



Jim and I finishing the 1990 World Championship at Trinidad, California. That was our first Ride & Tie together and we finished in top 25 and 4th man/ woman on my 17-year-old ½ Arab-1/2 quarter horse gelding, Reflection (aka 'Flec'). He was awesome!

## A Match Made in Heaven: Ride & Tie Rendezvous

By Annette Parsons

I had been an endurance rider since the late 1970's. When I first heard about Ride & Tie in about 1979 from my Humboldt endurance friends (Joan and Ted Ruprecht, Mike Harding, Julie Moreland) I told them I thought they were CRAZY! "I am NOT getting off my horse and running!" I could not imagine such a thing!

Then, in 1983, the Levi's Ride & Tie was held in Eureka, California....practically in my backyard! My friend, Joan Ruprecht convinced me to try it. "It's right here in town!" I rounded up a newfound friend, Debbie Kelsey, who had been a runner since her teens. At that time I was 34 and out of shape. Debbie was a few years younger and in good shape. We were both horse people, and we figured we weren't getting any younger...we might as well try it. We were not at ALL confident we could complete the tough 40-mile course in the requisite 8 hours.

So we began training. For the first time in my 34 years, I began to understand the benefits of regular exercise and feeling “in shape”! We were to use my 8-year-old half-Arab/half-quarter horse gelding, Reflection, on whom I had been doing local 50-mile endurance rides for about 3 years. We had a lot of fun training, and my husband-at-that-time, John, was pretty supportive, and planning on coordinating our pit crew for the race. During one of our training rides in the area where the course was to be laid out, Debbie took a wrong turn and got separated from the rest of us who were out there that day. It was typical Eureka summer weather - cool, heavy fog...and Debbie was out in shorts and a T-shirt for at least 4 hours before we finally found her. I panicked, visualizing her ravaged by some weirdo out there...but it turned out she was cold and tired, but otherwise okay.

Long story short...Debbie and I finished in less than 7 hours, in spite of my having run past our horse by over 2 miles, into the next vet check where my husband/crew said “Where’s your horse, Parsons??” Without a word I turned around and jogged back the 2 miles till I found him, quietly standing tied where Debbie had left him. All I could think about was poor Debbie out there, having been running now for a couple of hours and no doubt wondering where the hell I was with the dang horse! Anyway, we were so elated by the time we finished, we could not believe we had actually DONE IT! What a great feeling that was! I was HOOKED! I was also in better shape than I had been in years! Without the motivation of Ride & Tie, I have no doubt I would not have continued regular running. I was too lazy...but the sport was so much fun, it made me want to try it again!

My next Ride & Tie was the following year, 1984, when the Ruprechts and some other locals staged a local race on the same course as the Levi’s of the previous year. That year I teamed up with Sherry Skillwoman, an awesome ultra-runner and a novice, but competent, horsewoman. Once again, I ran past my horse, once again I was chided by my husband/crew. Sherry and I finished in decent time anyway, but I knew I had to change my modis operandi.

In going thru a divorce (perhaps the crew’s attitude had something to do with it??) I did no endurance or Ride & Tie during 1985.

When Sherry and I teamed up for the Levis at Big Creek in 1986, I purchased a tiny cassette tape recorder and placed it in our saddle bag. Our procedure was to push the “PLAY” button after dismounting and tying the horse to a tree. That way, when either of us heard David Grisman as we were running up the trail we knew old Flec was nearby. It worked, and it helped me to regain my confidence.

Another couple of years passed, as I struggled to make it on a single income as a soil scientist with the U.S. Forest Service. Few endurance rides or Ride & Tie races were in my life during those two years. Then, in late 1987, Joan Ruprecht once again inserted a major twist into my life. One day when we were riding, she asked me if I was ready to start dating again. I told her I guessed so, so she told me she knew this really nice guy named Jim Clover. He was just two years separated from his previous mate, he was a great runner, and had done a couple of Ride & Tie races with Joan’s daughter, Elaine. Jim was a professional colleague of Joan’s who happened to live near Santa Rosa, California, about 4 hours away from Arcata, where I lived. But he did

get up there on business now and then. It turns out, their common professional interest was TICKS! Joan had me and the rest of our local endurance riders collecting ticks for Jim before I ever knew he existed. His specialty, as a medical entomologist specializing in vector-borne diseases, was Lyme disease. It also turned out that Jim was not just a great runner, he was a great *ultra*-runner, having completed Western States three times and several other 100-milers, all sub-24 hours, plus a plethora of 50-mile and 50-K runs. He almost always managed to place well in his category.

SO...Joan gave Jim my phone number, and the rest, as they say, is history. He called me prior to his next business trip to Humboldt County, and we dated, and it was pretty much unequivocal love at first site! A man who loved the outdoors, could ride, could do ride and tie, and did not mind that I was a soil scientist! (After all...how much complaining could he do if he is into ticks?!) That year (1988) I crewed for Jim and Elaine at the Alturas Ride & Tie Championship...the first year it moved out from under the sponsorship of Levis. The following year, at the Frazier Park Championship I had not successfully stolen Jim away from partnering with Elaine Ruprecht, so we both did the championship, but not with each other. We all did well, finishing middle-of-the-pack, and Jim and I both wished we had partnered together.

Finally, in 1990, when the Championship was once again in my back yard, near Trinidad, California, Jim and I decided to team up together. We were still riding my old pard, Flec, who was about about 15 by this time, and Jim was embarrassed to be seen with him in the pre-race vet-in line. Flec was his usual calm, quiet self, standing with one hind leg cocked, eyelids half shut, lower lip hanging loose while the other competitors' fiery Arabians spun and whirled and reared and generally looked gorgeous and intimidating.

Jim apologized to Flec after the race, when we placed 4<sup>th</sup> Man/Woman and top 25 overall! He was awesome! Over the next few years, Jim and I teamed up for many more championships and other Ride & Tie races. We have managed to have a great time as teammates, and have actually placed admirably in some races, but always had fun. Oh, aside from the Taylorsville championship of 1992 when we had a bad day and did not speak to each other for three weeks (we were actually living three hours apart, so it was not QUITE as bad as that sounds! But it was bad!). We obviously got over that, and got married in 1992, and that same year we were national Man/Woman point champions! Ride & Tie has played a huge role in our lives, and even as we have gotten older we have managed to maintain our ties, although to a lesser degree.

It seems our lives have become increasingly busy, and we have since moved to Oregon, where nearby races are hard to come by. So much so that for a number of years we co-managed the Pacific Crest and the Headwaters of the Rogue Ride & Ties with Ashland veterinarian, Ann Swartz. Mary Tiscornia and her partner Rachael even won the Headwaters race in 2000! But after several years of disappointingly low turnouts (as in, one or two teams) we had to admit it was not worth our time and stress to continue putting on the race. In addition, fire seasons have become worse and worse, and my summers have been spent traveling the western U.S. mapping wildfires for the past two fire seasons.

This June, however, we did hold a local Ride & Tie clinic/practice near Ashland, and had four teams show up. We were disappointed that we did not have more than that, but the four veteran

teams had a great time on the practice course and it was gorgeous up in the high country! We were honored to have veteran Ride & Tie Don Betts and his spouse Annie join us, coming all the way from Squim, Washington. Two other experienced teams from Ashland joined us. One of their horses got his first taste of Ride & Tie and did great! Don entertained us all around the campfire Friday night singing his original ballad, "A Race Called Ride and Tie" ...a delightful anthem for our beloved sport!

We would love to see more riders become interested in this fun sport. Since my first Levi's race in 1983 when there were over 220 teams, I have seen the sports' participant numbers decline, especially in the past couple of years. Is this a sign of sedentary times or what?? Come on now, let's get motivated and have some fun! As one for whom Ride & Tie has played such an important role in shaping my fitness, my relationships, and my happiness overall, I highly recommend it. I personally invite and really look forward to meeting many more of you crazy souls who, like me, will become hooked once you try it.

*About the author:*

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For more information and advice on how you can get started in the sport of Ride & Tie, please visit the website at [www.rideandtie.org](http://www.rideandtie.org) or call the Ride & Tie Association at 650-949-2321.