

Endurance Riding Requires Courage and Perseverance of Horse and Rider

By ROBIN STANBACK

T rue partnerships between horses and humans provide some of the most compelling stories. The bonds that existed between Alexander and Bucephalus and those between Will Harbut and Man O' War are legendary. There are few areas in the equine competitive arena that epitomize this unique connection more than the sport of endurance riding, where a cohesive team of horse and rider must work together to cover long distances over sometimes grueling terrain. This is not a spectator sport. There are few areas on a rugged trail that lend themselves to observers and little room for fans to cheer their favorites on to victory. It is the drive and spirit of the horse and rider that compel them forward.

Endurance riding has long been a part of the equine and human connection. From the Arabian nomads who traveled long distances over desert sands in search of the nearest oasis to the pony express rider who hotfooted the United States mail across the western landscape, riders and their mounts have risen to the challenge of long distances and rough country. The sport of endurance riding has a more recent past. The American Endurance Ride Conference, the official sanctioning body for equine endurance rides in the United

States and Canada, was established 25 years ago, and the sport was recognized by the United States Equestrian Team as an Olympic discipline in 1992.

There are levels of competition that clearly divide the beginners from the more seasoned contestants. Rides can vary from 50 to 100 miles in one day with rides of longer distances taking several days. Most competitions have a shorter novice ride of about 25 miles that are usually referred to as Limited Distance rides. Competitions are also graded by the type of terrain the horses must cover. In every race there are teams of veterinarians at predetermined checkpoints, before, during, and after the race, who carefully monitor every horse to determine soundness and fitness. Horses that do not pass the veterinarian inspections because of an unsoundness or a metabolic problem are withdrawn.

The preparation for such a long and rigorous competition is exacting and time-consuming. Veterinarian and leading endurance rider Dr. Matthew Mackay-Smith stated, "Of course you must start with a horse that is temperamentally suited to endurance riding. These horses are often generous in their interest to do as we ask, which makes it very important to build up their stamina so that they do not push themselves into an injury. A slow buildup is best for the horse so he can develop the muscle tone and agility that will be required. Riding three or four days a week building up to 10 miles per day with a reasonable ability to recover is a good start. Then after five or six months you can ask that horse to do a 50-mile race at a pedestrian rate."

Dr. Mackay-Smith also stressed the need for specific training. He said, "Horses need to develop a tolerance to handle long climbs. You cannot train a horse for the mountains on flat ground. It is necessary to devise a scheme that is tailored to the ground upon which the horse will be expected to compete. The horse will need to learn how to adjust the length of his step and practice using muscles that are not normally needed."

Nutrition is also a very important component in preparing the endurance horse for competition. Horses that travel long distances require a different feeding regime. (See article on page 5.) These horses also have very specific metabolic requirements that can be aided by supplementation with

*Ramey Petico-
las-Stroud and
his mount
climb an
incline.*



electrolytes. Dr. Jeannie Waldron, in her work as an endurance race veterinarian, has observed and treated many horses that were in serious distress during some of the world's most prestigious races. She and the nutritionists at Kentucky Equine Research worked to develop an electrolyte formulated specifically for the endurance horse. The product they formulated, Endura-Max, differs from other electrolytes in that it contains added calcium and magnesium, minerals that can be lost by endurance horses during a race in amounts high enough to result in metabolic disorders such as thumps and tying-up.

The preparation, training and feeding that go into endurance riding require dedication and hard work. One of the best known and most respected competitors in endurance riding is Valerie Kanavy. She and her daughter Danielle are the first mother and daughter ever to win successive World Championships, and they did it on the same horse. Pieraz, better known as Cash, won the 1994 World Endurance Championship in The Hague, Holland with Valerie in the saddle. In 1996 the World Championship was held in Kansas and the win, by a narrow margin, went to Danielle riding the same Arabian gelding. The second place finisher in that race was Valerie aboard TK Fire N Gold. Mrs. Kanavy said, "Danielle and I have a unique advantage in that we train together and push each other. It is hard work and it does take a great deal of time, but working as a team with my daughter has been very rewarding."

Danielle began riding with her mother when she was eight years old. Riding together acts, according to Mrs. Kanavy, as "a stabilizing effect for both of us. On a long ride fatigue can lead to mistakes. If we are riding together, I can see something Danielle needs to correct that she might not even be aware of and she can do the same for me. We share our knowledge and develop strategy together. Sometimes we don't even need to talk to each other. It's almost like a basketball team. We work as a unit."

The beauty of this type of competition for Mrs. Kanavy is that "it is an ageless sport." There is a special award presented by the Western States Trail Ride, better known as the Tevis Cup, for junior riders that highlights the appeal of this type of competition for riders of all ages. The

Josephine Stedem Scripps Foundation Cup was established to encourage good horsemanship and to recognize cooperation between junior rider, horse, family and friends. Endurance riding is also a sport where men and women can compete on an equal playing field. The Tevis Cup, the oldest modern-day endurance ride, has been held annually since 1955. This competition stands as a perfect example of the equality of men and women riders, having been won 23 times by men and 22 times by women.

The Peticolas-Stroud family exemplifies the idea of endurance riding as an ageless and open field of competition. Dr. Cynthia Peticolas-Stroud, her husband Ramey, daughter Kelsey Johnson, age 10, and son Christopher Johnson, age 12, all are fierce competitors in this arena with over 7,000 competition miles under their collective belts. Mr. Peticolas-Stroud explained, "We looked for a sport where we could all participate together. Our son had indicated that he wanted someday to be a national champion in an athletic field. We discussed how we could accomplish his goal and developed a strategic plan to do this with our interest in horses. We worked on this as a family. Our horses and this sport have helped my wife

and me to give our children a set of fundamental values that, I believe, will have a lasting positive impact on their lives. Endurance riding isn't entirely about racing. It is also about solving problems. The people who solve them best will be the winners. This will go much further than the riding. Our children will be able to apply some of the same values they have learned from this sport to solving challenges they face in school and in other areas of their lives. They now have a greater understanding and appreciation of what they hold inside themselves."

The Peticolas-Stroud family has taken its drive and determination to the national championship that Christopher envisioned and beyond. Christopher is the current United States Junior Mileage Champion and Kelsey holds the title of United States Multiday Champion. Dr. Peticolas-Stroud won the National Featherweight Endurance crown in 1997, and her husband was named the Heavyweight champion in the Pacific Northwest.

"There is so very much that goes into riding in endurance competitions. It isn't just the time involved or



Dr. Cynthia Peticolas-Stroud and her Arabian gelding Air Lite climb Cougar Rock, one of the most grueling parts of the renowned Tevis Cup endurance ride.



The Peticolas-Stroud family. From left to right, Ramey and Dr. Cynthia Peticolas-Stroud, Christopher Johnson and Kelsey Johnson.

the work to prepare the horses. There is strategy and there is teamwork. There has to be a solid team of people who help you to prepare. You need a veterinarian and a ground crew, people who work for and with you," Mr. Peticolas-Stroud explained.

Mrs. Kanavy echoed his sentiments when she said, "A win in an endurance ride belongs not only to the horse and rider but also to the team of people who helped them to get there. My husband Larry and Danielle's new husband both work on our ground crews. We would not be able to compete without them, our veterinarians and the many other people who help to support us. Kentucky Equine Research is one of our supporters. They help to make certain our horses have the correct nutritional balance they need to be competitive. Our veterinarians work to keep a close eye on the overall health and the muscle strength of our horses. Our ground crews keep an eye on Danielle and me as well as on our horses. It is most definitely a team effort."

Mrs. Kanavy and Danielle are planning on taking their team to Dubai this year to compete in the 1998 World Endurance Championships. It will be a return visit for them as they were invited to participate in an endurance training ride there last year. Mrs. Kanavy stated, "This is a perfect example of how adaptable you have to be to participate in this sport. Each ride presents a specific type of challenge. In Dubai it will be more desert heat and humidity

than elevations. What we found there is that the sand will be a serious issue. In some areas there is bottomless sand and in others it is hard packed. There is wind that acts like a blow dryer, whisking away perspiration. There is no shade, not a tree to use for relief. If we were to practice in Florida, for instance, we might have the sand, but we would also have the canopy of trees overhead to provide relief. There are also no lanes to use. It is a wide-open area and the times will be blazing fast. We will have to work on a strategy for saving our horses as much as possible. We will not be able to rest on our laurels."

Mrs. Kanavy and Danielle, like the Peticolas-Strouds, are far from resting on

their laurels, as even with national and international awards to their credit, they continue to participate in a sport that provides countless challenges and heartbreaks. It is the pure pleasure that comes from a ride completed well that drives many. For the Kanavys it may also be a bit of a hope that someday they can repeat the heart-stopping finish they enjoyed in the World Championship in Kansas.

Mrs. Kanavy had given her daughter the opportunity to ride Cash so that she could experience a ride in the World Championship. It was also an opportunity for them to be the first mother and daughter ever to ride for their country in the same competition. Valerie chose to ride the younger of their two horses. "It meant more to me for Danielle to have the opportunity to ride in that race than it did for me to defend my championship," Mrs. Kanavy explained.

It was almost a picture-perfect ride for both mother and daughter as they rode side by side throughout most of the race. There were a few problems along the way, but each was overcome. They were in the lead at the last vet check when they decided to ride together to the finish but allow the younger horse to claim the championship, giving each horse a world title. In the setting sun with hundreds of spectators lining the route to the finish, Valerie's horse spooked at the crowd. She said, "He balked, not badly, but enough that Cash saw his chance. He just simply did not want to be beaten. He put his ears back and charged to the finish. It was thrilling." ☺☺