

NATRC FIRST RIDE

I was fortunate enough to attend the first NATRC ride in the spring of 1961. It was the weekend of April 15th and it was sponsored by the Concord/Mount Diablo Trail Ride Association. The ride was conducted on Mount Diablo and the camp grounds were the newly developed camp grounds and Club House of the Concord Mount Diablo Trail Ride Association. These were beautiful facilities complete with showers, swimming pool, dining hall/meeting room, kitchen area and refreshment bar. There was a concrete slab surrounding the club house and it served for out door dining or viewing the adjacent hills or at night the down town lights of Concord and Clayton. The San Francisco bay was not far beyond and its cool ocean breeze would help cool the area from scorching day time temperatures. The cool breeze made for pleasant sleeping. The Bay fog would often blanket the Mountain in the morning and making trail ribbons difficult to see from a distance but was welcomed by the riders as it delayed the on set of mid-day heat.

I was a sophomore in vet school at UC Davis and a classmate, George Cardinet III was a son of the ride manager. George was working on a research study of horse physiology under stress of work and he needed assistance. He invited me and three other of my classmates to join him in his investigation. I leaped at the chance for some hands on experience working horses and from the description he gave of the ride and ride conditions truly captured my imagination. We would get to study horses working under controlled stress with all the safe guards of periodic stress checks during the ride and in the evening recovery period.

George was going to investigate and hoped to prove his hypothesis, the pulse and respiratory recovery rates were directly related to the horse's physical conditioning. We were also going to be checking the horse's body temperature. We worked in pairs to collect the incoming pulse respiratory rates of each competitor's horse and recorded them and after a pre-assigned rest period a recovery reading was taken for comparison and rectal body temperatures were taken.

George and his crew were fortunate in having an excellent pair of judges for the ride and there fore the quality of judging assessment would make a comparison of our data to their final placement results more valid the conclusions drawn from our study. The Judges were General Kester a retired Calvary Commander who had conducted many Calvary marches and was excellent in evaluating a horse's condition and knew of the proper care of horses during these stressful marches. Marjorie Hambly, a well recognized Morgan Breeder and horseshow judge with years of experience was the other judge. They were both well qualified to make subjective judgments. At the conclusion of the ride, when we were able to analyze our data and compare it to the subjective judging results, we were elated to find

there was only one discrepancy between our placing based on our objective judging criterion and those of the official judges. The discrepancy involved only a horse placing sixth in one class and all other placing were correct.

Bolstered by the results of our initial study George and crew continued to gather data for the next three years in an attempt to find the best rest interval of recovery to accurately correlate with conditioning. It was established the best results were for a recovery period of 12 minutes gave the best correlation to match conditioning but was a night mare to keep track of and the 10 minute recovery became the standard allotted recovery period. During our study of the Olympic horses going to the Pan American games in 1963, at Carmel California, we studied results of recovery data taken at 5 minutes and established the time period was too short to correlate well with condition measurement. This was a valuable part of the study but we soon confined our study to Competitive Trail riding and the challenging terrain of Mount Diablo.

The trails on mount Diablo, many of which were hand dug to connect cow and deer trails and hand pruned to make them passable to horse traffic were supplemented by open dirt ranch roads. The cooperation of the local ranchers who owned parcels on Mount Diablo made it possible to have a two day trail ride encompassing 70 miles of trail. Mount Diablo park provided stopping points for Pulse and Respiratory checks with water and lunching areas with pick-nick tables and plenty of trees to tie horses to and provide shade from the heat. This whole scenario was the perfect setting for an excellent challenging test for evaluating a horse's condition and the natural obstacles presented the perfect test of horsemanship.

The sport of Competitive Trail riding was patterned after the rules of the Green Mountain Three Day 100 Mile trail ride in Vermont. Dr. Murray Fowler had attended their ride and was impressed with the discipline required of the riders to complete the 100 mile ride over a three day time period. It required better horsemanship of the rider and better care of their mounts than did the 100 mile, one day rides currently being conducted on the West Coast. On his return, Dr. Fowler brought with him their rule book and many of Green Mountain trail ride rules were incorporated into the drafting of the North American Trail Ride rules.

The Concord Horseman had conducted trail rides out of their club property in down town Concord. They were half competitive and half pleasure rides and had no standard set of rules to go by. When the Concord Horsemen sold their holdings in Concord and purchased the property on Mount Diablo. George Cardinet II and friends felt a need for a uniform set of rules under which to conduct future competitive rides and they continued to have Competitive rides and pleasure rides but they now separated the two so the competitive riders were not interfered with by the pleasure riders. The Competitive Rules and Judging Criterion were written up and adopted as a standard set of rules to be used in the nine original rides in California and Arizona. A pseudo- set of directors was established by gathering together the chairman of each of the original rides as member of this body.

The rides continued to be conducted under this set of rules from 1961 until 1968 when the riders became disgruntled from time to time because there was no recourse to address their grievances. If a sanctioned ride did not follow the rules or was poorly run the riders had no one to hear their complaints. There was no process by which the riders were able to gain satisfaction. The competitors loved the idea behind the origin of Competitive riding and loved the competition; but, they were to the point of Mutiny and their out cry forced the original board of directors to hear their complaints.

A meeting was called for all riders of interest with the board members and from that meeting the North American Trail Ride Conference emerged. The board members were no longer appointed they were now elected and the President and other officers were elected from this board. Joan Throgmorton volunteered to be the National Secretary and served in that capacity for year free gratis to help the organization get back on a firm financial footing. The Conference was in debt due to the extravagant spending by a previous chairman of the National Year End Awards. Thanks to a loan guarantee from Bob Bohannon and the Savings and Loan he Chaired in Arizona the North American Trail Ride Conference survived. Bob's personal guarantee of the loan to the organization allowed time to correct its debt.

It was now required that Board meetings, open to all who wished to attend, be held twice a year and all decision, grievances, financial expenditures along with rule changes were decided at these board meetings.

Blood samples were to be taken before, during and after the ride and analyzed for changes in blood chemistry and to compare to the data collected from the pulse and respiratory recovery study. Sweat samples were collected during the day for analysis and notes were taken as to the character of the sweat, clear or frothy, odorous or non-fragrant and areas involved in sweating.