

Hit *The* trail

Looking for a
new challenge?
Get acquainted with
endurance and
competitive trail riding.

By JENNIFER O. BRYANT



In competitive trail riding competition, the horse judged to have completed the event within the time allowed and in the best condition wins.

Are you bored with the show pen? Do you love to get away from it all on the back of your trusty Paint, but yearn to try something different—something to challenge both body and mind?

If you're a free spirit, yet still enjoy sharpening your sword on the whetstone of competition, the sports of competitive trail riding (CTR) and endurance riding may be just what you're looking for. No fancy show getup or politicking required—just you, comfy tack and equipment, and a trail-savvy and well-conditioned Paint.

Make that a horse of any color—for that's another of these sports' drawing cards: Any sound, reliable, sturdy mount will do, and nobody will look askance if you don't have the breed du jour.

Intrigued? Read on, for there's a lot to like about these fast-growing equestrian sports. In this article, I'll introduce you to a diehard Paint-horse fan whose colorful mounts have logged a lot of trail miles and helped her become (literally) a standout in the field. I'll explain the differences between the two sports. Then I'll tell you how you can get involved and hit the trail.

CTR and Endurance explained

Both CTR and endurance riding are distance-riding competitions over courses of various lengths. A 25-mile ride is appropriate for beginners, and even experienced riders like to start the season with this relatively modest distance. There are rides of increments up to 100 miles, which is reserved for the most seasoned and well-conditioned horses and riders.

The horses in both types of competition are monitored closely by veterinarians, who keep tabs on vital signs, check soundness and ensure that horses are fit enough to continue after mandatory "holds" or rest stops along the course. Veterinarians assess horses' appearance and condition before the ride commences and again on completion. Most rides give awards to the horse judged to be in the best physical condition.

So how do these sports differ? CTR is a test of conditioning and of a



Hallie McFadden and her 18-year-old mare, Snip Dee Doo, cross a bridge during the Renegade 30 Competitive Trail Ride. McFadden bought "Dee" as a 3-year-old, and the two learned endurance and competitive trail riding together.

rider's ability to pace his or her mount, while endurance riding is a race. In CTR, the objective is to complete the course within a specified time window (the window for a 25-mile ride, for instance, is 4 hours and 10 minutes to 4 hours and 40 minutes); there is no advantage to being first over the finish line. In CTR, the placings are determined by scoring. Judges subtract points for condition-related faults—everything from scrapes and girth galls to lameness and failure to get a horse's heart rate down to a specified level—found during and after the ride. The horse judged to have completed the ride—and, in these sports, "complete" means "finish within the time allowed"—in the best condition wins.

Condition is equally important in endurance, but here speed does matter. It takes a higher level of conditioning and more skill on the rider's part to cross the finish line at the head of the pack and still pass the veterinary inspections, and that's why endurance is considered the more advanced sport of the two. Novices are advised to start with CTR. As Debbie LaBerge of Cochranville, Pennsylvania, a member of the 1992 World Championships silver-medal-winning U.S. endurance team, puts it, "CTR really promotes good horsemanship and learning to condition and monitor your horse. It is a great stepping-

stone to the higher demands of endurance."

As one might expect, these sports are not for the youngest of equines. Horses must be at least 4 years old to take part in a CTR, and 5 to compete in endurance.

A colorful horse life

"I've always had Paints or pintos," said Hallie McFadden, 59, of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. A lifelong rider, McFadden fox hunted "and did a little horse trials" until her sister, Gail, introduced her to CTR in 1991.

Debbie LaBerge taught Gail the basics of the sport, and Gail passed the knowledge on to her sister; but McFadden was pleased to discover that "a lot is common sense." She was especially happy to find that, unlike in many equestrian sports, her fellow competitors were eager to assist and to offer advice. "The people in this sport are the nicest bunch of people around," she said. "They'll do anything to help you."

McFadden's mount is an 18-year-old Paint mare named Snip Dee Doo (by Snip's 7L Bar and out of Peggy Duffy). McFadden bought "Dee" as a 3-year-old from a friend, who had driven and fox hunted the filly. The two learned the sports of CTR and endurance together.

"She is the nicest horse," McFadden said affectionately. "She knows voice