DUTIES (Refer to Rule 1.8.1 in the ACTRA Rule Book for minimum Ride Personnel)

Ride Manager: As a ride manager you are responsible for operating a smooth- running ride. Keep this in mind when selecting people to help you with your ride. You can have a great deal of discontent, griping, problems and formal protests if you are not capable of making tough decisions and sticking by them. However, your decisions must be in line with the ACTRA rules. You can, for the safety of the horse or riders, you may impose stricter criteria, but you cannot ignore ACTRA rules. No matter how well you think you know the rules, re-read the book a week or two before your ride and have it handy on ride day. To avoid the majority of problems you must: 1) provide a correctly measured and well-marked trail, 2) hire competent equine control judges who are experienced with competitive distance horses and rides, 3) treat every competitor fairly, with no exceptions or allowances, and 4) not make any unnecessary rules. Any rules you plan to have, including completion criteria, that are different from ACTRA's, must be written down and available to riders before the start of your ride. Another role of the ride manager is that of host or hostess. In planning or implementing this event, you should treat your competitors and their horses as your guests and keep their welfare and safety in mind as you plan your ride. The trail should be planned for the equines' needs and abilities, not for ease of marking. If you are planning to compete in your own ride, you must have a pre-designated alternate manager who will make decisions and take action while you are out on the trail. The alternate manager must also be an ACTRA member, have in-depth knowledge of the sport of competitive distance riding, be familiar with the trail, and be some- what acquainted with other ride personnel.

Ride Secretary: The ride secretary is in charge of taking entries and recording all pertinent information. He/she is also responsible for compiling results and maintaining a master list of entries. In addition to having some basic secretarial or bookkeeping experience, the ride secretary should have good people skills. The secretary's phone number, e-mail address should be on the entry form and along with the ride managers contact information. Some ride managers act as their own secretary, or they may answer all inquiries and then use a ride secretary to help with registration the day before the ride and with paperwork afterwards

Ride Veterinarians and Control Judges: Control judges are persons that have graduated with a Degree in Veterinary Medicine or its equivalent from an institution of recognized accreditation. A control judge will provide judgment as to an equine's ability to remain in competition. Control judges are not hired to provide a diagnosis. A control judge who is a veterinarian legally licensed to practice may perform concurrent duties outside the role of control judge, such as providing a diagnosis and/or medical treatment. It is advised that you choose an experienced Head Control Judge and one that works well with riders and the other control judges. The control judge is should be listed on the ACTRA sanction request form when you send it to your sanctioning director for approval. It is best to have your head control judge contracted about six months before your ride, if possible. The head control judge may suggest and secure the services of additional vets/control judges whom you have mutually agreed upon, or a ride manager may contact and secure. Depending on the nature of your trail, number and type of control checkpoints and accessibility, one control judge per 15-25 horses is suggested. All control judges must be familiar with the ACTRA Rule Book. Since you as ride manager are hiring the control judges, be sure they are people whom you can work comfortably as a team. In some instances you may have more familiarity with competitive distance rides and ACTRA procedure than control judges new to the sport. Be sure to confer and work closely with your head control judge so there are no misunderstandings regarding your positions, duties, and responsibilities. The control judge's decision is final in all matters concerning safety and well-being of the horses. You as ride manager are responsible for upholding ACTRA rules. Ride management has the right to eliminate from competition any rider for reasons of cruelty, poor sportsmanship, harassment of ride personnel or failure to uphold rules, even if the rider has passed the control checkpoint examinations.

Control Judge Recorder (Secretary/Scribe): Control judge recorders (also called secretaries or scribes) record the information at the various control checks points including the pre-ride check-in. Provide one for each control judge. The recorder's duty is to write down on the vet card all information dictated by the control judge during any examination of a horse. This job offers a great opportunity to someone who wants to learn about the mechanics and metabolics of competitive distance horses.

Pulse Personnel: Pulse personnel take and record the pulse or a horse upon entering the control check pulse area. It is important to have people experienced in taking pulse, as they will ensure the horse has met the specified criteria criterion before recording the pulse readings on the rider card. The horse's hold time is based upon the time it reached the criteria dictated for the ride. Pulses are taken before passing the horse on to the control judge for further examination. Well-trained pulse personnel can remove a significant burden from the control judges and enhance the efficiency of the check. If experienced people are not readily available, the ride manager should take the time to train pulse takers or have experienced pulse takers mentor inexperienced pulse personnel. Pulse personnel can record the time on the vet card or a pulse gate timer can record all times as they are taken. Students from a local university vet school can be a source of pulse crews. Some rides that have many control judges send riders directly to the control judges to take the pulse. If this is the case, be sure that you have recorders available to record the time the horse meets pulse criteria.

Timers Arrival/Departure Timers: The responsibility of these timers is to keep track of arrival and departure of the riders. Experienced timers are very important even if other volunteers are new to the sport, as they are critical to ensuring the control checks run smoothly and fairly. One person can record the arrival time on a master sheet along with helpers who will record the time on the vet card. The departure timer (who is often the same person as the arrival timer) releases the riders at the proper recorded time for departure. It is their responsibility to verify that no rider leaves before their hold time is up. Position your timer in a location that is easily accessible to riders as they enter and leave the control check point.

Pulse Gate Timers: Some rides utilize a pulse gate timer, who records the time that the horses reach recovery criteria on a master sheet so that the information is available to the control judges.

Finish Line Timers: Timers are needed at the finish line to make accurate recordings and to pass judgment in case of a close race or tie. The finish line timer records the finish time of each rider using the horse/rider number on a master sheet at the finish line. To calculate the ride time, the hold times are subtracted from the overall elapsed time to establish the riding time.

Spotters: Spotters are useful wherever riders could illegally use an existing shortcut to gain an advantage of time and reduced mileage. Be sure spotters know their instructions and the trail explicitly and they do not leave until all riders have passed by. They should record numbers as the horse/rider teams pass. This is especially helpful in keeping track of all riders. If a rider was lost or sick/injured, or if there was a sick/injured horse, ride management would have the information and could act upon it.

Drag Rider(s): This is an important job for one or two riders, as they can pull flagging, remove signs, close gates, and assist any riders in need. Two are preferred, in case of rider injury. They also may pick up items dropped on the trail by the competitors. This can also be done by ATV or trail bike, if such vehicles are allowed on the trail. Farrier It is unusual for a competitive distance ride to be held without someone's horse losing a shoe. In the past, having a farrier at your ride may have made the difference between a rider finishing or being pulled. Now, many riders carry hoof boots, and the use of these can save a horse from lameness in case of a lost shoe. Some larger rides may be able to hire a farrier to be on standby, but it may be prohibitively expensive for rides with smaller attendance.

VETERINARY CONTROL

The purpose of veterinary control at competitive distance rides is both to protect the horses and help the riders complete the ride safely. The selection of control check types, location and accessibility will significantly affect the number of control judges needed. The cost of vet services is one of your largest budget items and will markedly affect your budget. Too many vets will drain your budget; too few will result in inefficient progress of your ride and will elicit complaints from the riders. Ride management selects the trail, and its layout, distance and difficulty will determine the number and type of vet checks during a ride. All rides must have a pre-ride vet check where the ride control judges examine each horse and record the particulars on the rider's card (supplied by the ride management.) The card is to be carried by the rider and submitted to the head control judges recorder at the end of the ride or if the horse is disqualified during the event. Ride management and the ride veterinarians should discuss the trail, its difficulty and the probable weather. From that discussion comes the plan for the number and type of vet checks and the criteria at each. To avoid confusion for riders and ride personnel, keep criteria for all distances the same at any given vet check. It is important to keep procedures as simple as possible, especially when volunteers new to the sport are involved.

Pre-Ride Check: Always provide safe ground and try to ensure an open and level area on which to trot out the horses. It should be strongly emphasized that all riders present their horses for the pre-ride exam during the prescribed hours, thus allowing time for management, vets and staff to prepare and to conduct a pre-ride briefing. Riders who are unable to arrive on time should be requested to notify ride management in advance. Most vets prefer not to have to conduct an exam in the darkness by artificial light. In unavoidable cases, a few horses may be vetted in the morning before the ride starts. Note: If you have a refund policy for those not passing the pre-ride vet check it should be very clearly stated in your ride flyer along with other allowances for refunds.

Vet Check Types: Depending on terrain, weather and length of the ride, you will need several vet checks, from 10 to 25 miles apart. In some regions, ride vets like to have a last check between five and 10 miles from the finish line, as this is where the pace may become the most intense. Water should be available at every vet check, whether from natural sources or by ride management provision. If neither of these is an option, inform the crews in advance so they may bring water to their rider and horse. There are several types of vet checks used on endurance rides (descriptions follow in order of preference), and you and your head control judge will decide which of these you will use and at what locations.

Gate In to Timed Hold: This is by far the preferred type of vet check, as it gives advantage to the truly well-conditioned horses and help to protect the less fit. In ideal circumstances the gate check follows this procedure: The rider arrives, presents his card to the In Timer (who records Arrival Time) and is free to present his horse to the P&R team when he believes the horse is recovered to the criteria of that checkpoint. If the horse is recovered, the Pulse team records Recovery Time, and it is from this time that the overall Hold Time for this check is taken. Thus, a horse might arrive at the vet check at 8:45 but not recover until 8:51. If the hold time is 60 minutes, the rider's Out Time will be 9:51. The Out Time may be recorded on the rider card or the Out Timer may record it on a master sheet. In either case, the rider or his crew is responsible for watching his time. The Out Timer will hold the rider until the exact time before he will release the rider to go out on the trail. The timed hold following a gate can be of any length from 10 minutes to one hour, but it is important to base the hold respective to the mileage of the checkpoint. A one-hour hold is essential to allowing the horse to refuel and rehydrate and, as such, is recommended for checks farther into the ride.

Gate or Stop and Go Check: This gate is similar to the previous gate check with the exception of not requiring a hold time. The rider is free to leave as soon as the horse has met the required P&R criteria and is approved by the control judge. There may be enough 10 pulse teams to monitor pulse or the responsibility can be placed on the rider or crew to check the horse and present him to the vet when he is ready to stand inspection. If the horse's pulse doesn't meet criteria, it must be brought back later for a re-check. Large rides may impose a minimum time before the horse can be re-presented. A horse is not allowed to leave the checkpoint if it does not meet all criteria. One advantage of this type of check is that it can slow the pace of the riders by separating out the fittest horses from the less fit especially if used early in the ride. The disadvantage is that it allows no time for the horse to eat, drink and relax.

Ten/Ten Check: This is another combination type of check. Horses are checked at a fixed 10 minutes after arrival. If they pass the P&R criteria, they have an additional 10-minute hold time before leaving. If they have not recovered, any additional time needed to recover to P&R criteria is added to the hold time. Essentially the check becomes just like a gate into a timed hold. The hold time can be longer than 10 minutes, as appropriate, i.e. 10/20 or 10/30. This check retains most of the advantages of the gate into a timed hold but allows the horses that arrive together to leave together, providing none are being significantly over paced. However, it penalizes the horses with the best recovery abilities.

Fixed Hold: This is historically the oldest type of vet check. All riders are held a specific amount of time (generally 10 to 60 minutes). This period of time is not held against their riding time and the horses are examined at a specific time after their official arrival at the checkpoint (typically, 30 minutes after arrival at a 60-minute stop). This check requires that horses are timed in and out to the nearest second, not just the nearest minute. The biggest disadvantage is that an over-paced, unfit horse can recover enough to leave and continue with the fitter horses. This could lead to fatigue and metabolic failure. This is the least desirable and least favored type of vet check.

Post-Finish Check: At the post-finish control check, the final criteria for completion must be met. The horse has not completed the ride until it has passed this check. The post-finish check acts as a safety check to monitor late-developing problems as well as extending veterinary control over the last leg of the ride. Because the horse at the finish is not in actuality going on—not going into remote areas far from veterinary aid—the standards for completion need not be as strict as those on the trail. Completion criteria must be set by the head control judge in consultation with ride management and announced at the pre-ride briefing so that all entrants understand it. ACTRA's minimum criterion for completion of each ride type can be found in the Rule book. Should ride management or the veterinarians wish to use stricter standards, the head veterinarian, in consultation with ride management, must decide what the standard will be, and then make sure that all competitors understand! Ideally, this should be in the ride brochure so that the riders will know what to expect before coming to the ride. In any case, it must be in written form to the riders before the start of the ride as per ACTRA rules.

Best Condition Judging: The best condition award is determined by a three-part procedure based on riding time, weight carried, and a control judge examination. The first 10 horses to complete are eligible to stand for this award, including those ridden by juniors, regardless of riding time. If, in the opinion of the vets, none of these horses deserve best condition, the award need not be given. Although ACTRA recognizes only one such winner at each ride, ride management may give other best condition awards as well, An example might be runner-up best condition or highest vet score. See the ACTRA Rule book for complete information on judging and scoring for this prestigious award. The control judge(s) m (usually the head control judge) will complete the veterinary portion of the form and the ride manager is responsible for completing the time and weigh portions and calculating the final scores. In case of identical scores, the horse having the best vet score among those tied is the winner. If there is still a tie, the horse finishing first among those still tied will be declared the winner. Credit for best condition is given only when the ACTRA form is used and submitted with the ride results. Ride management should be sure their control judges are familiar with the system, as most rider complaints regarding best condition result from control judges deviating from the established form. Be sure to announce best condition judging times and procedures sufficiently in advance so that riders have time to prepare their horses for presentation. Also, you will need to have a scale available to weigh riders with their tack after they complete the ride.

AFTER THE RIDE FINISH

Awards: Awards can be almost anything, but some sort of completion award must be given. Silver belt buckles are an example of one end of the spectrum, paper certificates, the other. Many riders like useful awards or awards that are unique to the ride: a t-shirt, buckets, hoof picks, halters, a sack of grain, a currycomb, ribbons, just about anything you can think of can serve as a completion award. There is little correlation between the expense of the awards and the satisfaction felt by the riders. Don't put your entire awards budget into 10 the front-runners' hardware; "To Finish is to Win" is the motto of competitive distance riding and the awards should reflect this, too. Local veterinarians, feed suppliers, tack stores, and national horse catalog companies might be contacted for donations. You should also have an award available for Best Condition.

Awards Presentation Ceremony: Try not to have your awards presentation while there are any riders still on the trail. The last to finish worked as hard, or harder, than the front-runners and deserves equal recognition at the ceremony. Start the presentation with the last rider and work toward the first to finish. It makes the presentation more meaningful and interesting to state the horse's name as well as the rider's. Try not to take it personally if riders wish to go home before the ceremony, but make it clear that they must pick up their awards first, or you will be paying for postage and packaging and spending lots of time sending awards later.

RIDE FOLLOW-UP

Tabulating Ride Results: The sooner you do this, the better, as ACTRA needs the results so they can be processed quickly. To calculate the ride time, the hold times are subtracted from the overall elapsed time to establish the riding time. Example, if a rider started the ride at 6:00 am, finished the ride at 1:00pm, and the ride had 45 minutes of holds, the riders ride time would be 6:15.

Sending Results to ACTRA: The Sanctioning Director will provide the Ride Manager with all of the correct scorecards and reporting forms at least 14 days prior to the ride date either by email or in hard copy depending upon the RMs preference. All ride results records are submitted to the Statistician Director within 14 days of the ride date. The Statistician Director enters the ride results onto the ACTRA website. Along with the results, all sanction fees must be submitted to the Treasurer.

Other Post-Ride Responsibilities: Post-ride duties include paying the vets and other personnel as required, and writing thank you notes to volunteers. Depending on where the ride is staged, duties may include cleaning up the staging area and disposal of any garbage and trash. Others duties may come to mind, but these are the basic essentials.

IN CLOSING

Please keep in mind this book has been created by ride managers and for ride managers as a tool to help work through the ride management process. The content does not replace any current ACTRA rules or forms and should not be interpreted as any ACTRA rule. ACTRA's rules are always available on-line and in upon request in written form. If you have further questions regarding ride management, please don't hesitate to contact the Sanctioning Director at actrasanctioning@gmail.com or any member of the ACTRA Board of Directors.