



Photo by Melanie Walker

#### UNIQUE SPORT:

A team makes its way to the finish line of a recent Ride & Tie event. Although all three members, the two runners and the horse, don't have to cross the finish simultaneously, the team's time is not counted until all team members finish.

# Ride & Tie

## Your next adventure ... on horseback

**By Jennifer Neal**

For those seeking a unique addition to their cross training, there is a California-grown, team-relay sport that is fun and challenging, and probably unlike anything you've competed in before.

Involving an adventurous spirit, a long trail course and three teammates — one of which is a horse — Ride & Tie is the latest craze among endurance athletes, runners in particular.

In its simplest form, Ride & Tie is an endurance event where two people trade off running and riding a horse to complete a 25- to 40-mile cross-country race.

"You're out there with 30 to 40 miles of trail and an animal, and anything can happen," said Lari Shea, a longtime Ride & Tie competitor. "It's a sport for adventurers."

The rigorous aspect of the sport tends to attract athletes who are looking for a variation on endurance riding or running marathons. At the same time, the sport draws in families and

adventurous folk who choose to walk instead of run between saddle times.

"The thing that kind of drew me into it was the fact that I used to ride and enjoyed it growing up," said Ride & Tie Association President Curt Riffle, who was a runner in college. "The thing that caused me to stay was the love of the combination of horses and running, and being out in some beautiful places."

Many of the competitors are extremely dedicated, and the circle surrounding the sport is its own community.

"Yeah, we're kind of grassroots and kind of small, but it's really a great group of people," Riffle said.

Founder Bud Johns has noticed that the people who compete in Ride & Tie are interesting folks.

"They're academics, they're people who do menial labor, musicians, people in the arts," Johns said. "It's the most diverse and intriguing group of people I've known. And it's become like a family. People care about each other."

#### THE CONCEPT

At a Ride & Tie event there may be anywhere from 30 to 100 teams competing, meaning 30 to 100 horses and riders line up at the edge of a meadow come race time with the other teammate beginning behind the horses on foot.

Reminiscent of the Oklahoma land rush or the charge of the cavalry, the start of a race is nothing more than a stampede. Runners steer clear and let the horses and riders take the lead.

"The biggest thing is just staying on," Riffle said. "What we try to do is always have starts in big open fields."

That's the ride. Next is the tie.

At some point, the rider will stop and dismount, tie the horse to a tree or bush and start running. The horse gets the opportunity to rest as the teammate who began running comes up the trail. When the first runner arrives at the horse, he or she unties it and begins to ride. The horse and rider then trot or canter ahead and pass the running teammate, repeating the process.

## Inside Ride & Tie

For more information on Ride & Tie:

### ONLINE

- [rideandtie.org](http://rideandtie.org)
- [giddy-up.com/ride.html](http://giddy-up.com/ride.html)
- [horses.about.com](http://horses.about.com), search "Ride & Tie"

### BOOKS

- "What is This Madness?" by Bud Johns
- "Ride & Tie: The Challenge of Running and Riding" by Donald Trent Jacobs

Although distance between ties depends on the strategy of the team and the strength of the individuals as riders and runners, all the human competitors stress the role of the horse, emphasizing that it is equally important to the team.

"There's something about having a horse involved ... there's quite a bond," Riffle said. "People love their horses, and they don't treat them as an animal, they treat them as an athlete."

The horse isn't just the beast of burden either. Competitors claim their animals grasp the sport mentally.

"It's amazing how the horse figures out really quick that this is a hysterical game — and they love it," said Carol Ruprecht, a Ride & Tie competitor from Newport Beach. "It's happened so many times that I come around the corner and my horse whinnies at me."

### THE HISTORY

Ride & Tie is definitely not a new sport on the block. In fact, the 33rd annual Ride & Tie World Championships was recently held near Lake Tahoe in early September.

Among multisport events, Ride & Tie predates formal triathlons. Documented in English literature as early as the 18th century, Ride & Tie competition as seen today

was founded by Bud Johns in 1971.

He discovered the concept in the 1960s after reading a 1930s periodical in San Diego County that told the story of a father and son who had all their horses stolen except for one. The father and son chased the rustlers into Mexico with the remaining horse, riding and tying.

"I just thought this concept with two people and one horse moving like that was a great idea," Johns said.

The first official competition was a promotional event for the Levi Strauss blue jeans company, where Johns worked in marketing. Levi Strauss was looking for a sport to sponsor, and Johns recalled Ride & Tie and how the Western aspect of the sport fit well with the company's image.

So in 1971 the first race took place in Sonoma County with 63 teams.

"That really showed us that we had something, and people were intrigued by it," Johns said. "I wasn't that surprised, because people like challenges. I think it was a time that people were looking for something that was going to challenge them in a multifaceted way."

For two decades, Levi's sponsored the annual competition. The event grew and often had 200 teams competing. Races began in England and Germany, but by the late 1980s the company's image was moving away from the Old West and Levi's decided to phase it out.

But participants were hooked and decided to keep Ride & Tie alive.

"In 1988, the Ride & Tie Association was formed to carry the sport beyond what Levi was doing," Riffle explained.

Today, there is a Ride & Tie season with several races — mostly in California — including the Ride & Tie World Championships, which will be held next year on June 26 on the Mendocino coast north of the town of Fort Bragg.

### GETTING STARTED

Earlier this year, Mike Fraysse, a veterinarian from Redondo Beach, contacted the Ride & Tie Association through its web site ([rideandtie.org](http://rideandtie.org)).

"I love horses, I like to ride, I like the outdoors and I like to run," Fraysse said. "It was kind of a good mix."

Already a triathlete, Fraysse thought he'd enjoy the challenge of Ride & Tie, and he was surprised to find out that the racing community was so enthusiastic, helpful and "very newcomer friendly."

"Certain people are gung-ho and want to win," said Fraysse, whose team finished the 32-mile World Championships course in 10th place in early September. "Others want to have fun and exercise. I don't think you'd have to be intimidated if you're a newcomer ... just kind of ease your way into it."

Lari Shea, who's been involved in Ride & Tie since 1982 and will be the race director for the 2004 World Championships, said she was an inexperienced runner when she started in the sport, but the fact that she had been doing endurance horseback riding for 10 years helped her ease into it.

"Since I'm not a runner, I didn't think I could do something like that," Shea said. "Running is definitely not my thing in life, but Ride & Tie is something you can do."

Shea trains others to ride at her Ricochet Ridge Ranch in Mendocino County, and she plans on offering Ride & Tie clinics at her ranch throughout the year. Visit [horse-vacation.com](http://horse-vacation.com) for details, or call the ranch at (888) 973-5777.

Another good introduction to the sport is simply attending a race, and the Ride & Tie Association can always use volunteers at the events. Race schedules can be found online at [rideandtie.org/schedule.htm](http://rideandtie.org/schedule.htm).

In addition to helping plan events, the association also provides partner-matching services. If someone is interested but doesn't have a horse, or has a horse but isn't a strong runner, the association helps form teams.

As long as you are comfortable around a horse, Ride & Tie is easy to learn. Start with basic horseback lessons and a running program, and you'll be hooked in no time. <<



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**THE SWITCH:** Elaine Ruprecht runs down a trail as teammate Tom Gey saddles up after the exchange.