

What are the Benefits of Competitive Trail Rides?

By Kim Pillard, with Denise Schieffer

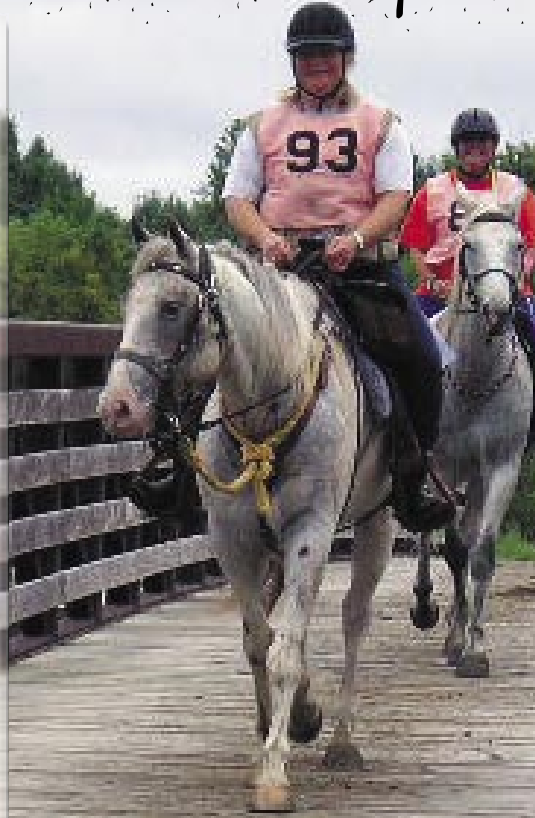
CTR (Competitive Trail Riding) is a sport that partners horse and rider as a team. Competitors find that the sport is not only fun for the rider, but for most horses as well, as both thoroughly enjoy riding new trails, looking forward to what is around the next bend, and enjoying new scenery. Camp is a cozy neighborhood filled with people who find it perfectly natural to constantly talk about horses. You will find that experienced competitors are extremely willing to give newbies tips, and point out things that could help them on the ride.

Overall, I personally have learned so much about horses and horsemanship in the few short years that I have been riding CTRs. Here are just a few of the things that I have found valuable.

Camp Safety - We all should know about tying your horse with a quick release knot, not tying too long, etc. But having a **sharp knife handy** is one of the things I feel is extremely important. The knife is important to cut a rope if a horse is caught in the rope. My CTR travelling friends group and I have seen this in person. At a ride in Kansas, a competitor's horse got caught up in his rope (which was tied too long) and was thrashing and hurting himself. My friend had his knife **handy** and quickly cut the rope before the horse was seriously injured. Thanks to him having his knife close by - not in the tack box stuffed in the corner of the trailer like mine - the horse was not hurt. At the very least, have it taped just inside your tack door so it is accessible, but having it on your person is even better!

Metabolics - I have been trail riding a lot, but had never given much thought to gut sounds. It is extremely important to keep your horse's insides moving. I have learned a lot about electrolytes, probiotics, and basic horse digestion. I let my horse stop and graze occasionally; it's a nice break for both him and me. The decision to graze, however, needs to be the rider's idea. Don't just let your horse stop and grab a mouthful. This can lead to bad behavior and possibly even sickness when they decide to grab and eat something you know wouldn't be good for them!

Judge Induced Stupidity (JIS) - A CTR judge once told us about JIS, and we laughed about it. That wouldn't happen to us! But oh, it happens, and it happens a lot! Of course, you know that all that stupidity transfers



TOP PHOTO: Denise Schieffer on "Moose," and Charlotte Lafargue-Henderson on "Carri de Away," at the Dave Smith Fall Fiesta Competitive Trail Ride.

BOTTOM PHOTO: L to R: Denise Schieffer, Natlie Harper on "Mariah," Martha Kunkle, and Shelby Andersen on "Cajun," at the ITRA/Wildwood Competitive Trail Challenge.

over to your horse. Things we practice and complete at home, suddenly become incredibly difficult. But once you get yourself past the JIS and complete the obstacle and get a great scorecard, you realize that you can overcome Judge Induced Stupidity. A veteran competitor once told me about 'SSS'. STOP-SETTLE-SLOW. She even wrote three

SS on her hand while competing to remind her. I have found that SSS overflows to non-horsey life too.

Backing Your Horse - I thought that my horse went into reverse pretty well. After my first CTR, however, I found out that he doesn't like to back up hills. He thinks that I'm crazy and that I'm a bad driver and I'm going to run him into something. Once we were asked to back over a log and between two trees. My horse sized up the space between the trees and was positive he would not fit. We've been working on backing between trees ever since. Maybe you would ask, "Why would this matter?" Maybe it never will matter, but that one time that the trail is blocked or washed out ahead, you will be happy that you can back up the trail, possibly around a curve and over that log and between trees. It could very well save you and your horse's life!

Ground Manners - Having control of your horse from the ground is as important as from the saddle. Don't skip training on ground manners, and besides; so much of this lends to a better horse under saddle! If you aren't safe doing it from the ground, you may not be safe doing it from his back. You will be asked to present your horse in hand to the judges several times during a competition. It is embarrassing and dangerous to not have control of your horse. And besides, there may come a time when it is vitally important that you and your horse know how to do this!

Ride Your Horse - *Ride* your horse - don't just *sit* there! Body position while riding up and down hills is important. You can make your horse's job easier if you ride to help him. If your horse is doing all of the work, he'll tire more easily, which, in the unlikely case of getting lost, could mean the difference between getting home or not. This is especially true if you are riding up a hill called the "Thighmaster" (Indian Caves State Park in Nebraska has one of these).

How to take care of horse in all kinds of weather - One year, we rode in 99 degree heat with humidity, and two months later,

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sleet and snow. The horses really appreciated the fleece cooler sheets that we had packed for them at that ride. The hot and humid ride was a learning experience. My horse and I got pulled at check-in for slight lameness (the horse, not me). I volunteered to work the P and R's (pulse and respiration checks). Did I mention that it was incredibly hot and humid? Some of the horses came into the last P and R on Sunday blowing very badly. When they didn't recover and come down to the set parameters (set by the veterinarian judge), and it was determined that they were in danger, the 'veteran' P and R workers went into action. They were stripping saddles off of horses and dousing them with water, then scraping off the water and dousing them with more. I was amazed at how fast these people were working and they were truly concerned for the well-being of the horses. Luckily, all of the horses recovered. If they had not, the ride does have a "horse ambulance" to take you to camp.

Making all kinds of great friends - The CTR crowd is a great bunch. Extremely friendly and helpful, whether you are a first time rider or have some miles logged, people are more than willing to give you a helping hand. The camaraderie and lifelong friends that you make are extraordinary.

There is nothing better than competing in a CTR. You have your trail map, trail times, trail buddy and your horse. The feeling of accomplishment when you do the final check out, the motto (even though it is an endurance motto), "To finish is to win," could not be truer.

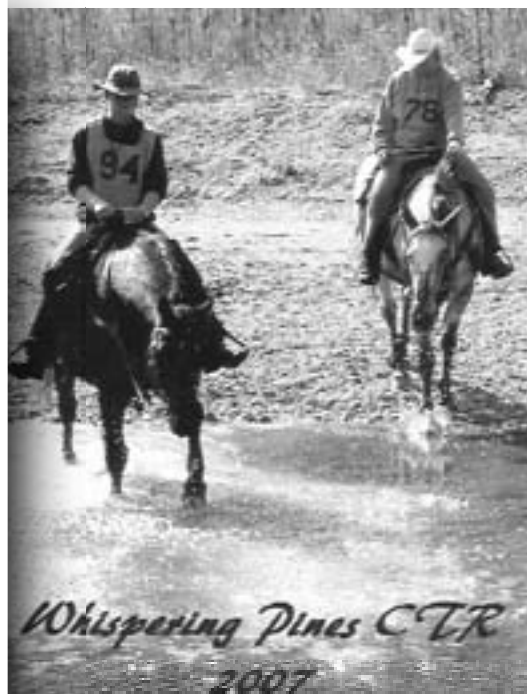
The Iowa Trail Riders Association (ITRA) offers CTRs sanctioned by the North American Trail Ride Conference (NATRC) (see www.natrc.org). This year they will hold their annual Dave Smith Fall Fiesta CTR at Stephens Forest State Park near Lucas, Iowa, the weekend of September 17-18, 2011. Contact Susan Andersen at 515-962-7424 or email horsehugr@aol.com or Alycia Carlsborg at 515-292-1673 or email LcarLsb@gmail.com for more information.

In addition, ITRA also offers one clinic per year, and at least three pleasure trail rides. Beginning just last year we began offering an American Competitive Trail Horse Assoc. (ACTHA) competitive trail challenge. The clinic last year was on trail riding, and the one this year is on despooning your horse. It will be held May 14 near Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.

There will be a pleasure trail ride at Shimek State Forest near Farmington, Iowa, on May 15.

Other pleasure ride dates and locations are not currently set.

The ACTHA challenge date is also not set.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: Denise Schieffer on "Moose"; Molly Havercamp on "Rebel" and Kim Pillard on "Big N Bad Bullwinkle"; Shelby Andersen on "Cajun"; Beth Aswegan on "Skyline Red Bambi"; Teresa Harp on "Red"; and Diana Thrift on "Kasztan"

Check our website's calendar at www.iowatrailriders.com or email itranews@hotmail.com or call Denise at 319-728-8737 for more information on the events or becoming an ITRA member.