

TO FINISH IS TO WIN

# THE ARABIAN HORSE & ENDURANCE RIDING

Courtesy of Experience Arabian  
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Various facets of our history and culture involve stories of “long rides.” From our first President, George Washington, who rode 1,700 miles in an effort to unify the 13 independent colonies; his ride inspiring a new nation, and later, President Teddy Roosevelt who required the cavalry to outride their foes and often ride 100 miles in a day (a trained prowess that would later serve as a strategic military advantage), to the Pony Express where a typical day for a rider was 75-100 miles, changing horses every 15-20 miles, and William Cody (later known as Buffalo Bill), who earned his keep as a young 14-year-old on these rides; at one point riding 384 miles on multiple horses without resting and which was considered to be one of the greatest long rides ever; has emerged what is known today in the United States as Endurance Riding and The American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) that supports the sport with their very important motto of, “To Finish is to Win.”

Hailey Zehring aboard Fredabaskin (front),  
and Ashley Wingert with Liberterra KGL



# WHAT IS ENDURANCE RIDING?

The sport of endurance riding is a great way to spend many hours with your equine partner. Equestrians of all ages, from all walks of life, participate and are consequently drawn together by the common thread of enjoying and safeguarding the welfare of their horses while traversing many miles of beautiful horse trails. When both are properly trained and conditioned, riders participate to test their ability as equestrians and to test their horses' athleticism. Ultimately, you must make the right decisions for your horse who has no idea what is ahead of them, and which will lead to a successful and safe finish for the both of you.

Distances range from 25 to 100 miles in one-day and two-day events and pioneer rides of three or more days of competition. Distances less than 50 miles are considered limited distance, or LD for short. Some compete to win, and others ride just to complete.

Throughout the course are vet checks and mandatory holds, where the horses must pass veterinary inspection to continue. They are checked for soundness and dehydration, with their pulse and respiration taken. The riders' time keeps running until their horses "pulse down", reaching the required target heartrate of typically 60 beats per minute. So, it is important that the horses recover as soon as possible. How long that takes is determinate upon your horse's health and conditioning.

During the vet check (usually 60 minutes), the VET will score the horses on various criteria and before or after the scoring, the horses are fed and watered.

## WHY ARE ARABIAN HORSES SO UNIQUELY EQUIPPED TO SUCCEED IN ENDURANCE?

In endurance riding, for both horses and riders, it's often the thinking side of the ride that is the biggest challenge, and so from this important perspective, there is no better companion out on the trail than an Arabian. Known for their:

speed	stamina
intelligence	people centric personalities
friendly character	inquisitive nature

Arabians are also quick learners, sensitive, high spirited and willing to please. It is these attributes that make them very intuitive and naturally inclined to be excellent equine partners and suited for long rides with their human companions. Having a strong bond and partnership with your horse provides you with the trust and confidence that you can finish, which will often be the difference between completing your ride or not.

On the brawn side, the Arabian has differentiating advantageous physical attributes that well position them to succeed in endurance. In general, Arabians are:

- smaller
- more compact with a lighter body
- have leaner muscling  
(think long distance runner vs. football lineman)
- strong bones and hooves
- higher percentage of slow twitch muscle fibers, making them more fatigue resistant and able to more efficiently use oxygen
- thin skin which allows for the efficient dissipation of heat
- naturally wide nasal passages, respiratory tract, and trachea, allowing for a more rapid delivery of oxygen to the lungs
- a short back with often one less rib and one less lumbar vertebra gives them a very smooth and efficient way of moving down the trail
- and "heart" (mental and physical). As it pertains to the physical side, given their smaller body, Arabians seem to on average have a larger heart relative to their size which allows them to move more blood, and in turn oxygen, more quickly and efficiently through the body.



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## WHY WOULD A RIDER TRY THIS SPORT?

### YOU GAIN COMMUNITY

Endurance riding comes with an endurance family. Sharing the common goal of finishing with a healthy partner naturally comes with supporting one another out on the trail, in camp and thru training at home. Endurance is at the same time, an individual and team sport, where you ride your own ride always, but it often takes a team of riders, family, friends, and crew to get a horse and rider across the finish line. The comradery gained is forged thru intense effort and teamwork and for this reason, relationships between riders are dependable always. Many a rider, without giving it a second thought, stop their rides and give up their finishes to help a fellow rider out on the trail. It is a sport filled with like-minded, well meaning, sincere and supportive people.

### IT'S FUN, EXCITING, & AS CHALLENGING AS YOU WANT TO MAKE IT

It's you and your horse and riding partners and mother nature testing you and your horse against the trail, elevation, weather conditions, and very objective and measurable performance criteria like pulse, respiration, hydration, gut sounds, etc., thus completion results are more understandable and achievable for beginners.

### YOU LEARN ABOUT ALL FACETS OF HORSEMANSHIP

Hooves to heart rate to gear and everything in between and probably more than you can ever imagine, you'll learn about horses and riding. When you ride and train for endurance, the long hours in the saddle will provide you with new insights and a new appreciation for what it means to really be one with your horse and you'll find that the key to winning is to simply never give up, to finish is to win, a great life lesson for all of us.

That quiet persistence and commitment to finish must go both ways. Often, we need to summon up our own courage and mirror our horse's spirit to endure as well and ride thru whatever it is that ails us, psychological, physical or both, as they are willing to do for us.



Lindsay Fisher aboard Bucephalos (above), and Brad Person with WMA Bandy the Clown (left).

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## HOW DO YOU GET INVOLVED?

Participation and success in this discipline does not require lots of money and time. With endurance rides, limited distance rides and introductory rides scheduled year around in regions across the country, there are riders and ride managers all working to actively recruit new riders in their region thru the AERC "Greenbean" program. Every region has a mentor program and Greenbean coordinator who is willing and able to help new riders, and the American Endurance Ride Conference [www.aerc.org](http://www.aerc.org) has very helpful staff who are accustomed to helping new riders get acquainted with the sport. A call or email to the main office will illicit an almost immediate friendly response to any question you might have and then they can direct you to a whole host of "getting started" resources and training modules and even connect you with riders in your area. You can also find training partners in your region on the AERC Facebook community page as well, or you may also contact me at: [Lucian@thelongride.com](mailto:Lucian@thelongride.com) for more information.

We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at a ride soon!

Lucian Spataro Jr., pictured left, with longtime Endurance partner WMA White Sandy (Mr. Sandman), has been dedicated to protecting the environment he enjoys so much on his adventures. His journey across America on horseback to bring awareness to preserving our planet can be enjoyed in his beautifully illustrated and richly photographed book, *The Long Ride*, available for purchase on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

