

Tougher than Tevis? And oh, what a moon!



This year was the 35th running of the Virginia City 100, making it one of the oldest endurance rides anywhere. Virginia City is in Nevada, about 30 miles south east of Reno, way up in the mountains at about 6000 feet. It's an old western mining town that was huge in the silver mining days of old. It's also where Hoss, Adam, and Little Joe used to frequent, to get drunk at the saloon, after their Pa hollered at them. Today the town is a tourist place that caters to

visitors from all over, even endurance riders. The NASTR (Nevada All State trail riders) group has been around a long time and puts on the 100-mile event each year. There's no fifty or LD ride here, just the 100. Ride manager Connie Creech, who is just about the nicest person anywhere, does a terrific job of putting on this big event. These NASTR people really do it right; it shows in the overall quality of the ride. This was my first attempt at the VC100, and guess who I got to ride? Yep, Zayante again. This old codger has propelled me through 450 miles so far this year with no pulls, including the Washoe 100 in April, held just down the highway. He's looking good and ripped through the Eastern High Sierra Classic a few weeks ago, so away we go! My riding partners were Jackie Bumgardner (his owner) who rode her great mare Holly, along with Merri Melde on Jackie's horse Raffiq, a spunky seven-year-old Arabian gelding. (who's for sale, buy the way. Raffiq, not Merri.)

This would be Merri's first attempt at a 100, as well as Raffiq's. Base camp for the ride was located right in the middle of town, just a block from the main drag. It was sort of neat, being right in the middle of town, at least the day before the ride. The ride meeting was held in a place called the depot, a huge warehouse sort of thing that had been converted to a dance hall, complete with a piano. Connie and head vet Susan McCartney educated everyone on the ride, then turned the ride meeting over to the Calcutta guys. The who? Hey, this is Nevada! They have this tradition of holding a little lottery sort of thing on this ride. I was a little fuzzy on the gambling concept, even though I grew up in Nevada, but it works sort of like this: for each weight division in the ride, people bid on all the riders, hoping to pick who they think will finish first, second, or third in their division. The highest bidder gets that rider, the pot is all the money taken in for that weight division. They pay out money for win, place, and show based on some strange formula. We were outside listening to the madness going on in there, it sounded like a lot of fun. I thought it was cool when someone put in a

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bid on me! Our sleeping arrangements were the back of Jackie's horse trailer, since the camper was left at home in favor of the speedier car, since Jackie was hauling the horses. And speaking of speedy cars, the Ferrari Club of North America was in town, having rented the main highway out of Virginia City to the south. They were holding a timed race up the mountain in some of the neatest cars in the world. The cops just shut down the road, and let the racing begin! You can do anything in Nevada with enough money. It was music to my ears when the Ferrari 512 Boxer in complete race trim came flying up the twisty highway at full tilt, its V-12 screaming out a glorious melody. The Maranello's, the Modena's, the Testarosa's, what a treat!

Oh yes, the ride. Sleeping Friday night was very difficult due to the whoop-em-up party bands playing in the clubs on Main Street. Quality? Bad. But unfortunately, very loud. And then there was Zayante on that stupid skyhook. Don't get me wrong, that skyhook is a great way to tie a horse. Ever tried to sleep a foot from one, with a horse eating all night? Every movement of the horse's head resulted in a loud squeak. It got so bad that Judy finally got up in the middle of the night and tied him to the trailer. Then there was that damn mosquito. No West Nile Virus for me, thank you, he had to die. It was a long, long, sleepless night- Oh camper, where art thou? 3:30 in the morning is just way too early to get up for anything. Get up? Who slept? I was very groggy while tacking up and preparing to head out at 5:00 am. The start line was right on the main street downtown, just like in an old western. (The old west didn't have many fudge shops and paved roads, though.) We started out with a controlled start to the edge of town and took off trotting on nice dirt roads. A little single-track trail led up out of the valley, then dumped us out on long, straight, flat dirt roads across the desert. Okay, so where's the rocks everyone always talks about on this ride? Heck, this was easy! (you see where this is going, right?) We were on nice dirt roads that led us around the valley, then through some housing neighborhoods. Still nice roads. We turned off and headed out across the desert on yet another road, this one just peppered with some rocks. Laura Fend, Brenda Benkley, and Karen Bottiani passed us up as we turned onto another road, this one had some rocks on it. Still not too bad, you could trot, but carefully. We were at mile fifteen or so when we turned up another climb, now the rocks were coming out into the morning sun, hanging out on the road like lizards basking in the warmth. A long climb took us up to the top of the big grade, where we started down a long road. Jackie had gone on ahead a little, Merri and I hopped off and led the horses down the hill. The long hill. The very long hill. It was a 45-minute walk the way down to the valley floor, with some nice rocks near the bottom. We ended up in a town, where we trotted along the roads to the first vet check at 25 miles, right behind a mini mart. Very handy! Bathrooms, cold Gatorade, cokes, but alas, no Taco Bell. Judy (mine) and Gary Fend were there

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crewing for us, a very appreciated service. It was the first of three one-hour holds, that seemed like a lot, maybe they know things we don't. It was a nice break, however, we left refreshed and happy.

I sort of figured that when we walked down that grade, we would have to go back up. One of those principles of the universe and Endurance riding axioms, you know. And we did, right up this thing called Bailey Canyon. It really was a neat trail, all single track, through trees and canyons, but it was almost all rocks. It went a long way up the mountain, we just walked the whole thing. Okay, I'm starting to see the rocks now. It took over an hour to get up that thing due to all those rocks. I was happy to hear from Judy Reens that the leaders walked this thing as well. Spectacular trail, just all rock. Once at the top, the rocks stopped, but the climbing didn't. Up and up some more, then a huge down hill, all the way to the Washoe lake basin. When I mention these climbs and downhills, these are not hills we are going over, but whole mountains. Right at the bottom of the valley there was a house whose owner let the ride go right through his property. The owner was out there at the water trough he supplied, with a huge platter of home-made Oatmeal with cranberry cookies. Oh yeah, they were good. What a great guy. We crossed the highway and got onto the fantastic single-track trail that led over to the Washoe Lake campground. It is a sandy, flat, twisty, really fun trail that goes a couple of miles through the sagebrush. Zayante was spooking at everything for some reason, it was reported that lots of horses were. Bad spirits, maybe? Judy and Gary were at the camp for us with a nice snack for horses and riders.



We rested a while, then attacked the huge climb. All the way back up that mountain, in the heat of the day, straight up for a few miles, with the SOB's smack in the middle. For those who don't know, the SOB's (yes, that's what it stands for) are this set of three hills that are incredibly steep, rocky, and generally annoying. You go straight down, then straight back up for a couple hundred yards or so. These suckers are steep, but I liked doing them in this direction better, and doing them in daylight was a whole lot easier than it was at the Washoe ride. I led Zay down, and then up the first, and biggest SOB on foot, making it a slight SOB for him, and a true SOB for me. Once we passed these stupid hills, we trotted along a moderately rocky road for a few more miles to a great rest and water stop, just under the summit at the reservoir. Lots of goodies for riders and horses; the horses were drinking an unbelievable

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amount of water all day. (Actually, so was I.) That's certainly a good thing out here. Five miles of trotting on a decent road led us back to Virginia City, where we had to go right through the paved streets in town to the base camp. Tourists were looking at us a little strangely, and when you tell them we are doing a one-day, 100-mile ride, they just say, "Yeah, right! Can we rent horses, too?"

Fifty-two miles down, another hour hold. I ate as much food as I could find, the horses were doing the same thing. It was around 3 in the afternoon and was pretty warm but thank goodness it wasn't unbearably hot. If you tried to do this ride in July it would be pretty ugly. Zayante looked very good, in fact he felt really good all day to that point. (except for all the spooking, the turkey) Holly was her usual great self, but the surprise of the day was Raffiq. This guy was a metabolic monster. Susan was very impressed with how good he looked. Hugh Vanderford was still doing well; it was his horse's first 100. After our quick hour, we left camp for the second loop and headed South along the highway where the race cars were blasting up the road. The next few miles were walking only, it was slow going down a rocky canyon. We finally hit some roads and started making up time. We wound all the way out of the valley, over towards Carson City, where we picked up the Washoe 100 trail. After a nice water stop, we hung the right turn back up the long valley again, more climbing. This was trotable, but was still a lot of work. At the top we had to do a couple miles of steep climbing that we walked, all the way to that Reservoir water stop again. We spent more time here, since the horses were famished. The sun was just setting as we headed back out, faced now with one of the longest climbs in the ride. It was walk/trot on the roads due to the hills and rocks, but it took a long time to get to the top. About halfway up the climb, it looked like a fire was burning on the horizon. It was the moon coming up, burning dark orange as it lifted above the mountains. It was absolutely unbelievable how bright that moon was. Every rider was babbling about it- you really could have ridden in sunglasses when that baby was high in the sky. We passed up Virginia City; we were way, way, up above it on the top of the mountain range, and then kept going north. Here's where it started getting tougher- lots of up and down, rocky, with not a lot of places to trot. It was slower going through the tough terrain in the dark. The moon was like a spotlight, though, helping immensely. Dave Rabe had marked the trail, it was done as well as any I have ever seen. Speaking of Dave, he rode and finished the ride, just a few days after flipping his ATV while out marking the trail. He was climbing up one of those SOB's and just looped out over backwards. Did I say those hills were steep? He has an edema on his side that looked like a huge, blue tattoo. After endless up and down climbs, the trail finally headed back down, way down, to the highway crossing. More and more walking. We made it back to the base camp at about 9:30 pm, 77 miles down, 23 to go. That third hour hold was feeling pretty nice at this point. All three horses were great, Zayante feels the same as

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he did at the start. The spooking stopped completely once the sun went down. Maybe he's really an owl? Once again, Judy was there for us, doing everything we needed. It was a very nice rest. Poor Laura was pulled here for lameness. Drat! She toughed out those first two nasty loops and would not be able to do the easier third. I would have fallen asleep except for the fact I kept eating.



That hour went fast- we were back on the trail once again at 10:40, 23 miles to go. Jackie said the third loop used to be tougher, (she has finished 10 VC100's) but they eased it up a little in recent years. (Thank you NASTR) It was indeed easier- we got treated to some nice roads that let us trot for a half hour or so at a time. Wow- thinking back, there were not many spots like that on the entire ride so far. The moon was so bright it was almost like daytime. We rode a long way down the valley, all the way to the end where we found an incredible sandstone formation that rimmed the valley. Boy, I sure hope we don't have to climb that! No, we got to walk through some of the cool formations, then headed back. After some more nice trotting, we hit the last vet check at mile 92. It was all lit up in the middle of nowhere, like Francisco's at Tevis. The ride workers there were great, giving us blankets, drinks, mashes for the horses, just great service. We vetted through and headed out on time, it was now about 1:30 in the morning, and only 8 relatively easy miles to go. It was here I noticed how sleepy I was. While trotting, or walking off the horse, I was fine, but while walking on horseback, my eyelids were drooping big time. I'd heard that Trilby has been known to sleep on the horse, it just might have been possible. We headed back out, trotting along in the moonlight, not talking much, just moving up the road towards camp. 2:15 am and we are back across the highway. Off Zayante one more time for the downhill walk, and at 2:40 or so we crossed the finish line. Connie was the only one there, she ran to wake up Susan to vet us out. All three made it just fine! We chatted for a minute about how neat the ride was, but I had to get some sleep. Judy had everything all laid out for us, we just put the beasts up and went to bed. All three horses were eating like crazy for the next few hours, but at that point I could have slept through a train wreck.

The awards breakfast was at a casino in town, Connie and crew gave out the awards and completions. There were 61 starters, 50 finishers, Zay and I came in 23rd. That was the highest completion rate ever in the ride, I think they said. My award will be a belt buckle with Zayante's name engraved on the back. That one will go in the trophy case. Tom Johnston won and got BC, (you ought to see the

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size of those perpetual trophies!) Judy Reens got 5th on Benji, and a four-and-a-half-year-old junior finished on a horse that was really old, someone said 28 years? Wow! Makes the grumpy old Zayante look like a baby. Zay got quite a round of applause when Connie mentioned that he now has 10,520 miles. Hugh finished, as did Brenda and Karen. The Calcutta payout was fun- I'm going to have to try that next year. Yeah, I'll come back. I like tough rides, but I'm spoiled, because the right horse makes tough rides easy.

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