

Endurance ride camp etiquette

How conscientious campers can deal with the dreaded endurance ride camp "menace"



When endurance riders converge on a camp site it is often said that we form a sort of community. We refer to those who are parked next to us as our "neighbors." This is usually a good thing with a gathering of friends who will loan you a can opener or agree to wake you up when you've forgotten your alarm clock. Unfortunately, there will always be a small minority of arrivals who will cause good neighbors to exchange knowing looks of dread indicating the opinion, "There goes the neighborhood."

I could have written a standard article on ride camp etiquette which would have described how to be a good neighbor, such as always keeping your well-behaved dog on leash and turning off your generator after a reasonable hour (or even better, only running it for extremely short periods, even in the daytime), or securing your trustworthy mounts in secure corrals.

Unfortunately, the only people who would read it are those who already do these things. The sort of people who pull up with a nervous horse and turn him out in the first electric corral he's ever seen, then tie their biting dog where his rope reaches the most popular route to the bathroom facility, are not the sort of person who will bother to read this article. So I have decided instead to write a more useful article on how the conscientious camper can deal with the person I will hereafter refer to as the "ride camp menace."

Runaway horses

The most dangerous menace is the one who makes little attempt to see that his horses stay contained. Remember, "good fences make for good neighbors." There will always be times when horses escape even the best enclosures, but if you're a repeat offender chances are there's a reason that people meet you some distance from their camp, pointing to a far corner of the field and giving you the tip that there's a great spot left there.

For some reason these repeat offenders often seem to think it's almost amusing that their horses just streaked through camp again, narrowly avoiding entangling small children with the dragging posts and

fencing. Here's a news flash: it's not funny. The problem is it's hard to be more obvious than the obvious...by saying, "you know, somebody could get hurt; you need to do something about your horses getting out."

They usually just reply with a clueless smile and say, "I don't know what to do, he's done that three times now!" Ha, ha, ha. Rather than be too confrontational, one might try the old "a lotta guys would" method. Just amble by after the dust has died down, the frantic moms have found their children, the flagging from the vet check is repaired and the tents have been re-pegged, then say something to the effect of, "You know, a lotta guys would introduce their horse to his first electric fence at home."

Other "a lotta guys" statements include: "A lotta guys hook up a charger to their electric tape," or, "A lotta guys keep their overhead line tight and make sure the bull snap is six inches off the ground."

And then there's the variation of circumstances such as the horse who got loose while being saddled which calls for the, "A lotta guys keep a rope around their horse's neck when they reach to pick up the bridle." A last resort statement is, "A lotta guys would worry that they'd get sued for everything they owned if they let their horse get loose and kill somebody's kid."

If a rider continues to be a problem after having ample hints thrown their way I vote that we remove them from all mailing lists and refuse to tell them when and where future rides will be held. Sorry, I like you as a person, but I'd rather never see you again than see your horses tearing through camp for the fifth time.

Space issues

Corrals. Now let's talk corral size. A ride camp is not the Oklahoma Land Rush. Just because you got there first does not entitle you to all the land you have the stakes to enclose. If the camp is tight, riders should keep their corrals the size management requests—measured in feet, not acres. If the camp is roomy and someone begins to stake out a homestead, management should simply smile and say, "The extra-large parcels are down there," pointing to an area far

from the office and tents. It's the same as at home. If you want a lot of land, it increases your daily commute.

Saving spaces. Since some riders plan to ride together, crew together, or sponsor each other's children or green horses, it is often almost essential that two rigs be parked side by side so I see nothing wrong with setting out a few buckets to save a spot for your friends. One or two spaces should be the limit, though. Claiming an entire community is just cliquish and calls for selective blindness on the driver who backs over the offending buckets.

Dogs. Another irritating quality in a neighbor is the person who brings the dog that they shouldn't bring. You know the one. It's not the dog that sleeps quietly in his enclosure throughout the day or is walking on leash with his master afterward; that's the dog that belongs to the person who's bothering to read this article. We're talking about the dog who's biting, barking, peeing on tents and hay, and harassing the dogs that are on leads.

For some reason, some people don't understand that a protective dog is a wonderful thing at home, but has no business tied to a trailer in a busy ride camp; and a loose, friendly dog who just hiked his leg on the corner of your tent is no friend. Since we are all animal lovers here, we would never stoop to some of the more violent ways people are known to deal with undesirable neighborhood dogs.

My suggestion for this problem is this: all riders should bring at least one can of chili and keep it in their rig. Assuming that the owner of said dog has to ride home with the animal in their vehicle, a full tin pan of chili might be just the appropriate treat for the dog—to ensure the owner the pleasant drive home he deserves. After a few trips with said dog the owner will hopefully decide that the animal is not a fit traveling companion and leave him home where he belongs.

Generators

Next let us discuss generators. There are two types of people. There are those who enjoy staying inside their camper with gen-

erators running, enjoying the air conditioning, televisions and microwaves that they're used to. And then there's the second group, the ones who are outside shouting above the drone of the generator—wondering when it will shut off, if it will shut off, and amusing themselves discussing violent ways they could shut it off for you.

Opinions are strong. Those inside think there would be no problem if those outside would buy generators of their own so they could stay inside away from the noise. Those outside who have been looking forward to a weekend of camping have no option but to pretend they are camping in the parking lot of a large truck stop and sullenly heat their soup on their Coleman hot plate.

A truce is in order with specific rules. The number one rule is all generators should be *silent* by 10:00 p.m. If you cannot live without your generator you should park as *far* from the center of camp as possible (preferably your own driveway). I have heard some round-the-clock generator users claim it was necessary for the comfort of their spouse or child (the one with the Game Boy permanently attached to his hand). Unless your spouse is on a ventilator, this is untrue. Cut it off.

One bit of misunderstanding comes from the "all generators off after 10:00" rule. Some generator owners take that to insinuate that "generators that run all day don't bother us." Not true. Other campers hate your generator just as much in the middle of the day, it's just the managers who feel they only have justification to tell you to turn it off after 10:00.

A good rule of thumb is, "I can stand your generator long enough for me to mentally imagine you cooking your supper. I cannot stand it air conditioning your rig for the dog/husband/kid who cannot handle a weekend in nature.

Finally, any generator owner who runs 100 feet of cord to their generator so that they can get it far enough away from their own camper not to be bothered by the noise, but puts it right next to another camp, is just asking for trouble. I am suspicious in such circumstances when the disheveled camper closest to it asks to borrow a cup of sugar at 3:00 a.m., but so long as I'm awake too, I'm happy to oblige.

And furthermore . . .

Loud music. Never assume that others have your taste in music, be it bluegrass or

opera. That's why God made headphones.

Porto-lets. Men, if you go to the porto-let during the night . . . take a flashlight. Please. Do not trust your memory for the general location of objects. During the ride it is nice when crews insist that riders break line. Towards the end of the ride weekend, I say feel free to smoke in the porto-let. Anything is an improvement.

Shade. At some rides shade is at a premium. If you are one of the lucky ones who has a tent, don't put it under the only tree around. Also, if your rider is out on the trail and you see other poor souls roasting under the sun, invite them in!

Trash. *Never* assume that the ride manager could haul off your trash easier than you could. If you brought it, take it home—and if you see a gum wrapper on the ground that you didn't throw down, pick it up anyway! Notice whether the camp appears to be someone's pasture and if so, don't dump out large pans of grain that someone else's horses may find. If the manager asks you to bag your manure or scatter your hay, do a good job of it. If you think it's hard to clean up after your horse, think about the manager trying to clean up after a hundred or more whose owners didn't do the job properly.

Filling up water tanks. If you happen to be the proud owner of a 200-gallon water tank, either fill it at home or at 2:00 a.m. Don't dominate the only hose in camp. Should you insist on filling it at the camp and some poor soul wanders up with two five-gallon buckets, pause, fill their buckets and send them on their way.

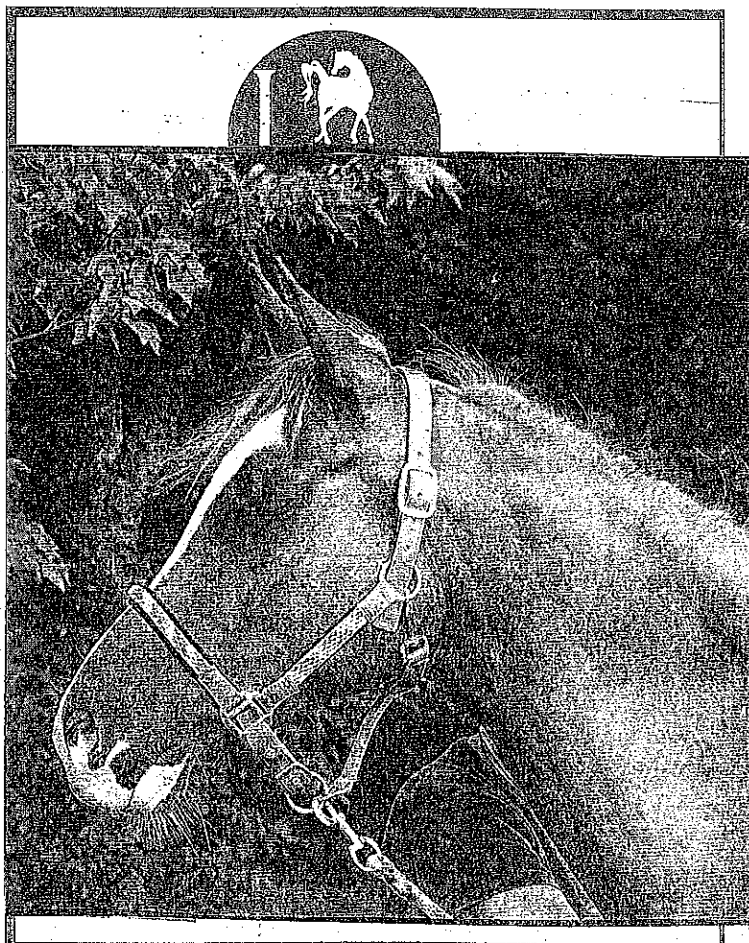
Drivers. You know the ones. The ones who drive up and down the dusty road without ceasing for an entire ride weekend. Granted, it may be handy to have one truck that's

not attached to a rig to take things to the vet check, haul water, go for ice or whatever, but the fifth time I have to get my horse off on the shoulder to allow the same empty truck to go by I begin to get irritated.

If you have a 16-year-old teen or a 40-year-old husband who simply cannot stay out from behind the driver's wheel, at least teach them to make themselves useful. A compulsive camp driver should offer to haul things from someone's vet check back to their trailer. Always leave the tailgate down and ask walkers if they want to hop on and carry a chain to help pull stuck rigs out.

Be a good neighbor

What it comes down to is "be a good neighbor." If you're the type that reads this article—even after seeing the title—chances are you're the type of person who tries to be a good neighbor. Just use it as a checklist to see that you didn't leave anything out. If you know someone who should have read this, photocopy the article, highlight the important parts and include it in their ride packet. Should you find this in your rider's packet, look around—did anyone else get it? Then take a hint! ♦





Electrolytes for endurance horses

Q For those of us new to this sport, please help us understand the ins and outs of electrolyting properly.

*Trisha Dingle
Bishopville, SC*

A Electrolytes are discussed on a daily basis among endurance riders along with dehydration, the "pinch" test, tying up, and thumps. We hear comments about electrolytes ranging from: "They're just salt" to "All of life depends on them." Many of us have been given a secret formula, an easy way, the only way. We have been told, "It's impossible to give too much" and we've been told, "Too much can kill them." It's no wonder that we are confused . . . and concerned.

I hope, after reading this article, you can walk away with some facts that can assist you in making intelligent decisions regarding choosing and using electrolytes in the endurance horse.

Electrolytes are necessary for life. They are intimately involved in muscle contraction, heart and kidney function, and energy metabolism. In general, electrolytes are required to make energy and energy is required to place electrolytes in a position to be utilized. This results in a delicate balance. Without adequate electrolytes, no energy can be produced and without adequate energy, electrolytes will not be available at the necessary sites to do their jobs.

Now for practicality

If your horse can not maintain hydration, he runs out of gas, fails to recover or loses his appetite. It is safe to assume that his energy and electrolyte balance has been upset. If he has been conditioned properly to do the job, and he carries enough body fat to supply adequate energy and still runs out of gas . . . it may well be an electrolyte deficiency.

When using an electrolyte product, one should abide by the 10 golden rules:

1. Do not allow the administration of electrolytes to interfere with your horse's eating or drinking. Wait until

your horse is leaving the stop before giving electrolytes. This will allow uninterrupted eating and drinking during his rest period. Electrolytes have been mixed with applesauce, yogurt, molasses, antacids and the list goes on. A taste test has recently revealed that molasses is far more palatable than yogurt (by my taste buds!). Certainly there are many choices. Also some electrolyte combinations can cause mouth irritation. Rinsing your horse's mouth after their administration is a kindness to be considered and may help with this irritation.

2. The full 100% of losses may not need to be supplemented. The bowel acts to store an incredible amount and, as long as motility and hydration are maintained, this constant source can be utilized.

3. Preloading your horse with electrolytes will be beneficial. It encourages drinking, and the electrolytes are available immediately upon demand. They will also contribute to bowel storage. Lag time can lead to poor recovery rates, loss of appetite and other less obvious problems. They should not have to play catch-up!

4. You must read the label and all ingredients must be listed. Sugar should not be first on this label.

Thirty liters of sweat containing the following amounts of electrolytes may be lost in a 50-mile ride:

- Sodium: 90,942 mg (three oz.)
- Potassium: 62,010 mg (two oz.)
- Chloride: 182,700 mg (six oz.)
- Calcium: 3720 mg (1/8 oz.)
- Magnesium: 1656 mg (1/20 oz.)

Horses, conditioned properly to ride 100 miles, will usually recover some of these losses by the end of the day, so these numbers are not found to automatically double.

5. Chloride suffers the greatest loss, therefore the largest significant amounts must be included in the supplement. If sodium and potassium are in the proportion of three to one and in the form of chloride salt, this would satisfy the needs of Na, K, and Cl if sufficient amounts are presented to the horse.

6. No bicarbonate (H₂CO₃) should be included in the electrolyte mixture used in the endurance horse. Alkalosis is a problem for the sweating animal and is a result of loss of chloride. Bicarbonate will only increase this alkalosis making his acid-base balance more difficult to achieve.

7. Ca and Mg salts need to be included. Acetate and citrate salts are rapidly absorbed (45%) and therefore beneficial during competitions. Chloride, glu-

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About the ingredients

Sodium (Na) is an important electrolyte in acid-base balance as well as osmotic balance of body fluids. Deficiency over the long haul can result in decreased water intake and a slowed rate of eating. Acute deficiency can result in incoordination. The daily requirement of a 1000 pound horse at rest would be 1.5 grams and can go as high as 36 grams per day in heavy work.

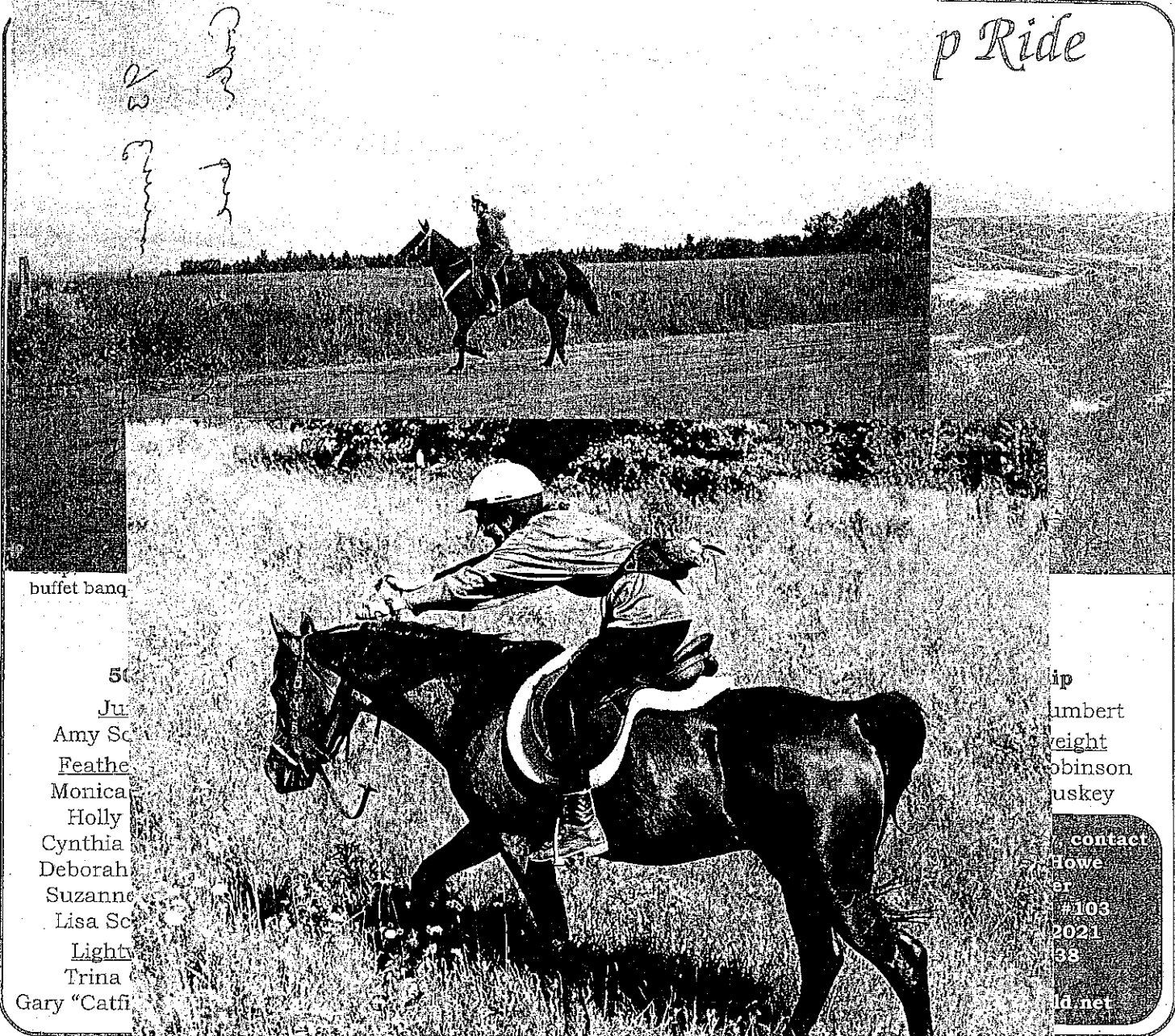
Calcium (Ca) is utilized in muscle contraction, blood clotting, enzyme utilization, nerve transmission, and energy production. Chronic deficiencies of calcium or improper balance of Calcium with phosphorus can result in weakening of bones and various forms of lameness. Acute deficiencies, as we may see in sweating horses, can result in poor recoveries, thumps, muscle weakness, and erratic heart rates. Thumps is thought to be associated with poor availability of calcium.

Chloride (Cl) is closely associated with sodium and involved in acid-base balance, osmotic balance, and digestion. Deficiency of chloride caused by heavy sweating will result in an alkalosis.

Magnesium (Mg) is an electrolyte associated with enzyme function and energy production. It has been recommended that when a horse is in training and on a high fat diet, as much as .18% of dietary magnesium may be required.

Potassium (K) is also associated with acid-base as well as osmotic balance of body fluids. It is intricately involved with getting oxygen to working muscles. Acute deficiencies can result in cramping of muscle mass and tying up syndrome. Chronic deprivation of potassium may result in decreased appetite and weight loss. —Jeannie Waldron, DVM

Have a question for an endurance vet? E-mail your question to endurancenews@foothill.net or mail to: AERC Endurance News, P.O. Box 6027, Auburn, CA 95604.



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ask a vet: electrolytes

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conate and lactate are next in line at 25% to 30% absorption. Carbonates are absorbed at the rate of 10% to 20%. Dolomite is a calcium/magnesium /carbonate complex and also has a fairly low absorption rate. All of these salts can be used but an increased amount of the poorly absorbed electrolytes will be required. Some riders have reported recovery of thumps within 30 minutes with the acetate salt of calcium. I can verify this in a few cases but certainly not all.

8. Having free choice, trace mineralized loose salt available to your horse at home is essential. The loose form is consumed far better than block salt. Many horses have sensitive tongues and don't like to lick a salt block as readily.

9. Do not give electrolytes on a daily basis in food or water. Constant presentation of high-level Ca will decrease the ability of your horse to mobilize his own calcium stores. Feed already contains significant amounts of electrolytes and adding more may also decrease palatability. One popular brand of quality sweet feed contains the following: Na 1360 mg/lb.; K 3180 mg/lb.; Cl 2700 mg/lb.; Ca 3600 mg/lb.; Mg 900 mg/lb. Compare these to your electrolyte choice, remembering the absorption rates. Supplying loose salt is usually all that is necessary.

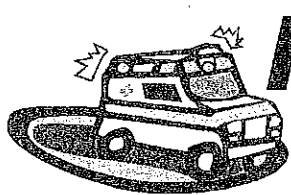
10. Alfalfa is an excellent source of calcium. I would not suggest it be fed on a regular basis if there are other protein sources available. It is fed on a regular basis to many endurance horses out west with no observable problems. In the east,

however, it seems to contribute to tying up. I do not understand this.

I feel that overdoing electrolytes would be a very difficult thing to do. Not eating or drinking appears far earlier with electrolyte deficiency than with an electrolyte overabundance. An early sign of too much salt in the diet might be soft manure when otherwise you would expect a normal consistency. This connection would be hard make in the excitable endurance horse. Being prudent but erring on the heavy side would be less detrimental during the stress of competition.

Remember, electrolytes will not make up for a poorly conditioned horse, but they will allow all horses to compete closer to their individual best. ♦

Vet Committee member Jeannie Waldron, DVM practices at Rectortown (VA) Equine Center.



RIDER HEALTH RISKS

and how to avoid them

by Jeff Herten, M.D.

There's a rider throwing up on the side of the trail about halfway up. Says he's terribly dizzy. He's not looking too good," the sweaty rider reported as his horse drank at the trough at the top of the hill. The infamous climb to Devil's Thumb on the Tevis trail had taken its toll on another rider. My wife, Deb, and I started down to see if we could help.

The rider was staggering broad-based up the trail, leading a tired horse. His face was gray, his mouth drawn. He'd been sick for the last 10 miles; couldn't keep anything down. He was dizzy and light-headed. And, oh, by the way, he was diabetic.

With the complicated electrolyte shifts that can occur with diabetes, I shuddered at the stress he was putting on his heart and nervous system. When I finally got him to lie down, he refused to drink Gatorade because it would elevate his blood sugar. No amount of explaining that he needed the fluid and the electrolytes and the body would burn the sugar with the work he was doing could convince him he needed to rehydrate.

He didn't die but he could have, from a heart arrhythmia or hyponatremia (low sodium). Or from stupidity and stubbornness.

Several years before, at the Tevis finish line, word came through on the radio that a rider had passed out and fallen off her horse 70 miles into the 100 mile ride. She was complaining that she couldn't see. She didn't volunteer that she was taking a new antihistamine for allergies. If I hadn't known her and asked the right questions, she might have taken a very expensive ambulance trip to the nearest hospital.

Both of these stories are true and are good examples of how the extremes of endurance riding can create serious health problems for the rider as well as the horse. It's a testimony to the ruggedness of endurance riders that most easily survive these long-distance rides. It might be wise

to implement some rider safety measures that could go a long way toward preventing a rider health disaster.

If your horse goes lame between vet checks, can you walk 10 miles of hills to where he can be trailered out?

Here's how you can help:

First, show up at the starting line in the best physical shape possible. If your horse goes lame between vet checks, can you walk 10 miles of hills to where he can be trailered out? Be especially cautious if the ride is at altitude—you may not notice it much when you are riding, but you will if you have to get off and lead a lame horse.

Second, if you'll be riding in the heat of summer, do as much heat training as possible. If temperatures go into the triple digits, will you be prepared? The only way to prepare for heat is to ride in the heat. Remember, you can lose four quarts an hour sweating in that kind of heat. Will you have enough water bottles, camel packs, and/or canteens to keep yourself hydrated?

Dehydration can make you weak, dizzy, nauseated, and it can impair your judgment. Be sure you drink a sports drink that has some electrolytes. If you drink straight water, your sodium will plummet and you may risk fatal hyponatremia. Practice drinking often in the heat.

Be careful to check with your health care provider to see if any of your routine medications might affect your heat tolerance. Some medications decrease your ability to sweat, especially some antihistamines that might be taken for allergies, or motion sickness medications that might be taken to prevent the motion sickness that some riders encounter riding at night. I vividly remember an outstanding high school runner who suffered heat stroke in a hometown 10K run because he was tak-


ing an antihistamine for a cold. Get the patient information leaflet that comes with every prescription medication you take and read it. If it's unclear, consult your pharmacist.

Make certain you eat early and often as you ride. Practice that as well on long, hard, hot training rides. Find foods that give you sustained energy and that won't be terminally boring or barfy in the middle of a hot afternoon. Remember to keep eating after dark—the weakness and confusion that some riders experience toward the end of a long ride is from hypoglycemia (low blood sugar).

Make certain that your clothing will not chafe you raw and miserable in the 24 hours it may take you to complete a 100-mile ride. Buy a stick of Body Glide (available from numerous suppliers specializing in long distance riding) and butter your butt with it. And maybe butter your inner thighs, knees, and nipples while you're at it. After 70,000 rises to the trot you may be glad you did.

Take a 3"x5" card and write on it your emergency medical information: name, address, emergency contact during the ride, blood type, major medical problems, drug allergies, and all medications. Keep that card in the same baggie where you have your vet card in case SOS riders or emergency medical personnel need information on you in a hurry.

And because you are so well prepared, you will have none of the potential problems that could sideline you during the ride. You won't be among the poor unfortunate riders who get lifted off their horse midway through the ride because they can't go on. What a tragic irony—plenty of horse but no rider. And you won't need that emergency medical information. You can trade that 3"x5" card in for a completion award.

Be prepared. Be smart. Be safe. 

Jeff Herten is a dermatologist and dermatopathologist practicing in San Luis Obispo, California. He has 4,345 AERC miles, including five Tevis buckles (in eight starts). He is married to veteran endurance rider Debby Lyon.

HORSE FLIES

by Angie McGhee

I hate false advertising. There was actually a commercial on the radio recently which, while trying to make a point, claimed: "The male horsefly, when pursuing a female horsefly, can travel up to 90 mph." This is absolute hogwash. As I voiced my disgust about the claim my 13-year-old daughter, who has recently decided that maybe I don't know everything, said "Maybe they *can*, Mom. How do you know?"

"I know," I reply, "because I have raced horseflies all my life and it takes a darned fast horsefly to hit 15 mph, and they can't maneuver well enough to land on a horse at over 10 mph—much less tackle a female horsefly!"

Around this time every year horseflies become a big part of my life. I start my day by dumping feed in the buckets along the fence row and running from horse to horse killing horseflies as they land. I end my day by plugging in a bug zapper and cheering as they fry. Fly repellants are only effective against those little flies that travel in swarms, synchronizing their movements like schools of fish. Horseflies are individuals, like sharks. You may get eaten by more than one, but they'll be competing, not cooperating.

I must pause for a moment and point out that throughout this article I am referring to the large black horseflies. The small green-headed flies are so incredibly fast that they can only be killed by the masters of martial arts. If the black ones are sharks, these are piranhas. The only escape from them is to submerge the horse in a pond and let him breathe through a snorkel until sunset, but I digress . . .


Memorable encounters

My first memorable confrontations with the big black horseflies were when I was 12 years old. I spent a week of my summer vacation with my best pony-riding friend who'd moved far back into the mountains of North Georgia. He soon introduced me to his new "best friend," his closest neighbor, "Manual Lee."

Actually the pickings for "best friends" were pretty slim in their area. Manual Lee's only competition had been his 11

brothers and sisters, which were indistinguishable other than by height. Since he was my friend's age and actually owned something that could technically be called a pony, he won out.

Manual Lee was determined to impress me. The first day he came close when he offered to guide my friend and me on horseback to the remote place where the sheriff had blown up a moonshine still. It sounded pretty exciting, but in fact was simply a clearing in the woods with lots of old milk jugs on the ground and some tin up in the treetops. I suppose my disappointment showed.

Horseflies are not mere insects, they're more like miniature flying monkeys. 

As we sat there on our grazing ponies trying to think of what we could do next, Manual Lee slapped at a horsefly on his pony's neck. At that age I was pretty proud of the fact that, unlike some girls, I hit to kill, regardless of the guts that would get on my hands. But Manual Lee had something more entertaining in mind.

With a quick movement of his grimy hand, he trapped a horsefly against his pony's neck in his cupped fingers. In an instant he had the horsefly between his left thumb and forefinger, had swung his bare foot over his pony's neck, and slid off her back to the ground. Quickly, he picked a piece of straw grass from the ground and with one eye shut for better aim, he carefully inserted the tip of the 6" long piece of straw into the opening at the extreme posterior of the horsefly. The effect on the horsefly was something like that of revving a car's engine while in neutral. When the RPMs got high enough, Manual Lee turned the horsefly loose and it flew straight up and out of sight—far superior to any of those cheap rockets my brother used to save up his money to buy.

The effect of this demonstration on me was one of disgust and fascination. On the one hand, I have always been totally opposed to any sort of torture, but this was

different. The horsefly had come looking for trouble. The usual sentence for this crime would have been having his guts splattered all over a pony's neck. I figured, given the choice, he probably would have chosen the straw enema. As a matter of fact, it was sort of like letting the horsefly off with a strong warning. I couldn't help but think that he'd be *very* wary of children on ponies in the future.

During the remainder of my week there we did extensive experiments with different lengths of grass, size of horseflies, etc. And I can honestly say that no matter how lightly laden, or how much incentive a horsefly is given to "get the heck out of Dodge," a horsefly is incapable of traveling faster than around 15 mph.

It's been more than 25 years since that summer and I have never once been able to make myself reenact those experiments. Horseflies are something that I've learned to cope with in true endurance fashion. "If it irritates you, outrun it."

In fact, horseflies can be valuable training tools. My horse Kaboot has a habit of trying to talk me out of training hard when we're alone. He does a very good impression of a little boy being sent to take a bath as he drags down the road in the general direction of my mountain trail. He walks slowly, stops suddenly and stares intently at things in the distance, trying to distract me from what he knows is my objective.

He's at his worst in the early spring when he is trying to find a reason to stop so that he can grab a few quick bites of grass. Getting him down the lush shoulder of the road is exhausting for the few short weeks between when the grass turns green and when the horseflies come out. From then on, it's "keep moving or be eaten."

During horsefly season, we no longer check recoveries; we have to maintain our pace regardless of terrain right up until we come to a screeching stop in front of the barn. Who can check recoveries when the moment you stop, the horseflies swarm in like a scene from Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds"?

I actually like to keep a tally of how many horseflies I kill on each ride. I don't simply count them. I prefer to figure my average more like a professional baseball player. This is serious business to me. "That's five for seven" would be a typical announcement. It keeps you focused and

forces you to make every slap count.

The art of the kill

There is an art to killing horseflies. Beginners tend to simply slap them, often with a look of disgust upon impact which means "I hope I hit it hard enough to kill it, but not hard enough to get guts on my hand." Those of us who have developed a deep-down maniacal hatred of these predators are more aggressive. A horsefly slapped is simply a horsefly stunned. The proper technique is to slap, then grab it and crunch it in your fist. A horsefly is not dead until you hear its bones pop. Yes, I said bones. Horseflies are not mere insects, they're more like miniature flying monkeys. You have to crush their bones.

Since there's no way I can exterminate all horseflies, I've learned to simply "manage" their population. As a person who understands the importance of bloodlines, I have learned to judge the quality of my horseflies. The average horsefly can comfortably maintain 10 mph, but as I said earlier cannot maneuver well enough to land. This is handy since a cloud of horseflies hovering just above and to each side of a trotting horse removes much of his incentive to slow down.

A few elite horseflies can travel at speeds up to 15 mph. Should you encounter one of these on the trail it is imperative that you kill it; you simply cannot allow a horsefly that fast to survive long enough to stand at stud.

There are fast horseflies, and there are smart horseflies. The smart horseflies are the ones that know that the horse cannot feel them if they land on the mane or the base of the tail. They tend to come in close from above and drop down onto the horse's hair, then carefully burrow down to the point where they can bite. This is where the "squeeze and crunch" method of annihilation is important. A slap to the horse's crest will simply scare the smart fly away, and once more, he'll live to reproduce those smart genes.

The rider, when he sees the horsefly land on the mane, must allow him to get over his initial wariness. Then, when he lowers his head to crawl down into the mane, you *grab and crunch!* Your horse does tend to get wings and other body parts stuck in his mane, but that's a small price to pay for damaging the entire horsefly gene pool.

The flies that land on the base of the horse's tail are a real problem. It's up to the rider behind you to let you know they're there, but it's your job to reach back there and get them out. I simply don't have the reach to kill them, so I have to do an extreme stretch (while continuing to trot due to the other attackers surrounding my horse), reaching as far back as possible and just managing to ruffle the hair at the base of the tail to flush the fly out. Of course my horse thinks this is a new method of requesting further extension of his trot, which means maintaining adequate abdominal muscles to regain an upright position is an absolute necessity.

Another variation on the "mane landers" is the endurance-adapted fly which has learned to land on the crupper. Once again it is the rider who is following's responsibility to let you know the fly's location. I really hate killing crupper flies, because the buckle really hurts my hand. Most of my misses are attributed to not giving the swing my all when going for a crupper fly.

Crupper flies are only slightly above my most hated horsefly—the "back lander." This is the horsefly which has learned that humans are edible too, and that they're incapable of reaching between their shoulder blades. Nothing inspires panic from a rider like the announcement, "On your back!" Since it's impossible to reach the perfectly centered spot where they land, the only option is to grab the back of your shirt collar and shake it violently until the other rider announces it's gone, then shuddering for a few moments at the thought of it drilling a hole through your skin.

Occasionally, one encounters a really stupid, incompetent horsefly. This is the one which lands on the perfect part of the

neck for slapping and doesn't even look around before he prepares to dive in for a meal. The rider's first reaction is to go for an easy kill, which will boost the batting average; but stop and think first. Kill him today and you've killed one stupid fly. Let him reproduce those genes and your neighborhood could be full of flies that are so slow that you can kill two in one hit by this time next year. Simply flip him off with your finger and let him go feed on cows for awhile. He's a keeper.

Once home from my ride, I give Kaboot a quick hose down, pausing periodically to train the jet spray at a horsefly that is still hovering in the vicinity. Then he retires to his shed through the heat of the day, where he has plenty of shade, hay, and several fans to provide turbulence for any horsefly who ventures into his dark, cool retreat.

My children are starting to spend lots of time on ponies these days, and they occasionally complain that there's not enough to do. If I can get up the nerve, there's a little trick I'd love to show them. ♦

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