

THE LITTLE MARE THAT COULD//Ashton Gwenda June 12, 1982 to Jan 5, 2011

Dearest Gwenda, you were my first 'own horse.' Close to age 40, I got my childhood wish, a pony of my own, not any old pony, no, a well-bred super pony -- Welsh Cob filly, 4 months old, all mine to keep happy and healthy... You stayed with your breeder at Ashton Farm near Ottawa for a year while we were building our own farm from scratch. Next summer we trailered you and newly acquired Welsh Pony friend, Morva, from Ontario to our farm in the wooded hills of New Brunswick between Nackawic and Hartland. You grew to a perfect size, 13.3 hands, short enough for easy mounting and a bonus when passing under low branches in the woods of NB. You, a Welsh Cob, solid and strong, quick and surefooted, were fully up to an adult woman's weight, combined with a 'wicked' turn of speed to challenge this no-longer-so-young, rider -- you were quick to freak out sometimes, although not over things that are 'of the woods.' Encounters with moose and bear, black mudholes, tricky footing in streams and ponds, plank bridges with wide gaps, rolling log paths tracking across bogs, these you took all in good stride, pausing to investigate, then cautiously navigating our way through, generally. And when, the odd time, you said, "I don't think so...let's go someplace else," I listened. Glad I did, for both our sakes.

But my oh my, those motorized boogaboos we encountered at close range on woods roads and trails, they sure gave you the heebie jeebies!

Just one thing wrong with those woods, to your mind...no fun things to jump over, safely. To satisfy your inbred desire for jumping, and lacking the stone fenced sheep pastures of Wales which your ancestors used to hone jumping skills, we hauled ourselves to numerous lessons and clinics over fences. You launched us so fast 'up and over,' that our camera in those early days often could only take blurred shots of us in flight.

Your first foal and only daughter was Megwen (the photo of you and she, just two days old, shows how perplexed and worried you were to find yourself saddled with raising this willful, yet dependant, little being that came out of nowhere.) She proved to be a branch of the same Welsh tree loaded with jumping genes -- both of you took to challenging stable doors unless the top halves were firmly shut.

In fifteen years of roaming the woods behind our farm, I reckon we set out on our wilderness rides more than 800 times, not counting the times we geared up for other pursuits. Our rides in the wilds were for fun, and to condition for ACTRA Competitive Trail Rides. We had one serious mishap during a Atlantic prov. CTR qualifier. Just short of the finish, I lost my balance, the saddle rolled, you and I parted ways, and you bolted in a panic through dense, spiky tree stands. We both came out of the woods that day with minor cuts and bruises, thanks to helpful fellow competitors, first aid volunteers -- and our own lucky stars.

The magical moments we enjoyed are beyond counting. A bull moose up ahead, which I took for a friend's Percheron on the loose -- you knew better. The day we watched a mother blackbear and two cubs crossing the trail a little ahead of us. When they were gone, I nudged you forward, but you insisted we wait, 'there's another one trying to cross'....right as usual...another breath, and presto! a laggard mini-bear streaked across the shadow-dappled trail to catch up with the family!

At age 19, you competed one last time, placing 4rth in Conditioning. Then came the day we moved away from the woods. After so many long, hard rides, braving summer heat and fly-infested woods much of the time, you had

earned your retirement in the cool, breezy Tantramar Marsh. How we enjoyed our occasional scenic and breezy pleasure rides along the Cumberland Basin on top of the dike! At age 24, you traveled to PEI to participate in an ACTRA Limited Distance ride, a novelty for us both. We greeted old friends, human ones -- I recall no other equines of your generation there. You, bubbling with happiness, ran the trails all morning with the new, younger gang.

We could have dealt with the nasty metabolic disease that sneaked up on you. You did well thanks to the Pergolide medication, showed improved coat, some light shedding.... Turns out, you were one of the unlucky Cushings horses with chronic laminitis added to their burden. After a year of acute painful flare ups off and on, you still managed to go out every day, 'skating' on padded, booted feet. You seemed to accept your limitations, happy in the presence of your new companion, Blodwen, a cousin raised on our farm way back then. Maybe you couldn't remember a time when your feet did NOT hurt.

Then, New Years Eve 2010, that wretched hoof, left fore, caused you fresh pain. You couldn't put any weight on it and ended up spending your days in the barn, on three legs, waiting for Blodwen to come back in. At night you were off your poor feet, resting on a thick straw-and-hay bed, pleased that 'she', the other mare, was back inside to keep you company. You seemed contented, snuggled up like a huge dog, huf huffing at your human attendant for more water, some more of those tasty pellets and another flake of hay if you please.

Still, only three legs aren't enough for a horse to live a worthwhile life. This incurable disease means that you will never again grow a healthy left forehoof. One day, later or sooner, there's no telling, you'd be in even worse pain than now. And so, my princess, today must be the end of our road together.

You loved to be in freshly fallen snow and these past few winter days, sunny and crisp, you wanted badly to go outside. Not for you, being cooped up in a barn. Your protests each morning when we turned Blodwen out, 'SHE goes out and why can't I?' were loud and vigorous. And so, today, when the door opened wide onto the bright snowy winter world, you happily made your painful way out with our support. Down the bank we went, to the flake of hay that lay waiting in your favorite sunny spot next to the shed.

You are resting beside your daughter in the pasture you both loved and gazed at with longing that summer of zero grazing to prevent fresh bouts of sore feet.

I can't help wondering how long you'll stay put there. Six feet of soil seem nowhere enough to keep your spirit from surfacing. I picture you jumping up in the air and taking off to soar over the Tantramar Marsh, circling once over the familiar barn, then winging it out to the Bay.

THANK YOU, Gwenda, for all of those good times we shared!

As I will always remember you, I hope so will you remember me, your devoted caretaker and friend, sometimes a bit pesky, one who has such poor hearing and sense of smell and has to move on such a pitiful single set of legs, that she recruited your help in order to better roam the wild woods, secure in your strength and finely honed senses, trusting your woods savvy s you carried her at speed over rough ground on two sets of powerful legs lightly touching the ground with superb hooves (such gorgeous, tough and shapely hooves they used to be...)

Signed, Afiena

Learning to 'ride my own ride'



BY PATTI STEDMAN

I admit that I am a slow study, and that it has taken me some time to figure out precisely what "ride your own ride" means, and to develop the self-discipline to actually make it happen.

I have ridden my riding companion's ride (slower), my riding companion's ride (faster), the herd-of-nearly-out-of-control front-running-horses' ride (dangerously faster) as well as the ride of my older horse when I was riding my younger horse, and vice versa.

With age and miles (and plenty of mistakes) comes a little wisdom.

What is your ultimate goal?

One can ride one's ride in an existential sense. To me, this is a critical one. I consider life to be one big ride, and I have a keen sense of living it to the fullest. That means that I am not terribly interested in riding in the worst weather, nor on the toughest trail, nor with broken bones, and certainly not on a horse that seems in the least bit "iffy."

A friend of mine, Kathy, a combined training competitor, described this concept to me as the Ultimate Goal. (See sidebar.)

My Ultimate Goal is less about completion times, or regional rankings, or even my completion rate, and a whole lot more about simply having a good time. My friend Mary Coleman talks about her "fun meter." Let's just say that I have a sensitive fun meter, and that I've learned to tune in to the fun meters of my horses, and that if we're not both running on the positive end of the meter, I'm likely to call it a day.

I realize that my Ultimate Goal is just that. It's mine. Your Ultimate Goal might be different; you may have a higher pain threshold. You may have a very specific goal in mind, or want to be challenged by the most humbling of trails, or be in the sport for an entirely different reason altogether; perhaps you just can't get enough silk-screened t-shirts!

Something that is amazing about the sport of endurance riding, and distance riding in general, is that there is a huge umbrella out there to accommodate us all.

So get to know, to really define, your Ultimate Goal. You will find it helps you make the day-to-day decisions with far less angst.



"Short term goal—do not fall off the bridge." Patti Stedman guides Supreme Aviator ("Ace") to his first 100 mile completion by riding her own ride. Photo © WendyWebbPhotography.com.

What are your long-term goals?

Winters in western New York are blessedly or cursedly long and cold, depending upon your perspective. Riding can be nearly impossible, or just plain dangerous, so it allows one to have the down time to ruminate about long-term goals.

With three horses competing, my husband and I often chat—or rather I blather and he nods absently—about what we're hoping to achieve in the upcoming season. Can we get the younger horse through a 100? Is it possible to improve my husband's horse's eating at rides? Will dressage help the veteran horse improve his topline?

Setting up the long-term goals makes it easier to set up our conditioning plan and to pick and choose the rides we hope to attend. This is done, of course, with the ever-present understanding that horses have a wicked sense of humor,

as do hauling vehicles, so that every scheme needs a back-up plan.

And on ride day . . .

The actual day of the ride is where we often abandon all of the above in the heat of the moment, or with the best of intentions—and we've all heard the destination at the end of the road paved with good intentions.

I find that the drive to the ride is the best time and place for me to reconfirm my own plans, and to imagine the scenarios that might get me off track. What is my Ultimate Goal? What are my long-term goals? What is my goal for this ride?

Rather than make plans for things that are dependent on others' performance or the ride conditions (e.g., "achieve Top Ten" or "complete under seven hours"), I prefer to focus on things that are, with a mindful nod to Murphy's Law, within my control.

My plan might include my intentions for warming up, where within "the pack" I will start with my horse, the pace I hope to keep, which equitation foibles I will focus on as the miles pass, how frequently I will electrolyte my horse or how I might encourage eating in the horse that is reluctant to eat, or how I will take care of myself with regard to my own eating and drinking.

The critical question is how we keep to that plan. What if someone, a dear friend, wants to ride with us, when we know their

continued on next page

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Learning to Ride My Own Ride . . .

pace is unlikely to match our own?

This is one that I've learned to handle over the years. I'm owned by one horse that has very strong opinions about the company he considers worth keeping on trail; I'm owned by another that functions best on his own, or paired up with one of his barn-mates. Their foibles win out over my own preferences.

So I just say that I'm sorry, but I have a plan on how to ride this ride and that I want to stick with it.

That said, I will sometimes tell someone that if they are willing to ride "my ride" they are welcome to tag along.

Sometimes, however, we all know that riders don't ask if they can tag along. Perhaps they have difficulty establishing a sane pace so tuck their own beast behind yours such that you can hear the fire-breathing and snorting behind you, aware that the tail-gating horse is close enough that he is viewing your horse's colon from the posterior exit.

In these circumstances, I simply raise my hand, pull my horse safely off to the side of the trail and politely insist, "No, please, you go on ahead."

Much of this is about self-discipline, and keeping one's eye on the long-term goal or ultimate prize. If you want to ride your own ride, you have to fiercely protect your plan, in the most polite way that the circumstances will allow. I comfort myself about what might seem like rather antisocial actions by realizing that it is all about giving my horse the best possible ride that I can, free from distractions or stressors that I have the power to control.

For example, this year I made a goal of getting my younger horse, Ace, through his first 100 mile ride. We'd attempted it last year, but not completed, and I'd made some changes that I hoped left him better prepared to get around the course this year.

As the season started, our friend Rachel, a lovely featherweight rider and an excellent horsewoman, found herself with two lame horses. She started conditioning Ned, my veteran 100-mile horse, rode an LD with him to get to know him, and I started envisioning the four of us completing a 100-mile ride together.

The Ultimate Goal was clear; for me, it's about having a barnful of 100-mile horses, if possible, all with long endurance careers.

Having my veteran horse's calm company

worked well with my long-term goals for my young horse, so we set a number of short-term goals to fulfill the plan of an early July 100-mile completion. All of our plans had escape routes and alternate schemes, but the plan came together with two sound, fit and well-rested horses, a perfect early

summer forecast, a last-minute crew, and a trail that I knew well enough to know that it was ideal.

We agreed that we would pace the ride for my more veteran horse, who is a solid 100-mile horse, but no speed demon. We planned to keep the horses on the trail together, going at their own sustainable pace, knowing how and when we would electrolyte, and that we might take extra time at some of the shorter 30-minute holds that were announced dur-

ing the pre-ride briefing.

As always, especially on a 100-mile ride, things go wrong. I slammed my finger in the truck door on the way to the ride, leaving me with a purple and throbbing finger. Ned torqued a shoe at 75 miles. Rachel, in a case of cosmic timing, started to get sick at about the same time. Ace tested my patience by being seemingly unable to be still, a perpetual motion machine, even at the end of 100 miles.

A friend whose horse needed a buddy on trail rode with us for more than half of the miles, but we told her, and she cheerfully understood, that she would be riding our ride.

This was a high-profile ride, with most of the 100-mile horses there to achieve their FEI COC, so we got lots of ribbing about the pace we kept and how utterly we were *not* stressing our horses, as evidenced by CRIs in the 52/48 region all day long.

This was just fine; we were not swayed. We were working our plan and adjusting as we needed to, based on our horses' needs and our own, but our goals did not change.

Shortly after midnight, both of our horses completed, happily accompanied by our friend's horse, also completing his first 100, with all As and only darkness slowing our pace.

We rode our own ride. And it worked.



Patti Stedman and Ace (left) teamed up with Rachel Lodder and Ned for a successful completion at the Canadian Championships in 2010. Photo © WendyWebb Photography.com.



Staying baby powder-fresh is part of the ride plan. Patti double-checks her 100-mile medical kit before hitting the trail. Photo: Rachel Lodder.

Defining and refining your Ultimate Goal

BY KATHY VIELE

Lots of people get stressed by competition, get frustrated with progress (or perceived lack thereof) or scores. And often they quit having fun riding and spend more time frustrated than enjoying themselves and their horse. In many cases, the rider has lost sight of, or more often has never established, their Ultimate Goal (aka UG™).

My Ultimate Goal is to have a happy, athletic horse who is a pleasure to ride and do things with—a horse who enjoys our time together, as do I. I feel I owe my horses good care and an ongoing effort to improve my riding and horsemanship. I owe them consideration (of likes and dislikes and personality and quirks) and sympathy and good care.

I do not owe them Olympic-caliber riding, so I don't go down the road of feeling guilty that I'm not a Great Rider—I am on an ongoing quest to improve and I am getting better. I try not to get caught up in a single score or a single competition. When I compete, I like it when things go well, but my UG is not winning a particular competition or even a year-end award. And if things go poorly I try to learn from them and keep in mind my UG.

If you let the competition or the award grow too much in importance and eclipse your UG, things get out of balance and horses get pushed and riders get unhappy. If you want to, go to competitions as a way of spending time with your horse and your horsey friends, as a way to get feedback on where your training is and of the inroads you've made or the challenges you still face. You can set smaller goals along the way but they should always hold a backseat to your UG and be revised in keeping with your UG whenever necessary.

My UG is to have and enjoy the benefits of a well-trained horse, so I can go and do things with the horse, and not let the training and test-riding be an end in itself. If riding in a competition becomes the goal, instead of enjoying the training and the horse itself, some of the pleasure is lost. Let the focus be the relationship with the horse and what that relationship lets you do and accomplish together, and don't let the accomplishments themselves become more important than the bond/relationship you build with the horse.

Kathy Viele ("Badger" to her friends) is a working adult amateur who is having a ball eventing at preliminary level, schooling fourth level dressage, hunting, trail riding, and occasionally going to jumper shows, all with her horned partner and dear friend, Connelly. Maybe someday you'll see them on the trails.

One Slipper Swings today,
The other at year ends!

**The
Slippers will**

Die BY

S at Night

HURRY

Give us each a
beer or the
slippers die;
No beer no
slippers

Your slippers are
scared. Here is the tag to
prove we are cutting
pieces off, slowly. You
better hurry.

FROM THE EDITORS STALL: continued

Well folks, believe it or not the unthinkable has happened. I became the victim of an organized band of "slippernappers". It all started at Gwenns Ride. It was a lovely day. The kind of ride which gave no sign of the things to come. I should have known better.

After the ride we all ambled up to Gwenns house to partake of a delicious feast and to eye the prize table. And that's when I saw them. The most beautiful Aqua slippers I had ever seen. I knew I had to act fast... for certainly every other rider had seen those slippers and would try to add them to their wardrobe. So using my quick thinking and super wit I applied "Reverse Psychology"... and begged all the riders who were called up first to take the slippers. It worked like a charm... and as luck would have it... my name was called and lo and behold the slippers were mine!!!

My bubble was soon burst however. I took my "eyes off my prize" for only an instant, but it was long enough for someone to realize that they had been scammed out of a lovely pair of foot huggers and wanted to make me pay for my trickery! My babies were gone and in their place a ransom note. I tried to comply with their demands but they would not be appeased. (I think they are a slight bit psychotic).

Ride after ride... note after note... and still no slippers. That is until Mosquodoboit when I found (sniff, sniff) one of my slippers hanging by a rope... with a bandaid on the spot where they had CUT (sniff, sniff) off the tag!

There is some good news. Although my slipper was severely traumatized by the events, it is recovering slowly. However the healing process will not be complete until his twin is safe and secure on my other foot.

So how can you help? I know you are all as anxious as I am to get my slipper home safe and sound and bring comfort to my cold feet. So this is what you can do.... Register for the **ACTRA year -end Achievement Celebrations** (information inside). There is strength in numbers and I am sure that together we can convince the slippernappers to free my Right furry foot warmer.

I am confident of success in this matter. But if, for some reason we cannot negotiate with these people... we will have a darn good time trying!!

See you at year ends... and to the slippernappers if your out there... PLEASE LET MY SLIPPER COME HOME, I LOVE IT AND I MISS IT.

Keep your eyes on your slippers,
Sylvia "blue-toes" Gillies

PACING

the art of riding your own ride

BY JEANETTE MERO, DVM

For those of us who ride, many have felt that horrid feeling in our stomachs when the horse we're on is feeling more like a runaway freight train than a well-trained, responsive trail horse. Blistered hands, sore shoulders, stiff backs and necks and tired legs are the result of trying to control those demon-possessed horses. Whatever got into them? Of course, they are all perfect angels at home on their own trails.

And what is the big deal anyway? So what if one's horse wants to run up front with the "hot shoes"? Nearly every control judge and treatment vet has heard at least once, "He just felt so good, Doc. He was keeping up just fine, Doc."

Why can't horses be allowed to just rate themselves and go as fast as they want on the trail? Why do we control judges cringe when we hear the inevitable, "I tried to slow him down, Doc. He was just pulling my arms out of the sockets"? Ultimately, the horse that is not well paced and ridden within the level of his ability will usually not finish the ride at best, and at worst suffer a metabolic crisis requiring treatment.

Why are horses so good at fooling their owners into thinking everything is all right, until suddenly everything is so wrong? It's because horses are herd animals and work hard at maintaining a connection with the herd, therefore pacing themselves at whatever speed is necessary to remain with the group.

It is only when that work is no longer required and the adrenaline that was needed to keep up dissipates (i.e., at a control checkpoint) that the damage from going too fast becomes readily apparent. Horses that have been allowed to go too fast usually have difficulty recovering their heart rate, often develop colic and can even suffer from exhaustion syndrome.

Finding the right pace

So how do you pace your horse appropriately during an endurance ride? As a rider and an endurance veterinarian, I see this as one of the most paramount responsibilities the rider has to his or her mount. Being a competitive rider myself, no one knows better how hard it is to control a speed-intoxicated endurance

horse, especially one that is bred to be hot to begin with.

Proper pacing during ride day is achieved through two pathways:

- Rider knowledge and education
- Training and schooling of the horse.

To begin with, the rider must understand rates, pacing and how their own horse feels traveling at any given speed (without the benefit of a GPS). Second, to implement a particular pace or speed while riding or racing, the horse must be adequately trained to respond and obey the rider's cues and wishes.



Kerstin Leuther of San Jose, California, and her Arabian gelding Jeen Jet set a pace at the 2009 Camp Far West 50, which they finished in 5:17. Photo © Rene Baylor, Gore/Baylor Photography.

The easiest and fastest way to learn how a certain speed feels on your horse is to ride with a GPS. While I did say earlier one should know how fast the horse is going without the benefit of a GPS, this is only because none of us should become hostages to toys and technology, as sometimes those toys break. In reality I train with a GPS every ride.

Over time, with the use of a GPS, it is easy to develop a sense of speeds while riding. In general a fast walk is 4 to 5 mph, a slow trot 6 mph, a moderate trot 8 mph, and a fast trot is 9 to 10 mph.

Slow canters usually come in around 10 to 12 mph and an FBI race canter will likely be around 13 to 16 mph, with a high-end canter or hand gallop being around 15 to 18 mph.

Without the benefit of a GPS, one can map out a course with exact distances and measure the time it takes to complete that course using different gaits.

In addition to using GPS technology, I strongly recommend all riders train with a heart rate monitor, my favorite systems be-

ing those that have both capabilities on the same wrist monitor. Why does one need to train with a heart rate monitor? Because the quickest and easiest way to know whether your horse can handle the speed you are asking it to go is by watching its heart rate.

Remember, we expect endurance horses to work for extended periods of time; this translates into horses needing to work within their aerobic thresholds. To do aerobic work, a system functions with oxygen, and does not exceed the system's metabolic need for oxygen.

An example of working beyond the oxygen level is sprinting work, or hill climbing. Most of us have all felt that burn in our own muscles running up a hill or going up stairs too fast. The burn comes from the cells being powered predominantly from glycogen to meet the extreme needs of the muscle cell. The problem of doing this kind of work is that it is short-lived and the cells fatigue quickly.

Therefore, to keep an endurance horse going all day long, one must be careful to keep the horse's system out of the anaerobic range (without oxygen). For most horses the standard recommendation is to not exceed working heart rates of 150 beats per minute. Most horses with heart rates of 160 on up are likely experiencing some level of anaerobic work and are therefore at risk of fatigue.

The use of the GPS and heart rate monitor paired together on the same wristband allows the rider to see the speed and heart rate at the same time, then feel the speed of the horse underneath them, and to ultimately develop that sense of the ideal pace for their horse based on the terrain they are riding.

One should never forget that horses are fantastic natural athletes. Most horses can maintain very fast speeds for considerable distances with their ears up and with eager strides, yet all the while they could potentially be working with heart rates that are too high and not sustainable over the long day.

These animals—without the benefit of heart rate monitoring—could feel perfectly fine to their unsuspecting riders, until suddenly they are very much *not* fine and are struggling to either keep up or recover their metabolic parameters at a control checkpoint.

A final point: horses should train at home
continued on next page

Pacing...

at the same pace or speed that is expected of them at a ride. In other words, do not train routinely at home at a 6 mph pace and then expect a horse to perform well at a ride traveling at an 8 or 10 mph pace.

Training to ride your own ride

Once a rider feels comfortable knowing the best pace for his or her own horse, how does a rider practice the concept of "ride your own ride"? Proper pacing training begins not even on the trail but in an arena with schooling exercises. The ability to control a horse on the trail begins with a horse that is obedient and responsive to basic exercises in an arena, both in hand and under saddle.

I am a big fan of natural horsemanship (but not of any particular style), and feel it provides the quickest, most humane methods to forge a working relationship with one's horse. Before I ever take a horse on the trail, or even get in the saddle for the first time for that matter, I make sure the horse has mastered the neck flexions, understands lateral movement and that I have control of the shoulder, hip and middle of the horse on each side, independently of each other.

Using classical training methods I also make sure the horse understands a half-halt. In addition a one-rein stop is essential before venturing out on the trail. It is not uncommon for me to acquire a new horse that is already under saddle going down the trail, yet I have to go backwards and teach the horse the exercises described above.

Once moving down the trail, I practice all of the same exercises that we mastered in the arena out on the trail. While I am as bad as the next rider in not spending enough time weekly on arena schooling exercises, I do as much as I can on the trail. I don't just saddle up, turn on the GPS and go, go, go until we complete the desired workout.

On-trail exercises usually consist of good stops (including one-rein stops), side passes up to gates or just in the middle of a trail from one side to the other, repeated neck flexions, small circles, and shoulders-in and haunches-in movements. While I don't perform schooling exercises every time I go out on trail to train, I do try to make a concerted effort at consistency, as practice makes perfect!

In addition, as soon as the horse is out on trail performing conditioning rides, now is the time to instill consistency in one's pacing and speed. Practice getting your horse to relax into a set pace on a loose rein, with no need for you to either slow them down

or urge them on with your leg. At rides on trail I often see riders that rush ahead, then slow down to a walk or slow jog, then rush on again, only to slow down again in a short time. They will often maintain this pattern of riding for the whole ride.

Physiologically, it is actually much easier on your horse (and probably mentally as well) if you keep your horse's speed fairly constant for longer periods of time, say several miles at the least. It actually requires more energy for a system to speed up and slow down over and over than it does to maintain a consistent pace throughout the exercise.

Once you and your horse have at least a good handle on the steps outlined above, then it's time to "train" your horse to listen to you and not just follow the pack. Many horses do fantastically well at home alone, or with other buddies, but have never been pressured by the common chaos that exists with large numbers of horses coming and going on the trail during an endurance ride.

This is where you need some good friends to ride with; in my case I use my kids and their horses. Start a ride with everyone leaving in a group together. If only one other horse is available to work with, most often that is even enough. Go along at least a couple of miles to give the horses a chance to settle in. When ready, tell your friends to go on a little without you. This is where it gets dicey.

Your horse's temperament and your confidence level will dictate how far ahead you let the group get. If you have a reasonable handle on your horse and you think he will listen well, or he does not get too upset by others leaving him, then let them get almost out of eyesight but not quite. If your horse is the opposite of this and needs his buddies desperately and/or you really don't want to provoke a fight, then just put several horse lengths between you and your buddies' horses.

Predictably, most horses will start trying to rush ahead, grab the bit, pull on the bit, etc. Some horses might even bolt ahead; some might have a hissy fit right in the middle of the trail in an attempt to get rid of you so they can rush back to the safety of their friends. Be ready for any and all types of evasion tactics.

Start first with mild half-halts and using a stiff seat to signal to the horse you want him to slow down and follow your direction, not the group ahead. If that does not work—and in most cases in the beginning it will not be enough—then one has to use neck flexions/lateral flexions, or even a full one-rein stop if the horse is really losing its mind. If you

have to resort to the one-rein stop, be ready as the group will get even further ahead and that might unsettle your horse even more.

In my hands, I use the one-rein stop fairly frequently in the beginning. Once the horse is stopped I practice neck flexions from the saddle ad nauseam until the horse settles and he seems back on the planet with me. Then we start again and move up until we either see the group again (but I ask the horse to hang back) or I allow the horse to reconnect but then ask him to slow down again fairly soon and let the group move away once again. I will do this over and over during the course of one ride.

Like all training exercises, this does take some sensitivity and finesse, as you don't want the horse to be reduced to a frothing, dripping, panicked animal that is no longer thinking. Every horse is different, and how much pressure they will tolerate before blowing up is different.

Your job is to create just the right amount of stress that your horse can safely learn from. Some horses only need a few neck flexions and they can move off again. Some will need several minutes of repeated flexions before their jaw softens, their head lowers and they are finally "listening" again.

Once we've had at least a few of these training sessions I can then usually move to using just a subtle neck flexion from the saddle and at the same time use my leg on the same side as my hand to disengage the hip. This does not stop the horse abruptly, but slows the horse, softens the jaw, and lowers the poll. It does not mean that one-rein stops are still not sometimes necessary but most horses with the proper background exercises get the point pretty quick.

When riding with my kids, I will not do these kinds of training rides every time with my young horses. More likely, I may only practice these separation exercises for part of a ride and then go back to riding with the group. But as mentioned earlier, practice makes perfect and repetition is the only road to success.

I realize the suggestions I have provided are not quick-and-easy solutions to the problems of riding a runaway horse during an endurance ride. However, these methods—when applied step by step, with patience and much practice—will eventually result in a mount that will be safe, obedient and fun to ride in any situation and, most importantly, will have the best shot at finishing an endurance ride in good shape. Good luck. ■

Warm-up and cool-down checklists

This article, originally published in the January 1991 issue of *Endurance News*, is as relevant today as it was 20 years ago. Dr. Mackay-Smith, of White Post, Virginia, has been active as an endurance rider and veterinarian since the sport's early days. His watchwords of "Never hurry, never tarry" have served riders well and are commonly cited as among the most influential endurance advice ever given.

WHAT ARE ALL THOSE PEOPLE doing out there at this hour? The ride doesn't start for half an hour and they're already aboard, moseying aimlessly around. There's another one trying to pull the poor horse's leg off! I'm going to save my horse's strength for when they start the ride.

Endurance riding is war, with battles fought by your horse against the ground, the heat, the hills, the speed and distance. Soldiers who stumble out of their tents when the enemy is already among them are not going to win any battles.

Preparing your horse for the fight is called warming up, speeding the mop-up afterward is cooling down. Care in both areas will enhance performance, multiply completions and prolong your horse's career.

As in war, strategy and tactics need specifying. Strategy is what you want to accomplish, tactics how you do it. Strategic targets in warm-up and cool-down include:

- mechanical and nervous equipment
- chemical (metabolic) function.

First in warm-up and last in cool-down, tactics address the mechanical needs. Muscle function gets the next attention, and the cardiovascular system gets the final preparation and the first post-ride attention.

Horses properly warmed up and cooled

out will have fewer injuries, average faster time over the course, and snap back afterward with fewer after-effects as manifested by lameness, soreness, fatigue, illness and weight loss. What follows is a tactical program of times, activities and effects that can guide you to more effective endurance riding. Thirty minutes is more than ample for preparation; post-ride duties are less tightly scheduled.

Warm-up

After tacking up and checking all your rigging, but before you mount:

Stretching and bending: 3 minutes.

Picking up each leg in turn, bend all the joints fully and stretch the whole limb fore, aft and to the side. Then vault lightly into the saddle. *This will find any tenderness or restriction, maximize the range of motion of the legs, and relieve muscle tightness or stiffness. It wakes up the nerves and relaxes the attitude.*

Walking: 5 minutes. At first walk casually, then briskly, on the aids. Intersperse halts and sharp turns, logs, banks and ditches if available. *Lubricates joints, removes congestion and fluid from the legs; awakens balance and precision, control; gets the gut going.*

Trotting: 5 minutes. First ordinary, working up to extended or fast pace. Some steady stretches, varied with obstacles or rough ground and serpentines. *Warms up the critical exercise functions: heart, lungs, blood vessels, muscles; redistributes circulation; habituates gait to working speeds.*

Acceleration: 3 minutes. Canter to gallop in 50 to 75 yards, pulling up in between. Three to four repetitions for 50-mile

contenders—less or optional in warming up for 100-milers or completion effort to the start at a walk. *Arouses anaerobic energy pathways, opens all lung alveoli and muscle capillaries, sharpens nerve functions, attitude and attention.*

During the ride: In the first 10 to 15 miles, go a little slower than best pace. *In that time, the internal water balance will be adjusting, and all the endurance systems—such as fat mobilization and aerobic muscle recruitment—will reach their most efficient. You'll feel a "second wind" and you can move out faster with little extra energy cost.*

Cool-down

After the finish line, don't hitch your horse to the trailer and head for your favorite beverage. Take a few minutes to warm-down the machinery that's been toting you.

Loosen or remove tack, sponge off the head, neck and legs with as little or as much water as body temperature and heat or chill factor dictate. Cover saddle area or whole horse with cooler, sheet or blanket(s), as needed.

Massage all heavy muscles: 2 minutes. Do the shoulders, rump and hams with a rhythmic pressure. *Squeezes out hot, stale blood and muscle byproducts, and assists the heart in recovery.*

Walk in circles: 5 to 30 minutes. Allow a drink of up to 20 swallows every two to three minutes and allow the horse to pick grass or hay. If the horse is slowing or stiffening, repeat massage every five minutes. *Muscle action cleanses the entire system, removes heat, feeds kidney circulation and keeps the gut active. Lactic acid gets used up as energy, rather than accumulating. Water returns to the system rapidly.*

Stretch and bend: 5 to 10 minutes. As in warm-up, including head and neck this time. Briskly rub down all over with towel or bare hands. *Relieves stiffness, encourages relaxation and encourages skin circulation.*

Hand graze or turn out: 20 to 60 minutes. Or resume intermittent walking with hay in hand; give a handful of grain every five to 10 minutes. *Slow walking and grazing restore homeostasis. Early grain feeding of small, frequent amount recharges energy stores faster than a big meal 12 to 24 hours later.*

★ **'Teach with the Stars'** ★

at the ~~convention~~, sponsored by the Education Committee

Want to have lunch with one of your heroes? In July, Sally, Amy, M. Glee and Dana Rube are among those who have volunteered to share lunch with APGC members at the convention in March. ~~Watch for more details in Endurance News~~

for complete details about this exciting program.

The Education Committee will also be ~~holding a meeting~~ at the convention. For details or to make a donation, contact ~~Wendy Greer~~ at kerryannies@del.com.

Hope to see many of you at ~~convention~~. For more to ~~stop by~~ the Education Committee booth and ~~learn more~~ have planned for ~~you~~.

—The APGC Education Committee