

Introduction to New Riders

Dear New Rider,

Welcome to the sport of distance riding! Novice rides are a great way to learn about the sport of distance riding. Here are the basics, just to get you started. For more detailed information please read the *New Riders Handbook* and the *Frequently Asked Questions* on the New Riders page of the UMECRA website (umecra.com).

Novice rides follow the competitive ride rules established by Upper Midwest Endurance and Competitive Rides Association (UMECRA).

The Trail

Novice rides are 10-15 miles and are lead by an experienced rider who will explain the sport, answer questions, and guide you through the ride.

The average speed will be about six miles per hour and the total ride time will be between 2-3 hours. This means that most of the ride will be completed at a trot. Your horse should be ridden the entire trail; there should be no forward motion unless mounted.

These rides are not a race. The ride management sets an ideal time to complete the trail (e.g., 2 ½ hours). The rider's goal is to complete the ride in the allotted time with a horse in the best condition possible. There is a 5 minute "window" on either side of the ideal time that the rider can finish within without losing points. Beyond that, 1 point is lost per minute too early or too late.

Vetting

At a minimum, there is a "vet check" before and after the ride. Some novice rides also include a vet check in the middle. A veterinarian will record your horse's information on a score sheet. The score at the conclusion of the ride will determine your placing. The *New Riders Handbook* has excellent information on how this scoring occurs.

At the pre-ride vet check the ride veterinarian will record your horse's pulse and respiration (P/R); will check their metabolic function; check their legs, back, and shoulders; and watch them trot.

For the "trot out" you will be asked to trot your horse in-hand in a straight line away from the vet, in a complete circle in one direction and then in the other direction, and then in a straight line back to the vet.

The post-ride vet check follows the same procedure, except the pulse and respiration will be taken at 10 minutes after you arrive back in camp. The timer (a volunteer who keeps track of everyone's time) will give you a ride card when you come into camp with your in-time and the time your horse's P/R should be taken. Hold onto that card and give it to

the person who takes your horses post-ride P/R ten minutes after you have arrived at the timer.

Crew Area

It's a good idea to have drinking water and some hay available at the "crewing area." It's always a good idea to offer your horse water, but you may want to wait to offer the hay until after P/Rs are taken. Sponging, ice, and liniments are not to be used until after the final vet check. There will probably be a lot of other horses in the crewing area, so pay attention to where your horse is in relation to the other horses and riders.

In novice and competitive rides the rider must care for their own horse at all times. Crews (people to help you with grooming, tacking, carrying water, hay etc.) are not allowed.

Equipment

Riding helmets are strongly encouraged (and required for all riders at some rides). However, with the exception of junior riders (under the age of 18 the first day of the ride season) who must wear a riding helmet, there are no equipment requirements for either you or your horse. You may wear any clothing you want and your horse may be tacked in any saddle and bridle that is comfortable for you and fits him. It's helpful to have water buckets available at the crewing area and in hot weather it may help to give your horse electrolytes. Other useful items to have on hand include: water and snacks for you, rain gear, sunblock, a blanket or cooler for your horse.

Awards

The score sheet that the vets used to record information about your horse is used to determine award placing. A perfect score is 400, with points being deducted for higher P/Rs, filling in legs, lameness/fatigue, etc. Awards are given to "true" novices (individuals who have not competed in more than one 25 mile ride). Typically awards will be given to 1st through 6th places, with other riders receiving "completion" awards. Be sure to stay around for the awards ceremony to celebrate your accomplishment!

Other ways to learn about distance riding

Find a mentor. There is a list of mentors on the New Riders page of the UMECRA website.

Read. Two favorite books are *Go the Distance: The Complete Resource for Endurance*, by Nancy Smith Loving and *Endurance Riding: From Beginning to Winning* by Lew Hollander. Another great source of information is the American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC.org) website.

