

UMECRA Frequently Asked Questions – FAQ

Where do I start if I want to try a Distance Ride?

A great place to start is by finding a mentor from our Mentor List. These individuals are experienced in the different divisions of Distance Riding and have volunteered to take the time to help you get started. Another resource is the New Riders Handbook. We also have several Novice Clinics to get you started. If you prefer to start out by attending a ride, one suggestion is to attend as a volunteer, contact the ride manager, let them know you're new to distance riding and ask what you can do to learn the most about the sport. Ride managers are always happy to have additional help. If none of these options work for you or if you prefer to attend a competition and ride, it is recommended that you review the New Riders Handbook and start out in our Novice division.

What is the difference in Endurance, Limited Distance, Competitive Trail and Novice?

More details can be found in the New Riders Handbook but in short here are the definitions of these divisions:

Novice: A great place to start! Novice rides are 15 miles or less and follow the guidelines of the Competitive Trail Ride. Although there may be some experienced riders doing the Novice for one reason or another, in order to qualify for points and awards you must have not completed more than one ride of 25 miles or longer. Riders that do not qualify for points or awards will get mileage only.

UMECRA Competitive Rides (CRs): UMECRA's CR's are rides of 25 miles or more and are completed at a 5-7 mph pace. These rides are not a race; all competitors have the same set time to finish. You will have the option to ride in a group of approximately 4-6 riders. Horses are scored by veterinarians on such factors as pulse, respiration, soundness, fatigue and attitude. Horsemanship is not judged. The winner of the competition is determined by the horse that has the most points at the end of the final vet check.

Limited Distance: This division covers distances 35 miles or less. Often referred to as LD, this distance has no minimum time but it does have a maximum time. For example, the maximum time to complete a 25 mile ride is 6 hours. Other distance maximum times are listed on a chart in the UMECRA rulebook. There will be at least one vet check usually near the $\frac{1}{2}$ way point. At the final vet check, the placing of the riders and horses is determined in the order the horses meet the pulse criteria that was set forth by the vet at the preride meeting.

Endurance: This division covers distances of at least 50 miles. There will be several vet checks along the way. There is also no minimum time for these rides, but there is a maximum time. For example, the maximum time to complete a 50 mile ride is 12 hours. Other distance maximum times are listed on a chart in the UMECRA rulebook. The finish order is determined in the order that the horses cross the marked finish line.

What breed of horse can I use?

Any Breed - UMECRA is open to all breeds of horses, mules and ponies. Distance horses need to be strong and healthy. They don't need to be beautiful, but they must have a conformation free from major faults that might lead to injury or lameness when stressed. Because the sport is stressful, on a ride of 30 miles or less the horse must be at least 48 months old and on a ride of over 30 miles a horse must be at least 60 months old. Horses of all breeds have been successful in distance riding as long as they are well conditioned and sound.

What equipment (saddle, bridle etc) will I need in order to do distance riding?

One of the great things about riding distance is that riders use any and all types of equipment. While a lot of riders will eventually purchase a saddle made specifically for endurance riding there is no reason to run out and buy a bunch of new equipment to start out. Stick with what is working for you and your horse for now.

There are many endurance related products, including saddles, that you will see at the rides. Some of these items you will eventually want and some you won't. Websites such as www.endurance.net has a long list for endurance related saddle and tack vendors.

There is only one equipment rule and that is that riders under the age of 18 are required to wear a helmet. A helmet is strongly recommended and there are many options available. Some of the more commonly used helmets are the Tipperary and the Troxel brands.

What are Electrolytes and how/when/why should I use them?

Electrolytes in short are a horse's Gatorade. You will see riders dosing electrolytes to their horses with 60cc dosing syringes throughout ride camp. Most have their own special way of mixing them but two of the most common bases are yogurt and applesauce. Electrolytes are commonly given before, during and after the competition. Especially in hot, humid weather, significant amounts of electrolytes are lost in the sweat. Sodium, chloride and potassium are the primary ions lost, along with smaller amounts of calcium, magnesium and other trace minerals. Increasing scientific data indicates that supplementing during exercise, and thereby minimizing depletion is beneficial in possibly averting metabolic problems such as thumps, tying-up, poor gut sounds and other symptoms associated with "exhausted horse syndrome." The body does not store excess electrolytes against future need, therefore "pre-loading" several days before a ride will not replace supplementation during the ride itself. However, orally syringing a day or two before the ride (especially before and during transport) may help trigger a "thirst response" to encourage drinking. Likewise, supplementing throughout the day may encourage drinking as well as replacing electrolytes lost through sweating. As with every other feed supplied throughout an endurance ride, small and frequent amounts are usually preferable to large and infrequent amounts. Electrolytes are often added to feed or water, but some horses may refuse the too salty flavor, and therefore also refuse much needed food and water. Although horses do develop an appetite for needed salt to replace depleted storage, this is not an

instantaneous response. Don't rely on this mechanism during a ride! Oral syringing is a good alternative that has worked well for many horses and riders. Take advantage of the increasing body of scientific data and consider the use of research-based electrolytes formulated specifically for endurance horses. Visit www.endurance.net and research the endurance vendor sites to find electrolytes formulated for endurance horses.

What do I need to bring to my first ride or drive?

Be sure to review the ride flyer first for pre-entry, camping and horse requirements (Do you need a Health Certificate?). At all rides your horse will need a current Negative Coggins, so bring the original and a copy to leave with the ride manager. The ride flyer will also indicate if a dinner meal is provided or if there is a potluck.

We believe that as you start riding more distance rides and camping longer nights with your horse your list will grow, and grow but these items are a few essentials that we wouldn't want to be caught without:

For the Rider:

- ✓ Bottled Water
- ✓ Electrolyte such as Gatorade
- ✓ Your riding attire and helmet
- ✓ Bring a variety of Sweatshirts, T-shirts and Tank Tops. You never know when the weather will turn, and its better to be prepared than standing freezing in the rain!
- ✓ Snacks - Fruit, Nuts, etc...
- ✓ Advil - Tylenol - Aleve
- ✓ Rain Gear
- ✓ Personal Items
- ✓ Sunscreen
- ✓ Sunglasses
- ✓ Chapstick
- ✓ Bug Spray
- ✓ Lantern and/or Flashlight

For the Horse:

- ✓ Hay, Grain other horse feeds and supplements (whatever is typically fed at home; don't try any new feeds at the ride)
- ✓ Water and Feed Buckets - if you have a way to haul water that is great; otherwise, there is water provided at all rides.
- ✓ Blankets, Coolers and Fly sheets/masks.
- ✓ Saddle, Bridle and, if used, Breastcollar, Martingale, Crupper, Leg boots, Hoof boots ✓ Electrolytes and Syringes

How do I contain my horse at a ride?

There are many ways to keep your horse at a ride. The most obvious and easiest is to simply tie him with a lead rope to the horse trailer but this has distinct disadvantages, as a horse tied to a trailer cannot move around much and he cannot lie down. The metal swingouts with stretchy tie ropes are a vast improvement and give the horse more room to move about (Hi-Tie, Spring Tie, etc.). Another method to be considered is a high picket line, sometimes called a high line. This involves the use of a stout rope tied six feet or more off the ground. A steel ring is placed on the rope, and the horse is tied to the ring. This allows the horse to walk the length of the line, which is much more comfortable for him. Feed and water buckets can be hung at each end of the line for safe and easy access. You can tie several horses to one picket line by putting "stoppers" in the rope (short pegs that won't allow the rings to pass) to keep them separated. If you use a picket line, be sure to tie the horse short enough that he doesn't get his legs tangled. Any horse that is tied, whether to a trailer or a picket line, should have some form of emergency release; a "panic snap" or safety halter is very important.

Corrals can be made of metal or PVC plastic pipe. These can be transported on the side of the trailer and erected in a few minutes at the campsite. However, they do not allow much room for movement, and unless they're staked down a horse can lift them off the ground. Some riders prefer an electric fence corral. Such a corral is made by using electrically charged tape, strung on plastic or fiberglass poles. The tape is made of nylon with fine wires woven in to carry the electricity; a battery operated fence charger electrifies the tape. This kind of paddock can be any size or shape desired, can be put up or taken down easily, and allows the horse maximum freedom to move about with the least chance of getting tangled in something. The big drawback is that a panicked horse can run through the electric fence so the paddock may not be secure for animals with this tendency.

There is no foolproof way to contain a horse, especially in a strange environment. Sleep in your clothes and have your boots and a flashlight near the bed!

How do I know if my horse and I are ready for a distance ride?

If you're new to distance riding and plan to attend a Novice ride, if you've been ridding 8-10 mile trail rides and incorporating some trotting and walking intervals chances are that your horse is prepared to do a Novice ride.

If you are planning on riding 25 miles either Competitive or Limited Distance in general you should be riding at least 3 days a week at distances between 5 and 15 miles each ride. You should be trotting most of the training ride only walking when the footing or terrain requires a walk. A medium to slow trot is fine.

Other things to work on at home are your horse's manners. The horse needs to be able to be examined by a Vet and not be a danger to the Vet or anyone else, be able to trot in hand in a circle in both directions as well as a straight line, and also behave safely on the trail with other riders and horses. This also should not be your horse's first camping trip! You should know what type of containment system your horse can be left

in or on safely and comfortably throughout the night. Getting your horse used to camping prior to the event also helps them to relax and eat and drink properly which is of utmost importance.

How do I check my horses pulse?

There are several ways to take your horse's pulse. The most basic way would be with a stethoscope. Position the ear pieces of your stethoscope so they point slightly towards the front of your head. Position the diaphragm of the stethoscope on the left side of the horse just behind the elbow where the girth rests. Move it around in that area until you can hear the beating of the heart. At rest, the horse's heart has a slow, regular rhythm that sounds like "ker-plunk, ker-plunk". Each "ker-plunk" is counted as one beat, not two. Once you have established the rhythm, look at your watch. You can count the beats for 15 seconds and multiply by 4 or take the pulse for 30 seconds and multiply by 2. A quick way to get a general idea of the pulse is to take it for 6 seconds and add a zero. However you take it, your intent is to establish how many times your horse's heart beats in one minute. Take his pulse often. Learn what his resting heart rate is. Take it directly after a work out. Take it 10 minutes after a work out. Take it at different times of the day. Take it in different situations/locations. Your horse's heart rate will fluctuate under different conditions. Both physical and emotional stress can elevate the heart rate. Find out what is normal for your horse. If you don't have a stethoscope it is possible to take the pulse with your fingers. Find a vein, feel the pulse and start counting. I have even seen people place their hand in the girth area near the heart and count the pulse that way. Experiment and find out what works best for you.

While a horse may come into the vet check with a high heart rate, the rider can lower the heart rate in a number of ways. A conditioned horse's heart rate will lower on its own with little help of the rider. The rider can facilitate the lowering of the heart rate by cooling the horse, through water on the neck and legs of the horse, or even by icing the horse down. As the temperature of the horse declines, the heart rate will also decline. However, if the horse has been over stressed, even after the heart rate has come down, if the horse is stressed again, the heart rate will jump up again.

When the horse is presented to the vet, the heart rate should be lower than pulse criteria set by the Vet before the ride (e.g., 60, 64). If the heart rate is above criteria, the vet will probably look at the card to see how long it took the horse to come down to criteria. If the heart rate is still at criteria, and the horse has been waiting around for several minutes, again the vet might be a bit concerned.

As always, there are some tricks you can play to lower the heart rate even while the vet is checking.

- First, if another horse walks by, particularly a best buddy, then the horse's rate is sure to go up. Stand such that you block the horse's view of whatever might excite him.
- Do not let the horse eat while the vet is taking the pulse.
- Do not let the horse throw his head way up. Preferably, have the horse hold his head in a "neutral" position.

- If you have a calming technique, such as gently rubbing the horse, do so.
- For yourself, take a deep breath and try to relax to show your horse that the excitement is over, no more trotting right now.

What is a CRI and How and Why is it used?

The Cardiac Recovery Index, CRI, or "Ridgway Trot" has proven to be a very useful tool for determining when a horse is becoming overstressed. Its unique value is that it detects problems at their onset, before other indicators register that a danger zone has been crossed.

The CRI is performed as follows. The horse's pulse is taken and the time is noted (for example, pulse 64; time = 1:03:07). The horse is then trotted in hand approximately 125 feet (about 45 steps) away from a point and then turned around and trotted back. After 60 seconds have passed from the initial pulse taking, the pulse is rechecked. It should be no higher than the first reading (for example, pulse 64). An accurate pulse count is imperative or the test will not be valid. If the pulse has increased the second time it is checked, there is cause for concern. While a four beat per minute increase (64 to 68) is not alarming, as the increase grows so should concern. A 64 to 72 reading, for example, would be fair warning that the horse is in enough distress that continuing the ride would be risky. Generally speaking, if the veterinarian gets a poor CRI reading, he will ask the rider to come back again for a recheck. At that time the CRI would be repeated, and unless it has normalized, the horse would probably be pulled from the ride. The veterinarian would most likely evaluate the horse as a whole before making this decision, but poor metabolic readings or lameness inevitably seem to accompany a poor CRI.

What is P&R?

The P & R is pulse and respiration. At a ride these parameters will be taken at the beginning, all checks and the finish of a ride. There are designated people in the vet checks to do this for you and normally a designated area for you to go to in order for them to be taken.

What are Gut Sounds?

The sounds of the intestinal system (random gurgling noises). Often diminishing with fatigue, their total absence can indicate a serious metabolic problem with the horse.

What is Skin Tenting?

A test for dehydration; pinch a fold of skin between your fingers and note the number of seconds it takes to flatten back out. The longer the time, the greater the dehydration of the horse. Over three to four seconds indicates potentially serious dehydration. To be more accurate on endurance horses, this test should be applied at the point of the shoulder, not up on the neck.

What is Anal Tone? Why do the vets check it?

The muscle tone of the anus; loss of anal tone is a sign of fatigue.

What does it mean when one says they have been “pulled”?

This means the horse and rider were not allowed to continue on in the competition due to not meeting the “Fit to Continue” criteria. Sometimes riders will opt to “pull” themselves for either something that is wrong with them or they just feel their horse is not right that day.

What Year End Awards are there?

As a member of UMECRA you are automatically accumulating miles and points from the first day you become a member. Here are some of the awards you can achieve at the end of the season:

Top Ten High Point Awards: Given to the ten horse/rider team combos who have compiled the highest number of points. Horse/rider teams must complete at least three rides for year-end awards.

Competitive Trail: Horse/rider team must have accumulated a minimum of 40 points or more. There are three divisions, lightweight, heavyweight and junior.

Endurance: Horse/rider team must have accumulated a minimum of 60 points or more. Divided into lightweight, heavyweight and junior divisions.

Limited Distance: Horse rider team must have accumulated a minimum of 40 points or more. There are two divisions, senior and junior. A junior is a rider who was under the age of 16 as of the first day of the ride season in which the ride is held.

Restricted Mileage: Awards will be given through sixth place in all divisions for completed rides as follows: 195 or fewer competitive miles and 295 or fewer endurance miles. Horserider teams must have 40 points in endurance and 20 in competitive. A horse-rider team may not place in both top ten and restricted mileage divisions. No one can place more than one horse, either lightweight or heavyweight, in each restricted mileage division.

Rookie Top Five: Awards for Endurance and Competitive Trail, seniors only, no junior division. Participants to nominate with the UMECRA secretary and mark ride entries with an "R." One horse-one rider teams to count. Rookie is defined as a rider who has not competed more than 2 distance rides in said division. Explanation: If you have not ridden more than two 50 mile endurance rides you can nominate as Rookie even if you have ridden more than 2 Competitive Trail or LD rides. Likewise for Competitive Trail, novice rides do not count towards the 2 rides. You must accrue at least 20 points competitive trail and 40 points endurance to be eligible.

High Point Riders: Senior and Junior riders who have compiled the highest number of points on any number of horses.

Family Award: The Jan Scott memorial trophy will be presented to the family who accumulates the most points in competitive, endurance, or a combination thereof.

Novice Competitive Top Five: Allows for accumulation of points for UMECRA members who choose not to ride more than 15 miles at any particular time within UMECRA. Can be a Junior or a Senior rider. The horse/rider team must accumulate a minimum of 40 miles and one of them may be a 25 or 30 mile competitive ride.

Rider Mileage: To count on any number of horses miles accumulated over multiple years. Chevrons awarded for each 500 miles of endurance and 250 miles of competitive riding. No charge. Miles recorded automatically from ride results.

1000 Mile Horse Award: To count with any number of riders. Miles accumulated over multiple years from any division count. One-time nomination fee of \$10. Miles to count from time of nomination. Anyone wishing to have back miles counted may pay an additional fee of \$15 per year or portion thereof.

Louise Reidel Top Ten Mileage Horses: The 10 horses accumulating most mileage. Any number of riders. Donated by Robert Beecher and John Sturm in memory of Louise Riedel.

Charles Phillips Memorial Versatility Award: To qualify for this award the horse/rider team must complete 2 Competitive, 2 Limited Distance, and 2 Endurance rides. There is a Grand Champion and a Reserve Champion (no divisions). This award is sponsored by the Great Lakes Distance Riders Association and is in honor of Charles Phillips.

High Point Senior Equine: This award honors the equine 20 years of age and older that accrues the highest number of UMECRA points during the season. The equine may compete in multiple divisions (endurance, limited distance, competitive, novice, driving) and with any number of riders. The equine must complete at least 4 rides to be eligible. To be considered for the award, each equine should be nominated in writing accompanied by proof of age (registration papers or vet letter or other evidence for unregistered animals). This award is sponsored by Sharon Hahn.

Is there a list of books, magazines and/or newsletter for distance riding?

Books:

The Complete Guide to Endurance Riding and Competition ~ By Donna Snyder-Smith

Go the Distance: The Complete Resource for Endurance ~ By Nancy S. Loving

All Horse Systems Go: The Horse Owner's Full-Color Veterinary Care and Conditioning Resource for Modern Performance, Sport and Pleasure Horses ~ By Nancy S. Loving

Conditioning Sport Horses ~ By Hilary M. Clayton

Endurance Riding - From Beginning to Winning ~ By Lew Hollander Also available from this author is a CD,
The Bible of Endurance Riding

All About Endurance Riding ~ By Marcy Pavord

Magazines & Newsletters:

Trail Blazer, Phone: (866) 818-4146 <http://www.horsetrails.com/> Also ask them for the Ultimate Trail
Rider's Resource

Endurance News, available with membership to AERC Phone: (530) 823-2260 or <http://www.aerc.org/>

[NATRC Region 5 - Hoof Beats](#)

[NATRC 4 - The Round Up!](#)

[SERA - From the Horses Mouth...](#)