RIDE & TIE and EQUATHON

December 2026



Megan Lapkoff and Olivia Ison on Sheriff
at the 2026 Iron Mountain Jubilee

photo: Becky Pearman

THE RIDE & TIE ASSOCIATION

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Gold Level Sponsor

Steve Anderson: Putting His Money Where the Gold Is!

Steve Anderson has been Ride & Tie's steadfast Treasurer for years, keeping our finances on track and our sport running smoothly. But Steve doesn't just keep track of the gold—he gives some of his own!

This year, Steve stepped up as a Gold Level Sponsor, investing in the future of the sport he loves.

Steve encourages every Ride & Tie member to consider making a donation to the Association. No contribution is too small when we all pitch in. After all, a little gold from each of us can help keep the fun, friendship, and finish lines coming for years to come!

Go to **www.rideandtie.org/about-ride-and-tie/sponsors** or use the QR code_to learn how you can become golden!



Steve competing at the 50th World Championship



From the office of the President of

THE RIDE & TIE ASSOCIATION

In the Pacific Northwest, like the rest of the country, the days are getting shorter but the list of upcoming races is getting longer! As I write this, I am excited to see races starting to fill our 2027 ride calendar.

2026 has been a year of very positive changes, growth, and landmark accomplishments, for our sport. Once again, our pinnacle event, the World Championship brought out the very best race strategies, athletic excellence, and unmatched grit from our teams. We have added some new faces to the board of directors who are bringing excitement and fresh perspectives to the leadership. There are new events and new ride managers stepping forward hosting events for us, giving us more opportunities to participate. We have had our newest Gold Level Sponsor come forward emphasizing their lifetime love and commitment to Ride and Tie. We have added a high school essay contest that reminds us of the freshness and exuberance those young competitors bring to every event attended. We added another member to the Cripple Triple Club (Ride and Tie Championship finisher, Tevis Cup finisher, Western States Trail Run finisher). A huge shout out to Barb Mathews, who recently joined past association president Janice Heltibridle becoming only the second in Ride & Tie history to cross the incredible 5,000 mile mark. Just a few weeks after Barb hit that milestone Carrie Baris surpassed it as well! I find those accomplishments both astounding and inspirational.

Our sport thrives entirely on teamwork, trust, and a deep mutual respect between partners and horses. It also relies on the teamwork of ride managers, veterinarians, volunteers and crew. I have had the honor of being Ride Manager for 4 world championship events and have participated in 11. At the awards ceremony, the first thing I did was ask everyone to give their horses a round of applause as they rested back at the trailers for the brave and noble way they allowed us to compete that day. The next was to thank all the volunteers and veterinarians. We literally could not leave the starting line without them.

Save June 5, 2027 on your calendar for the 55th World Championship in Cool, CA. And save July 30 and August 1 for the East Coast Championship at Burgettstown, PA. For more information, use the QR codes below.

Stay safe on the trails, tie them well, and as always: ride, run, and have fun.

Chris Amaral

55th World Championship
www.rideandtie.org/mec-schedule/coolest

East Coast Regional Championship
www.rideandtie.org/mec-schedule/hillman-ride-fly

They Say Crazy Attracts Crazy: Our First Ride & Tie at Hillbilly Holler

by Jess Routh

When I mentioned to my husband, Tommy, I wanted to try a Ride & Tie in the mountains of Tennessee, he said “let’s do it!” They say crazy attracts crazy. As a lifelong runner and rider I had been intrigued with this ride and tie thing since I’d first heard of it a couple years ago.

We chose the 14 mile distance which climbed the historic Yellow Springs Mountain . There used to be the Yellow Springs Mountain Retreat Hotel there for over 100 years until the resort eventually closed in the late 1940s.

We had to get creative to train for this beast. We have a family of 7 so we seized every opportunity in the nooks and crannies of busy, daily life with a large family. Most of our runs were done at the ball field while our kids practiced and jogging whirlpools in the above ground pool while the kids swam. Tommy, who maybe rides a handful of times a year- rode and ran the “hilly” cow fields of our neighbors, often getting some funny looks.

The Hillbilly Holler 14 mile was a very technical, challenging course , with steep grades, tons of rocks and the most amazing view at the top. Dueling Gun Runner, our trusty little BLM Mustang bravely traversed the terrain no questions asked. Me, being a stronger rider and Tommy a faster runner, he would run ahead and be a spotter shouting things like “Stay to the right of the rocks!” or “You can trot this next section!” That was the extent of our ride strategy.



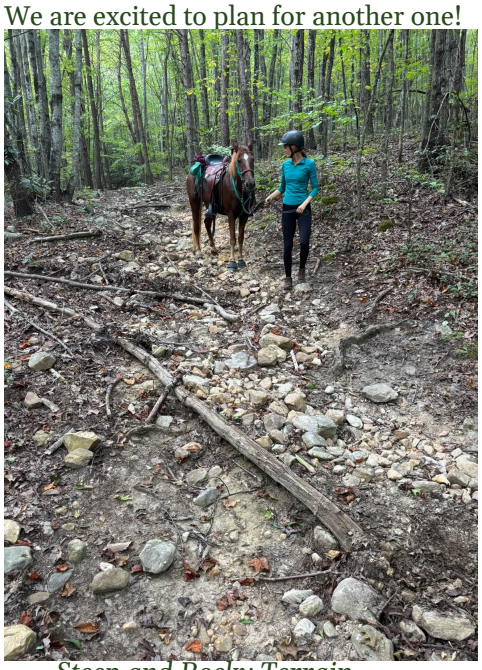
Somewhere along the way, maybe mile 9?? A few Ride & Tie competitors warned us there were yellow-jackets up ahead. After a particularly hard, single track climb we see the area that had been marked off with pink vet wrap. Tommy passes through unscathed and yells to me “You’re all good!” No sooner than that, I feel the stings on my left calf. Gunner is swishing, kicking and barely holding it together as we were swarmed by yellow-jackets. I’m holding on for dear life praying we don’t go off the other side of the mountain!

This is not a sport for pansies, and after talking to other experienced Ride & Tie competitors we were told this was one of the toughest ones they have ever done. It was INTENSE! It gave us Florida flat landers a true Appalachian experience.

Each ride teaches me something. The mountains were humbling, reminding me that this sport is a relationship with the entire journey. The peaks, the valleys and the weird detours. It’s about becoming the kind of person who can maintain both dedication and the ability to laugh when life reminds you you’re not as in control as you think you thought.

I have to mention that the community of Ride & Tie folks are seriously the nicest, most inclusive group.

We are excited to plan for another one!



Steep and Rocky Terrain



Stunning View



Tommy on board

Photos: Jess Routh



Barb Mathews achieved a major milestone at this summer's Big South Fork race, becoming only the second person in Ride & Tie history to cross 5,000 career miles. Janice Heltibridle with over 6,000 career miles is the only person ahead of Barb. With several other competitors nearing major mileage milestones this year, look for a complete report in the Winter 2027 issue.

In the meantime, you can catch Barb on a recent episode of the *At the Hold* podcast! Host Kim Minarich sits down with Barb to discuss Barb's remarkable career, aging as an athlete, and the unique joys of Ride & Tie. Tune in on your favorite podcast app or scan the QR code below.



At the Hold Episode 20

How a Vet and a Letter Saved Ride & Tie

by Courtney Krueger



In 1971, Ride & Tie was born—and nearly died on the same day.

Bud Johns, Levi Strauss & Company's public relations director and the sport's creator, launched the first race with $3,250 in prize money. The purse drew a crowd, but some horses weren't fit for 28 grueling miles in California's 100-degree heat. By day's end, two horses had died. Critics quickly dubbed the new sport "Ride & Die."

Ride & Tie's future looked bleak. Then a veterinarian stepped forward.

In *What Is This Madness?*, Johns recalls a short, stocky man with long, graying hair approaching him after the race. He was Jim Steere, a vet and a competitor that day. He had cared for both horses when he encountered them on the course. He warned Johns that the coming weeks wouldn't be easy, but insisted the sport deserved another chance, with better protections for its horses and promised his help.



"I've been a vet for 20 years and I've been an endurance rider for years," Dr. Jim Steere told him, *"and I never before understood my relationship with a horse the way I did today."*

Dr. Steere was true to his word. Just three days after the race, he wrote a letter to Bud Johns cc'ing (among others) Peter Haas, the president of Levi's, with whom he had already spoken about the race.

His letter praised the riders, officials, and spectators, noting that for most competitors, the real reward was simply doing the Ride & Tie and finishing. But he didn't shy away from the tragedy. He urged Johns to acknowledge what had gone wrong and demonstrate that changes were already underway.

Then Steere offered ten specific recommendations to protect the horses, including veterinary checks before, during, and after the race; Humane Society oversight; and knowledgeable officials prepared to guide riders and hold them accountable.

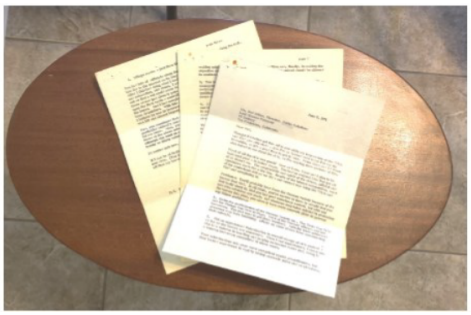


The letter made all the difference. When Johns met with Levi's president, Peter Haas, to discuss the sport's future, Haas had one condition: *"Just make sure I don't get any of those calls."* With that, he approved the 1972 Levi's Ride & Tie World Championship.

Dr. Steere became Ride & Tie's first head veterinarian, serving for nearly 40 years. In 2010, at age 85, he competed in the World Championship short course. Less than two months later, he died.

Today, we honor Dr. Steere through the annual **Jim Steere Memorial Veterinary Student Scholarship**. Applicants reflect on what it means to care for the horse in a sport built on partnership.

A tragedy nearly ended Ride & Tie before it began. A veterinarian's compassion, courage, and ten-point letter helped give it a future. We're still riding because of that legacy—and the scholarship helps ensure the next generation understands why the horse always comes first.



Top: Dr. Steere, the "hippie vet," finishes the first Championship in 1971 in St. Helena, CA.
Middle: Carrie Steere and her dad are both hugged by Dawn Damas after the 1972 Championship in Alturas, CA.
Bottom: Thom Steere and his dad finish the 2010 Championship Short Course in Mt. Adams, WA.
Left: Mary Tiscornia's cc copy of Jim's letter to Bud Johns

2026 Veterinary Scholarship Essay Winners

WINNER

Ariana Bilderback
Ariana.bilderback@yahoo.com
LSU School of Veterinary Medicine
2028

Ariana Bilderback is a third-year veterinary student at Louisiana State University with a passion for large animal medicine, and a goal of becoming an equine veterinarian. She serves as a Nutramax Student Representative and co-leads a Tuesday evening community group. Outside of veterinary school, she enjoys reading her Bible, working out, spending time outdoors, and expressing her creativity through artistic pursuits. She is grateful for opportunities to grow academically, professionally, and personally while preparing to serve both animals and their owners.



RUNNER UP

Alysa J.L. Giudici
Ag2283@cornell.edu
Cornell University
College of Veterinary Medicine
2026

Alysa is a 4th year Doctor of Veterinary Medicine candidate. Raised through 4-H and lifelong involvement with horses, Alysa developed an early appreciation for horsemanship and the responsibility inherent in equine care. She plans to pursue a residency in equine theriogenology or diagnostic imaging, with interests in fetal-maternal interaction, client education, and mentorship within the profession. Outside of veterinary school, Alysa enjoys coaching karate, weightlifting, and spending time outdoors with her husband, Tyler, paint horse, Marlo, and golden retriever, Wrigley.



WINNING ESSAY

Why Ride & Tie is Biomechanically Different from other Equine Sports

Ariana Bilderback

Equine endurance sports are often discussed as a single category with veterinary oversight, conditioning strategies, and injury risk broadly applied across disciplines. However, Ride & Tie stands apart as a uniquely intermittent endurance event, creating biomechanical and physiological demands that differ substantially from traditional endurance riding or continuous athletic disciplines. From a veterinary perspective, the alternating cycles of exertion and recovery inherent to Ride & Tie profoundly influence musculoskeletal loading, metabolic stress, and injury risk (Hinchcliff, 2008). Understanding these differences is essential for protecting equine welfare and highlights why Ride & Tie requires specialized veterinary consideration.

Unlike continuous endurance rides, where a single horse maintains forward motion for extended distances, Ride & Tie requires horses to perform repeated bouts of moderate to high intensity work followed by variable periods of rest. During these rest intervals, horses experience partial recovery of heart rate, respiratory rate, and muscle oxygenation before being remounted (Munsters, 2014). This pattern of work more closely resembles interval training than traditional endurance exercise. Veterinary research in equine sports medicine has demonstrated that intermittent loading can allow for metabolic recovery while still placing cumulative stress on musculoskeletal structure. Particularly, tendons and ligaments that respond more slowly to rest than the cardiovascular system (Hinchcliff, 2008). From a biomechanical standpoint, Ride & Tie horses experience repeated transitions between rest and exercise, increasing the number of acceleration and deceleration cycles throughout an event. These transitions are known to increase strain on the superficial digital flexor tendon, suspensory ligament, and distal limb joints (Clayton & Hobbs, 2017). While continuous endurance riding produces sustained, lower amplitude loading, the start-stop nature of Ride & Tie creates fluctuating forces that challenge soft tissue elasticity and fatigue resistance. Veterinarians monitoring Ride & Tie events must therefore be attuned not only to overall distance and speed, but also to cumulative mechanical stress that may not be immediately evident during brief recovery periods (McConaghy & Hodgson, 2019).

Additionally, thermoregulation further distinguishes Ride & Tie from other endurance disciplines. The intermittent rest periods allow horses to dissipate heat more effectively than in continuous exercise, particularly in hot or humid environments (Hinchcliff, 2008). Lower peak body temperatures may reduce the risk of exertional heat illness, which is a major concern in endurance competitions. However, repeated cooling and reheating cycles may mask early signs of metabolic compromise. A horse may appear clinically normal at rest, only to decompensate once exercise resumes (Munsters, 2014). This creates a unique challenge for veterinarians: they must evaluate horses not only at rest, but also consider how they are likely to respond to the next phase of exertion.



Dr. Ken Marcella examines Toby as owner Jennifer Stanley looks on.

photo: Becky Pearman

Turning our attention to the hooves, hoof biomechanics and surface interaction also play an important role in Ride & Tie performance and injury risk. Horses may be tied in variable terrain, then reintroduced to movement at different gaits and speeds, often without a prolonged warm-up. Sudden loading on uneven footing can increase the risk of sole bruising, hoof capsule stress, and distal limb injury (Clayton & Hobbs, 2017). Veterinary oversight must therefore include careful assessment of hoof condition, shoeing or trimming adequacy, and gait symmetry throughout the event, even in the absence of lameness. Therefore, conditioning strategies for Ride & Tie horses must reflect these intermittent demands (Ride & Tie Association). All things considered, traditional endurance conditioning focuses on cardiovascular efficiency and sustained aerobic capacity, whereas Ride & Tie conditioning should emphasize tendon resilience, joint stability, and adaptability to variable workloads (McConaghy & Hodgson, 2019). Veterinarians play a role in advising riders on appropriate conditioning programs, including progressive interval training and adequate recovery between training sessions. Horses that are fit for continuous endurance work may not necessarily be suited for the biomechanical challenges of Ride & Tie without discipline-specific preparation (Hinchcliff, 2008).



Dr. Greg Fellers examines Leo as owner Lisa Broyles looks on.

photo: Becky Pearman

Ultimately, Ride & Tie challenges the assumption that endurance is defined solely by distance and duration. Its intermittent structure creates a distinct physiological profile that demands tailored veterinary evaluation and management. The veterinarian's role extends beyond monitoring vital signs to interpreting how repeated cycles of exertion and recovery affect the horse's musculoskeletal and metabolic systems over time. This perspective reinforces the importance of specialized veterinary involvement in Ride & Tie and honors the legacy of early Ride & Tie veterinarians who recognized that protecting equine athletes requires an understanding of the sport's unique demands. As equine sports medicine continues to evolve, Ride & Tie offers a valuable model for studying intermittent endurance and its effects on equine health. By appreciating how this discipline differs biomechanically from other endurance sports, veterinarians can better safeguard equine welfare while supporting the continued growth of Ride & Tie as a sport rooted in horsemanship, partnership, and respect for the horses.







The author at work and play

Runner Up Essay

EHV Without the Panic: What Horse Owners Need to Know Right Now

Alysa J.L. Giudici



Type “EHV” into any social media platform, and the response is immediate. Thousands of posts, widespread discussion, and a steady stream of updates reflect the seriousness with which the equine community views Equine Herpesvirus. EHV is a disease with the potential for significant consequences, including neurologic illness and loss of life, and that reality understandably captures attention.

Alongside this heightened awareness, however, the speed at which information travels can create uncertainty about what actions are most appropriate. Lessons are canceled, horses are scratched from competition, and barns pause normal routines often before clear guidance is available. In these moments, the challenge for horse owners is not recognizing the seriousness of EHV but determining how to respond in a way that meaningfully protects horses.

Increased attention does not always reflect increased disease spread, but it does highlight the need for clear, accessible information. Equine Herpesvirus is one of the most concerning infectious diseases in the horse world, and responding effectively requires both urgency and informed decision-making. Understanding how EHV spreads, what truly increases risk, and how to act early and appropriately can make a critical difference when EHV appears in the news—or closer to home.

What Is EHV, Really?

Equine Herpesvirus is not a single disease, but a group of viruses that pose a significant health concern within the equine industry. The most common strains, EHV-1 and EHV-4, can cause a range of clinical signs, particularly in young horses. Early recognition of clinical signs by owners and caretakers is critical, as prompt isolation and veterinary involvement can significantly reduce spread and improve outcomes. Owners should monitor horses closely for the following signs:

Clinical Signs Owners Should Watch For

- Fever (often the earliest and sometimes only initial sign)
- Lethargy or depression
- Decreased appetite
- Nasal discharge (clear to cloudy)
- Cough
- Swollen lymph nodes under the jaw

Neurologic Signs (associated with EHV-1 / EHM)

- Hind-end weakness or incoordination (ataxia)
- Dragging toes or difficulty turning
- Difficulty standing or rising
- Leaning against walls or fences
- Urinary incontinence or dribbling
- Decreased tail tone
- Recumbency in severe cases

Of particular concern is EHV-1, which can progress to Equine Herpesvirus

Myeloencephalopathy (EHM), a neurologic condition that may develop rapidly and can result in long-term deficits or death. Because there is no reliable way to predict which exposed horses will develop neurologic disease, every suspected or confirmed case of EHV warrants prompt attention, appropriate isolation, and veterinary involvement.

EHV itself is not new. What has changed is how quickly awareness spreads and how frequently horses travel for training, competition, sales, and breeding. These factors increase both the risk of transmission and the importance of clear communication and coordinated responses.

How EHV Spreads and How It Usually Does Not



EHV is transmitted primarily through direct contact with nasal secretions. This includes nose-to-nose contact between horses, shared water buckets, grooming tools, tack, and indirect transmission through human hands, clothing, or equipment.

What EHV generally does not do is drift through the air across entire barns or travel long distances on the wind. The presence of one sick horse does not automatically mean every horse in the barn will become ill. Understanding this distinction allows owners and barn managers to respond thoughtfully, focusing efforts where they are most effective.

Human movement plays a significant role in transmission. Well-intentioned owners, staff, and visitors can unknowingly carry the virus between horses. Simple but consistent measures—such as handwashing, changing clothes between barns, and avoiding shared equipment—are highly effective tools in reducing spread.



Vaccination: Important, but Not a Guarantee

Vaccines for Equine Herpesvirus, often called rhinopneumonitis vaccines, are an important tool in protecting horses from EHV-1 and EHV-4. These vaccines help reduce the severity of respiratory illness, decrease how much virus an infected horse sheds, and lower the risk of abortion in pregnant mares. Vaccination schedules vary, but most horses receive an initial series as foals, regular boosters every three to six months if they travel or compete, and specific vaccinations during pregnancy, commonly at five, seven, and nine months of gestation, to help protect mares and foals.

It is important for owners to understand that no available vaccine fully prevents the neurologic form of EHV-1, known as Equine Herpesvirus Myeloencephalopathy. This means that even vaccinated horses can become infected and, in rare cases, develop neurologic disease.

Because of this, vaccination should be viewed as one layer of protection rather than a guarantee. Outbreaks can still occur, even in well-vaccinated barns. The best protection comes from combining vaccination with good biosecurity, daily temperature monitoring, and early involvement of a veterinarian if a horse shows signs of illness.

Horse owners should work closely with their veterinarian to develop a vaccination plan that fits their horse's age, travel schedule, and level of exposure.

Your Barn Gets "The Call": What To Do First

Hearing that EHV may be present in your barn or local area is stressful—but early, measured action matters more than fear.

The first step is monitoring temperatures. Taking and recording daily rectal temperatures allows fevers to be identified early, often before other clinical signs appear. Horses with fevers should be isolated promptly and evaluated by a veterinarian.

Next, limit unnecessary movement. This does not always mean a full barn lockdown, but it does mean pausing shipping, showing, and non-essential visitors until more information is available.

Isolation protocols should focus on horses with fevers or known exposure, using dedicated equipment and minimizing shared contact. Clear communication between owners, barn managers, and veterinarians is essential—rumors and social media speculation rarely help and often cause harm.

Most importantly, involve your veterinarian early. Early guidance can help determine appropriate testing, isolation measures, and next steps, potentially preventing wider spread.

Protecting Horses Without Shutting Everything Down

One of the greatest challenges during an EHV concern is balancing disease prevention with realistic barn function. While EHV demands respect and vigilance, not every situation requires extreme measures.

Effective biosecurity is built on risk-based decisions: identifying which horses are most vulnerable, where contact occurs, and how movement can be managed safely. Routine temperature monitoring, strong hygiene practices, and transparent communication are often more effective than broad, fear-driven restrictions.

Every barn is different, and no single response fits all situations. Proportional action, guided by veterinary expertise, protects horses while preserving trust and stability within the barn community.

The Takeaway: Calm, Informed Owners Make the Difference

Equine Herpesvirus is a serious and potentially devastating disease, and the concern it generates within the horse community is both understandable and warranted. For many owners, EHV is not an abstract headline—it is a diagnosis that can arrive quietly, in a familiar barn, with horses we know by name. Protecting horses requires acknowledging that gravity while responding with clear, informed decisions rather than fear-driven reactions. Owners who understand how EHV spreads, monitor their horses closely, and act early alongside their veterinarian form the strongest line of defense. In a world where conversations about EHV can dominate news feeds in a matter of hours, the most effective response remains unchanged: informed, deliberate action grounded in veterinary guidance before a viral story becomes a personal one.

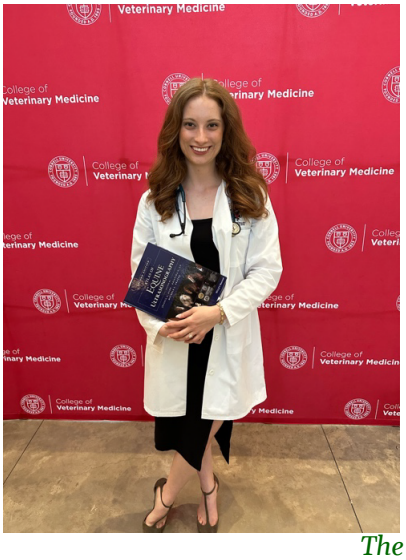


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The author

RIDE & TIE and EQUATHON 2027 Season

THE 2027 SEASON HAS BEGUN! ARE YOU IN?

Courtney Krueger

The 2027 Ride & Tie season is already underway! December 1 marks the official beginning of a new season, and there are three things you can do right now to make it a great one.

1. FILL YOUR DANCE CARD!

Every year, I send a "Dance Card" to my potential partners. It's our way of figuring out who is partnering with whom and which races we want to tackle together. I've learned something over the years: If I don't put races on my calendar, chances are I won't make it to the starting line!

Don't let another season slip by. Head over to **www.rideandtie.org/ride-schedule**, check out the sanctioned races, find your partners, and start filling your dance card. The races are posted, the season is here, and it's time to make some plans!

2. HELP GROW THE SPORT!

Ever wondered how to convince an AERC Ride Manager to add Ride & Tie/Equathon to their event?

Let them know that The Ride & Tie Association will put some money behind their effort:

- **$100 stipend** for an AERC ride offering Ride & Tie or Equathon for the very first time.
- **$200 stipend** for any AERC ride that has Ride & Tie participants.

That's up to **$300 in extra support** (in addition to registration fees) simply for adding a few more timeslots to an event! The AERC Ride Manager has already secured the venue, marked the trails, arranged for veterinarians, and recruited volunteers. Adding Ride & Tie can be a win for everyone. In fact, a couple of AERC rides this year were able to break even financially because of Ride & Tie participation.

Want to make it even easier?

Volunteer to serve as the Ride & Tie Ride Manager. That takes some of the workload off the AERC Ride Manager and helps make the event happen. Contact Sanctioning Officer Rhonda Venable, me, or any board member. We're happy to help you get started. Our contact information is on the inside cover of this newsletter.

3. GET YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN THE SADDLE!

Don't forget to renew your Ride & Tie membership for 2027! Renewing now means you'll receive our next newsletter, coming early next year, packed with all the statistics, stories, accomplishments, and memories from the 2026 season.

More importantly, you'll be ready to compete, reconnect with friends, meet new partners, and enjoy another year of the fun, competition, and camaraderie that make this sport so special.

Renew at **www.rideandtie.org/membership**

THE SEASON IS HERE. THE RACES ARE WAITING.
LET'S MAKE 2027 A GREAT YEAR FOR RIDE & TIE!

Detroit Horse Power Benefit Ride & Run: A Weekend of Firsts, Friendship, and Purpose

By Jennifer Shooshanian

Some events stay with you because of the miles. Others stay with you because of the people. For me, the 2026 Detroit Horse Power Benefit Ride (& Run) was memorable for both.

Every year I look forward to returning to Kensington Metropark. The trails are beautiful, the horses are eager, and the people remind me why our endurance community is so special. This year felt different, because we offered Ride & Tie for the very first time.

A Dream That Started a Year Earlier

The idea took root in the summer of 2025, when I met several passionate Ride & Tie competitors at the Shore-to-Shore Endurance Ride. Their enthusiasm was contagious, and I couldn't stop thinking about what a great addition Ride & Tie would be to our event.

A year later, it happened. We had ten Ride & Tie participants, and most were trying the sport for the first time. The event was sanctioned on a short timeline, so we didn't draw many seasoned competitors. Honestly, that didn't matter. What made the weekend special was watching people step outside their comfort zones and discover just how much fun Ride & Tie can be.

Celebrating First-Timers and New Friendships

Katherine Baldwin completed the longest Ride & Tie distance of the weekend, a 25-mile Equathon Ironman effort, with determination and positivity that inspired us all. Kristen Wiseman and her wonderful mule, Moses, made the most of the weekend. They competed with Kristen's mother, Jan, in Friday's Equathon, then returned Saturday for Ride & Tie with Sarah George. Rebecca Emerson and Christina Williams teamed up Friday in the introductory division, and Saturday brought more first-timers, including Amy Whelan, Elle Parsely, Anthony Pineda, and Wesley Whelan..

Watching newcomers figure it out, support one another, and cross the finish line smiling was one of my favorite parts of the weekend. Success isn't always measured in miles. Sometimes it's the confidence gained from trying something new.



Kristen and Jan Wiseman with Moses the mule

More Than an Event

This ride began in 2015 and became a fundraiser for **Detroit Horse Power** in 2020. Every entry, donation, and volunteer hour supports the organization's mission of empowering Detroit youth through horsemanship and life-skills development. Knowing that makes every mile feel more meaningful. Founded in 2015 by former Detroit elementary school teacher David Silver, Detroit Horse Power uses horses as a vehicle for teaching life skills that help young people succeed in school, careers, and life. Through free summer camps and after-school programs, nearly 1,000 Detroit youth have been introduced to horsemanship and the lessons that come with it. Use the QR code to learn more about this amazing charity.

It Takes a Village

Events like this happen because a community chooses to show up. Amy Whelan donates sanctioning fees and prizes. The Proud Lake Trail Association and Metropark staff keep the trails clear. Veterinarians donate their time, Michigan State veterinary students volunteer countless hours, and Detroit Horse Power students and team members pitch in wherever needed. Many riders give well beyond their entry fees because they believe in the cause.

This year we welcomed more than 100 participants from Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, New York, and Canada. They rode endurance, competitive trail, introductory rides, hunter pace, Equathon, and, for the first time, Ride & Tie.

Looking Ahead to 2027

I won't remember finishing times nearly as much as the conversations at camp, the volunteers working tirelessly behind the scenes, and the first-timers laughing at the finish line. The success of our inaugural Ride & Tie has already generated excitement for next year, and I truly believe we're just getting started.

So I'd like to personally invite you to join us in 2027. Whether you're an experienced endurance rider, a runner, a horse lover, or simply curious about Ride & Tie, we'd love to welcome you. Bring your horse. Bring your running shoes. Bring a friend. Most importantly, bring your heart.

Thank you to every volunteer, sponsor, donor, rider, runner, veterinarian, student, and supporter who has carried this event forward since 2015. You are helping make a difference in the lives of Detroit youth, one mile at a time.

Ride. Run. Give Back. Change Lives. We'll save you a spot at the starting line in 2027.



Amy Whelan on Mo and Elle Parsely on Breaker



Rebecca Emerson and Christina Williams with Huck

Sometimes the Adventure *Is* the Ride

By Emily Gilliam

Sometimes the adventure happens before the ride (see my previous article in the Summer 2026 newsletter about the truck trouble that turned a three-hour drive into borrowing a truck to get to BSF last year). This year the adventure WAS the ride! You're probably thinking the horse did something silly or the rider made a bone-headed decision. Those would be safe assumptions! But this time, the adventure started before I ever saddled up my little mare.

Thursday: Packing with a Porcupine

I had just a few things to do before leaving for BSF, including hauling some bulky items to the local dog shelter. Since those items were in my little two-horse trailer, I figured I'd lubricate the hinges and check for wasps while hooking up. The bulldog-style hitch was tight. I sprayed it, tugged on the collar, and pulled harder. Then I pulled *a little too* hard, and the collar gave way. I flew backward and landed on my tush, right on an American Chestnut. If you've never met one, imagine a porcupine that decided to be a tree.

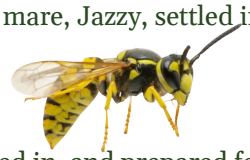


My palm was full of spines. My husband and stepson helped remove the big ones, and we attacked the tiny splinters with better lighting and an arsenal of tools. I still had plenty left to deal with over the next few days.

The shelter didn't want my items, so I headed to the convenience center instead. On the way back, I was grumpy about wasting half an hour when a truck stopped in the middle of the highway. Then I spotted a cute gray French Bulldog. The woman in the truck and the dog seemed headed in the same direction, neither realizing where the other was—like a scene from the Sunday comics.



Then I recognized him: Gunner, an indoor dog who lives nearby! I scooped him up, got him into the truck's air conditioning, and safely reunited him with his family. Suddenly, that wasted half-hour didn't feel wasted at all. I was exactly where I was supposed to be. After packing (which always takes longer than expected) and an uneventful three-hour drive, my little mare, Jazzy, settled into camp and happily munched hay on her hi-tie.



Friday: Buzz Buzz

Friday morning, I brushed Jazzy, vetted in, and prepared for the 10/6 Equathon with my dear friend Lindsay Gunzburger. This season, I'd actually been running to get in shape to "Iron-Woman" the event. More on that in a moment!

We set off on the 10-mile ride, chatting as we always do and letting the horses meander through the woods. We weren't in a hurry. We just wanted a fun, safe ride with no unplanned dismounts.

Around mile five, Jazzy stiffened. Anyone who knows her knows she has occasional Lipizzaner moments: she freezes just before her energy explodes. I was about to push her forward when Lindsay yelled, "BEES!"



I could stay on and hope Jazzy didn't dump me near the nest—or hop off and run, trusting her to follow. I chose running. Jazzy stayed right beside me until we reached a safe spot, and Lindsay called for help with the nest. Huge thanks to the park ranger who took care of it shortly afterward!

Lindsay and I each got stung, and I found about 10 live yellow jackets tangled in Jazzy's beautiful, thick tail. Armed with my crop, I batted the little yellow rascals away. One got feisty and stung me near the armpit. Both horses had taken who-knows-how-many stings, probably dozens.

Two more riders arrived with their own bee-attack stories, including one who had come off. I broke out my first-aid kit, handed out Benadryl, and bandaged an arm. I sometimes swell up from stings, so I took two Benadryl myself. I knew they'd make me sleepy, but better sleepy than super swollen, right?

Thankfully, the horses settled down, and we finished the ride without further stings. We cooled the horses, vetted out, and headed for the run.

Lindsay, who had trained much more diligently, quickly pulled ahead. I should mention that I'd never run a step in my life before the 60 days leading up to this event. My goal from the start was simple: "To finish is to win."

I ran where I could and walked where I couldn't. Those hills were steep! About a third of the way in, my brain started telling my body to lie down for a nap. That was the Benadryl kicking in, I just knew it. All I could do was keep going.

At the finish, Lindsay, her mom, and friends were cheering me in. I was proud to still be jogging after more than six miles on a hot day. That's what I love about the Ride & Tie family: everyone supports you.

Saturday: Soggy Is Better Than Stings

The next morning, I headed to East South Fork for a NATRC ride with Lindsay, her mom and daughter, and a friend. It rained through most of the morning and most of the ride. Soggy and a little miserable, we finished anyway and had a good time.

After the awards ceremony, we returned to BSF. I'd volunteered to pull ribbons on Sunday, one of my favorite things to do. I get to enjoy the trails at my own pace while helping ride management. It's a win-win!

Sunday: Caution—Beautiful but Steep

Trailmaster April Johnson had given me a gorgeous loop that descended to the river before climbing back up. Jazzy was a great sport about everything, including the enormous cantle bags I strapped on to carry all those miles of ribbon.

We encountered gravel, rocks, dirt, mud, and more mud, but the scenery was beautiful. A rider error added a couple of miles, but we weren't in a hurry. Besides, it helped us keep working toward our goal of getting fit for 25 miles!

The climb back up was long and steep, so I hopped off and walked. My thighs and lungs burned, but I was glad to be in better shape than usual—and able to spare my mare the extra weight on the way up.

Back at camp, we packed up and headed home. Jazzy was thrilled to reunite with her fella, and I was thrilled to see my own bed.

One of my favorite things about camping is the extra time outdoors. Sunrises and sunsets I'd usually miss become a bonus on ride weekends, and I always look forward to them.

This weekend had bees, splinters, rain, and a runaway Frenchie, but the sunrises still made the list. Sometimes the adventure happens before the ride, sometimes it *is* the ride, and either way, I'd do it again.



Emily and Jazzy on trail

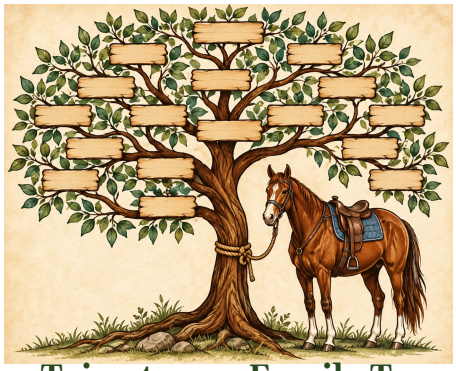


Emily and Lindsay head out



Trailmasters April and Daniel Johnson

Be like Emily. Write an article for the newsletter and email it to ckrueger@rideandtie.org



Tying to our Family Tree

Courtney Krueger

At Biltmore this fall, I teamed up with my niece, Katie Ruth Tucker, and noticed I wasn't the only one competing with family. We had engaged couples, cousins, parents and children, aunts and uncles with nieces and nephews, grandparents with grandchildren, and a great-uncle with his great-nieces and great-nephews. So after the results came out, I did the math. Of the 64 people who competed over the weekend, 27 were related to at least one other competitor. That's 42%.

I set out to write about every family in Ride & Tie, past and present, and quickly gave up. From the beginning, this has been a family sport on both coasts. Families have kept it alive by competing, leading, hosting, and managing races. I won't name them, because I'd surely leave someone out.

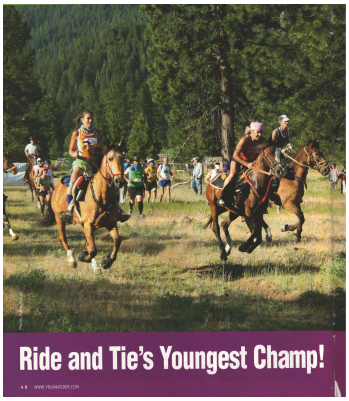
So I narrowed my research: how often have family teams won a World Championship? With help from Annette Parsons and the Board of Directors, I counted 11 wins in 54 runnings. That's a whopping 20% or one in five champions who are related to their team member!

Here's my list. If you own the book 50 Years of Madness, go through the years and see if I missed anyone. If you don't own it, go buy a copy in our store at **www.rideandtie.org/store** and check behind me!

The Wadsworths. Brothers Con and Tod Wadsworth were the first family team to win a World Championship, in 1982. They won the 1983 race which holds the record for the largest starting lineup ever at 187 teams. They won again in 1984 and then came back 14 years later to win in 1998, and then again in 2002. That fifth title made them the only team in Ride & Tie history to win in three different decades.

Tod and Con arrive at a vet check in 1998





The Howards. Jim and his daughter Sara won in 2008, when Sara was 15. She remains the youngest World Champion ever. They won again in 2010, 2011, and 2014. Sara and her husband, Wyatt Landrum, took the West Coast Regional in 2017, and in 2019 Jim and his son-in-law Wyatt won the World Championship.

*Sara's victory was featured in **Young Rider Magazine***

The Venables. Dave and Rhonda Venable won the first World Championship ever held on the East Coast, in 2017, after taking East Coast Regional titles in 2015 and 2016. They also won the East Coast Regional in 2018 giving them a four year sweep on the East Coast.

*The team pictured in a **Wall Street Journal** article featuring them*



The Gonzalezs. Alyssa Stalley Gonzalez is Chuck Stalley's daughter. Chuck has 3 World Championship wins among his 27 starts and 26 completions. Alyssa had little choice but to grow up running and riding! When she met her future husband Nick he did neither. You simply can't be part of the Stalley family that way. So he started running and riding. Teamed up with Alyssa, they finished third in the 50th World Championship. Nick finished the Western States 100 mile trail run in 2023. Ten months after their daughter was born, Nick and Alyssa Gonzalez won the 2024 World Championship.

Nick and Alyssa with both the First Place and Best Conditioned trophies



We began **Equathon World Championships** in 2015. Equathon is a natural family friendly sport because team members only have to be able to ride or run, but not necessarily both.
Family teams have won 3 of the 8 World Championship Equathons, an impressive 38%.



The Murrays. In 2019 husband/wife team Andrew and Alyssa Murray were the first family to win a World Championship . I remember that race well. In 90+ degree heat, I led the running portion for more than seven of the eight miles, until Andrew and Justin Chambers ran me down in the last mile bringing their teams in first and second.

Andrew powering through to win the 2019 Equathon. photo: Sierra Gerringer

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The Lathams In 2022, Carolyn Latham got permission to run for both of her parents Bob and Sharon when her brother came down with COVID. She ran one lap for her dad and one for her mom. She and Bob had the winning time.

BOTH Latham 2022 Equathon Teams





The Cooks. In 2025, Chelsea Ross and Chad Cook entered the Equathon as an engaged couple who had never done either sport. They've since married and hope to compete again.
Chelsea out on the Equathon Course. photo: Becky Pearman

Turns out that in Ride & Tie the horse ties are tight and the family ties are tighter!

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The "Back" Cover

Renee Brachfeld follows the old adage *"Ride 'em like you stole 'em"* as she gallops away from her partner Helena George on Helena's horse Shadow at Iron Mountain

photo: Becky Pearman

Ride and Tie

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