

BCCTRA WORDS OF WISDOM AND RIDE MISTAKES MADE

BY BARB SMITH

First off, even the most experienced riders make mistakes; we just try not to make the same mistake twice!

1. HORSE:

- These rides are all about how well your horse performs so make it as easy as possible on your athlete.
- Ride trails like you would ride a long distance Event. Take munching breaks. Stop at every stream or puddle to give your horse a chance to drink so that the horse knows there is always time for that. Go at your horse's most comfortable speed.
- If your horse regularly loses shoes, carry an Easyboot or other boot protection, or Duct tape and Kotex.
- Make sure you mark every bump and scrape on your horse for the pre-ride check. Nothing is more frustrating than losing unnecessary points for pre-existing wounds. Some of us are riding horses with so many scrapes that the diagram is almost totally covered in inked scribbles.
- Use the slurpy slurry method of feeding during the breaks so that the horse consumes necessary water and nutrients. Have the horse's feed ready ahead of time.
- Your horse needs to enjoy this Event as much as you do so let the horse buddy up with another horse pal.
- Make sure your horse is comfortable having mouth and teeth checked, eyelids stretched and neck and body pinched. Make working around your horse safe for the volunteers and judges.
- Leave your saddle on but loosened at least 20 minutes after a long ride day. If you take your saddle off right away your horse might get a sore back or skin hives.
- Even if your horse is DQ'd for being too late or going off course, finalize the P & R and Vet checks so that you can ensure your horse is OK. I had a horse tie up in the last 4 miles of a Ride, finished on foot and then had the horse judged – surprisingly the horse's vital signs were fine one hour after Ride end.
- I generally lose points for Pulse over 12; diminished gut sounds and hydration so always pay special attention to those issues while competing.

2. TACK:

- Never, never, never try new tack for this event. No matter how grungy your regular tack is, use it. If you clean your tack, make sure you have one ride in before the big event in case you haven't assembled everything properly. Double-check all points of wear on your saddle and bridle before the Event. I generally ride between 2 to 3 hours so my horse only goes that 20 plus mile distance for these Events. I have discovered that saddles and cinches that work well for a normal day ride will give girth galls for a 30 mile event.
- Go bitless if you can to give your horse unimpeded eating.
- Carry spare tack in your trailer.

3. HUMAN:

- Guaranteed that by the end of the Ride you will be brain dead so plan ahead.
- Make sure that you eat and drink before and during a ride, not just after. Your pulse, respiration and hydration rates are as important as your horse's. You have to be in as good a shape as your horse and dehydration, headaches or muscle or stomach pains will ultimately

affect your horse's performance. There have been some stinking hot rides last year and drinking lots of water throughout the day is a must!

- Bring painkillers – ibuprophen is probably more effective than alcohol but the latter works just fine too.
- Be calm, a frazzled rider always has an equally frazzled horse.

4. CLOTHING:

- Never wear new clothes on a ride – be comfortable. Ladies, please wear your sports bras and spare us all the ogling at the wild flopping bouncing boobs. The trot out requires sensible shoes, so wear them.
- Bring a change of clothes to relax in after the ride.
- Be prepared for weather changes and always carry rain gear.
- Have a special easily accessible spot to store your P & R card and Ride map while underway. Use pockets that fasten or special pouches.

5. Lounging equipment and other items:

- Bring a chair, dinner plate, cutlery and plastic glasses.
- Figure on something easy to bring or prepare for the potluck dinner. I always bring extra serving utensils because there never seems to be enough of them.

6. RIDE MISTAKES AND HUMAN ERROR

- Listen to the Ride briefing and make notes about points of interest and crucial trail issues. Read the map carefully – it will tell you how long the ride is and the appropriate time to finish plus extra time for the checks. When in doubt ask. Write on your map the time you should be crossing the midway and finish line.
- Pay particular attention to the **time deadlines**.
- You have no more than 10 minutes to get to the P & R check and you are solely responsible for your own promptness. Take your horse to the P & R crew at 9 minutes and announce your readiness so that they know you are waiting. If they are too busy, they should note that you had “presented yourself” in a timely manner. Otherwise you will get a 10 point penalty. Always wait as long as possible as each minute allows your horse to further mellow down. You start losing points when the horse's pulse reaches 13.
- Vet judging must be completed within the midway time allotted and generally takes about 7 to 8 minutes. Don't miss this check – you need all three judging sessions to score or to get mileage.
- Again you must present yourself to the Vets 60 minutes after you cross the finish line and no later or points will be deducted. You can't be checked before the 60 minutes elapses.

Out on the trail:

- **Read your map!** Don't just follow the flagging blindly or another Rider's directions as they may be totally confused.
- Don't get off your horse and walk forward at any time while out on the trails unless the Ride Manager has specifically allowed it or there is a safety issue.
- Think ahead for the 2-mile mark, as beyond that you must always be moving forward. We generally allow for 30 minutes from that point to finish to give the horse time to cool down. Often the route covers the same ground coming and going to the Ride site so make note of how long it takes you to cover the ground.
- An experienced rider always wants to come into Midway and Ride end slow and relaxed.