

# American Endurance Ride Conference

By JEANETTE WARREN

**J**O THE RELIEF of all endurance riders, both prospective and seasoned, an organization has been formed which is designed to act as a central clearing house to end some of the confusion that surrounds any new sport.

In the past each individual ride picked a date, hoped it did not conflict with any other ride, and then sat back and trusted that somehow enough people would hear about it to warrant staging the event. During the last couple of years, while endurance riding grew by leaps and bounds with several new rides starting each year, some of the better-known rides had to turn away entries, while others just were not heard about by too many until after the ride was over. There has also been a decided lack of information on how to set up rides.

It would look as though most of these problems are now being solved with the formation in December of 1971 of the American Endurance Ride Conference, which has in its organization some of the most knowledgeable people now participating in endurance rides either as contestants or on the ground.

The first elected chairman is Phil Gardner of Auburn, Calif., with Marion Robie acting as secretary. These two are real pros in their field and their enthusiasm is great, so the organization should be off to a good start. The board of directors includes Charles Barieau, whose great photographs of endurance horses and riders have done much to boost the sport. The other eight members of the board have been prominent in the endurance field and it is their collected experiences and knowledge that have been pooled.

The best way to explain the goals of the American Endurance Ride Conference is to quote from their preliminary report which is as follows:

"Due to the rapid growth in the sport of endurance riding in the last two years and the proliferation of new rides, the American Endurance Ride Conference has been formed to standardize rules and to act as a national organization to distribute information on endurance rides. The following definition was formulated as the endurance ride standard:

An endurance ride is an athletic event in which the same horse and rider cover a measured course, usually 50 or 100 miles, and conforms to the following conditions:

1. First horse to finish in accept-

(Continued on page 124)



• Phil Gardner, first chairman of the American Endurance Ride Conference, crosses the crest of the Sierra Nevada on the Western States One Hundred Mile One Day Ride in 1969.  
Photo by Charles Barieau



• All endurance rides are veterinarian supervised. Here, a secretary checks the respiration rate of an entry at one of the veterinary check stops.  
Photo by Jim Whitcomb



## Ride Conference

(Continued from page 44)

able condition is the winner.

2. No minimum time limit.

3. An award for best-conditioned horse.

4. Controlled by licensed veterinarians.

5. Everyone who finishes within the maximum time receives an award.

All rides anywhere in the United States that meet the requirements set forth in the definition will be sanctioned by the American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) and will be included in all publicity releases. At the end of the year a national champion endurance horse and rider will be chosen according to the following point system. Points to accumulate for each horse-rider combination.

In order to qualify for points, a ride must be sanctioned by the American Endurance Ride Conference. Everyone who finishes a sanctioned ride is awarded one point for every mile regardless of what place he finishes. The top ten finishers receive, in addition, a percentage of the mileage in points depending on their place of finish. First place—100 percent, second place—90 percent, third place—80 percent, fourth place—70 percent, fifth place—60 percent, sixth place—50 percent, seventh place—40 percent, eighth place—30 percent, ninth place—20 percent, tenth place—10 percent. The winner and the best-conditioned horse each receive 50

points regardless of mileage. On a 100-mile ride the winner would garner 250 points while a 50-mile winner would be richer by only 150 points; but if he won both first in and best condition on a 50-miler, he would receive 200 points."

Some of the rules are worthy of further explanation. The words "acceptable condition" are important in Rule 1 as they safeguard the horse against an overly eager rider. Occasionally the first horse across the finish line is not declared the winner as the veterinarians consider him to have been used excessively or to be in unsound condition.

One of the guidelines used by many veterinarians is that the horse must be considered in good enough condition to continue without distress if the ride was longer. If he is not, they will deny him the first-place trophy and award it to another horse. Rule 1 also means that there can be no weight divisions in an endurance ride (such as there are in North American Trail Ride Conference events). If there are weight or other types of divisions, there is more than one winner, which would preclude Rule 1.

Rule 2 says there cannot be a minimum time limit. In the past some rides have tried to establish a minimum time under which a horse cannot finish (again a NATRC regulation). Designed to protect the horse, it has not worked out for endurance rides as many people can arrive at the finish line in under the minimum time and wait to cross the line en masse when the clock dictates, with the result that



there is no one winner. (It should be pointed out, however, that the minimum time rule works effectively in NATRC rides where the judging is completely different both in concept and practice than it is for endurance rides.)

A best-conditioned award as in Rule 3 has been traditional in endurance rides and many people consider it more desirable than the first-place award. It rewards a rider for the care he has given his animal on both the day of the ride and during the pre-ride training period. It is not unheard of to have both this award and the first-place award go to the same horse. While the best-conditioned horse is usually chosen from the first ten to cross the finish line, some rides change this a bit by choosing the animal to receive this honor from all horses crossing the finish line within one hour of the first horse. Sometimes he is selected from only the first five horses across, according to the rules of the individual ride. Therefore, the AERC has written this rule, as well as all the others, in the broadest terms possible.

Because endurance riding is a sport for only well-conditioned, healthy, sound animals, Rule 4 is essential. Someone has to judge the horses' fitness both prior to the ride and during the course of the contest. A trained veterinarian is the only one capable of making such an analysis of each horse, and his presence is necessary for the protection of the horses. He may also be needed in case of injury.

Rule 5 recognizes that all endurance rides are a test of stamina and ability and that to complete one, without being in the top, is enough reason for an award. It sends a lot of people happily home with a new buckle, plaque, or whatever the award for a particular ride may be.

The point system is also worthy of elaboration. A horse and rider act as a team. If the rider switches to a different mount, a separate tally would be kept for that combination of horse and rider. Thus, if a rider earned 800



● Pre-ride briefings are essential to a well-run endurance ride. The Castle Rock Challenge Ride chairman holds a question and answer period the evening before the ride.

Photo by Jim Whitcomb

points on one horse and 700 on another, he would only have 800 points toward the Endurance Horse and Rider of the Year trophy.

If the point system seems a little complicated, it is designed to prevent ties, and while it stresses winning, it also gives emphasis to the best-conditioned horse and other horses that finish high in the Top Ten. At the present, the endurance season seems to run from March to October, but there is no official year as yet as far as the AERC is concerned. The present plan is to award the 1972 National Champion Endurance Horse and Rider of the Year trophy at a fall dinner.

Any ride wishing to be listed with the American Endurance Ride Conference should send a copy of their rules along with the date of their ride to P.O. Box 1605, Auburn, Calif., 95603. The AERC will also answer any questions about the procedure they have found best for setting up a new ride and upon request will mail a list of dates and addresses of all rides sanctioned by them. A self-addressed, stamped envelope would be appreciated, but no charge will be made for the listings or for material sent.