

The CMDTRA Spring Ride



View from the Club House

The CMDTRA Spring Ride was held on Mt Diablo on Saturday, May 7, and this is the story of my ride. That said, the *real* story started a couple of weeks prior to that. Most rides have a problem getting trained people to work the pulse and respiration (P&R) stops. If you know what a P&R is, you probably want to be riding the event, not volunteering at it. To address the problem, Linda Thomason, Region 1 Outreach Chair, got with Ride Management at CMDTRA and set up a clinic for prospective P&R volunteers. According to five different accounts, which were consistent on overlapping details, Linda did the lecture part of the clinic, and Steve Meroshnekoff, the P&R guru of, well, all of NATRC, and Lee Cannon, one of Steve's trusty sidekicks, provided the hands-on training.

I hate it when people start sentences with "It's ironic, but . . ." - it just sounds so smug but, in this case, it's justified, so live with it.

It's ironic, but NATRC's most effective representatives are our P&R leads, who don't ride. Most of them are like Steve and Lee: competent, kind, and goofy; a combination that makes the people around them feel comfortable but confident that things are under control. And, when I think about it, it's reasonable: I'm *really* charming, but the only one who sees me on a ride is my riding partner - but everyone sees the P&R crews at least four times on every ride. Anyhow, by the end of the clinic, Steve and Lee had convinced (inadvertently, I think) five of the prospective P&R volunteers that doing the ride was (a) reasonable for their horses and (b) would be lots more fun than doing P&Rs. So they signed up and rode. Four of the five reported having a GREAT time and the fifth, Gary, features in this story.

So we're back to the weekend of the ride. I drove up from Santa Cruz on Friday morning. It rained for the last hour of the drive up and stopped just as I started up the hill to the clubhouse. Registration opened at 1 PM, so I was shooting for arriving about 1 and getting a good parking slot in the lower arena where the "little rigs" are usually parked. When I got there, I had my choice - I was the *only* rig in the arena. Sunny (my mare) and I parked, set up camp, and took off for our usual apres' trailering walking tour, which took

about an hour and gave us a good preview of things to come. The rain had stopped, sort of, but there was a pretty constant mist, and the ground was really wet. The soil on the mountain is pretty much adobe mud, so when it gets wet, it gets really slick. So, even just hand walking Sunny, there was a lot of slippin' and slidin' goin' on. That said, the low clouds on the hills and the delta made stunning views.



Sunny - Alone at the Top

When we got back to our camp, we were *still* the only rig in the arena. I was starting to get worried: Sunny would NOT be happy being alone in the arena when she knew there were other horses darned close. I put her on her high tie for awhile, but both of us were uncomfortable, so we took off walking again. This time we went to the upper arena, Where the Big Rigs Park. It didn't take long to find Angie and Steve's rig and THERE WAS AN OPEN SPACE NEXT TO IT! It seemed like destiny that just as I was getting desperate, a trailer space would open up. So Angie held Sunny and I went down and de-camped from the Lonely Arena and headed up. What a relief. Sunny and I both relaxed and settled in for the weekend.



Steve and Angie Setting Up

I picked up my registration packet and got in the vet check line. Sunny passed the standing inspection no problem, but the vet, Carol, noticed that she was short-striding on her right front. I saw it when Carol pointed it out - dang it! It was pretty subtle for my eye and I guess it had sort of crept up on me. It wasn't awful, but we had to come back in the morning so Carol could verify that it hadn't gotten worse before we were okayed to start.

The guy just in front of me, Gary, was a first-time rider (one of the attendees at the P&R clinic), and his horse was showing lame as well. We both walked away with little clouds over our heads, but Gary's was way gloomier than mine: he was SO concerned that he'd done something stupid that made his horse lame, and he was SO unhappy that the horse was in pain. He was ready to just go home and wait for his horse to heal. He is clearly a concerned horseperson - the kind we want in NATRC. We chatted about it, and I told him that I thought that if Carol asked him to check back in the morning, his horse was probably going to be okay: our vets are paid to be ultra-conservative about horse health and soundness. If she had seen signs of unintentional mistreatment, she would have told him about it. And if she was certain something was wrong with his horse, she would have sent him off immediately to see his own vet. I think Gary talked to a bunch of other people, as well as me, and we all must have agreed, because he stayed.

The ride meeting was short and pretty much to the point. Chris, the trail manager, talked us through the map, describing areas with downed trees, etc. When the meeting finished, we walked back up to our rigs in more rain. The only thing I could think of to do was to blanket Sunny and go to bed. Dang.

Ride management sent around a honking car at 5 AM to get us up for our 7 AM start. We met Carol, the vet, about 6:30 and trotted out again. There was no change, so Carol let us start. Gary had trotted out his horse just before us, and his horse was completely recovered, no lameness at all, so he was riding, too.

There were five Open riders, and Angie and I started at the back; the vet was concerned about Sunny's soundness and Angie was concerned about Beau's attitude - he wasn't his usual motivated self. So off we went. The first obstacle was about 200 yards from the out timer while the horses were still pretty amped.

We had to go up a steep 15-foot slope, muddy and covered with wet, slippery grass. Sunny and I had done it while we were walking the previous day, so she sort of had it covered, but it was tough for me to stay in position on that angle.

We hit the single track about 50 yards after the obstacle, and it was instantly obvious that the trail was really slick and our timing goals were going to be tough to meet, so as soon as we could, we started on Angie's patented method of meeting time: trot EVERYTHING you can, even if it's 25 yards. When we came back to the Novice/CP trail, after the first Open loop, there was a Novice in front of us, going like crazy - pulling away from us and we were doing Open speed. It was Gary. We were sort of shaking our heads, but he was maintaining, so we figured he had a reason.

Our first watering stop was about six miles into the ride, at the entrance to a park. Not only is there water there, but also a parking lot, a ranger station, and several trailheads - so lots of people on a Saturday morning. Oh yeah, it's also a traditional observation point for the horsemanship judge to watch our position on the steep descent into the area. As expected, Karel, the Horsemanship Judge, was watching. We threaded our way through the cars and people to the stock tank water trough. Beau wasn't thirsty, but Sunny marched up to the water with intent. I positioned her in the (safe) middle of the tank, but just as her nose hit water, she did an NBA-worthy fake and ducked left so she could scratch the outside of her nose on the edge of the trough. She didn't make it to the edge, though, because she hooked the float valve for the tank, with the hose attached, to her headstall. Being Sunny, she jerked her head up, pulling the valve and the hose off the tank. The float valve was released because it wasn't floating, and the hose started spouting water at full pressure. Sunny bounced and bobbed until she finally knocked the whole mess off her bridle, I got off and replaced the float valve, and we continued our adventure. Oh yeah. She didn't want to drink any more.

While we were at the tank, some other riders came up and told us that there had been a serious accident at the start of the ride. Lea Landry had fallen at that first uphill obstacle. She had slipped off sideways, and her horse had fallen on her. Twice. The story we got was that she'd been unconscious for about 5 minutes. The rider following her was a paramedic and had taken control. He'd attended her, called the hospital to describe her status and get her evacuated, and waited until the ambulance and other paramedics were there to hand her off to. He had then hopped on his horse and continued the ride. It was Gary. It turned out that he wasn't sure how the timing worked, and he was worried about the time he'd lost taking care of Lea. Sorry for the spoiler, but he *did* make up the time and his horse had great vet checks. Who says no good deed will go unpunished?

After the tank, we had to ride through several groups of birders - maybe 50 or 60 total. They were carrying lots of binoculars, telescopes, and tripods and wearing exotic hats. The horses were interested in them, and they were interested in what we were up to, too, so it was an even deal. After the birders, we just went up and up for a long, long time. And there was enough goo on the trail so that both Beau and Sunny were sliding all over. There are frequently cattle on this part of the ride, and I was grateful that they didn't show up; I'm not sure we could have survived if Sunny had to pay attention to her feet AND the cows. And of course there was a P&R at the top of the hill. Sunny was channeling her Inner Arab and couldn't stand still, much less put her head down. And if I pulled it down, she started eating - I guess it was pretty lush on the trail edges, and there was even grass growing on the trail itself. In any case, we got out of the P&R without losing any points and on we went.



And There Were Yellow Flowers, Too

We continued to climb, and it continued to be slick, but the views compensated. We had the clouds and hills, but we also had fabulous flowers: the globe lilies were in bloom, as well as a couple of colors of lupine, honey suckle, poppies, and in the area that was burned a couple of years ago, morning glories. I think the next horsemanship obstacle was on this part of the trail. We had to wait on one side of the stream while Beau and Angie executed the obstacle, which was probably the hardest part of all. When it was our turn, we had to cross a stream, look at Karel and wait for instructions, which were to back up (and it was up) a nearby single track path to a marker, then walk down. Sunny and Beau both did beautifully, and on we went toward lunch.

Just as we came into the lunch-stop P&R, it started to rain. We got through the P&R and into lunch where we grabbed our coolers and a flake of the hay that ride management had trucked in, and hid under a tree that protected us from most of the rain. Sunny ate like a champion and drank (out of a stock tank) quite a lot (26 swallows, to be exact), so lunch was a success. Then we got ready to leave. Ha. Karel, the horsemanship judge, had us doing an off-side mount down in this little ravine. I practice off-side mounts a couple of times a week, but I had recently shortened my stirrups AND I do the mounts from a mounting block. There was no mounting block in the ravine. And even using the side angles, I couldn't get high enough. Anyhow, I sort of lunged up on Sunny and kicked her in the flank with my right foot. She hopped and spun, and I kept ahold of her somehow. I made it to the ground safely and tried it again - same result: I kicked her, she jumped. I declined to try again because I figured it would be tempting fate and I was already in kharmic debt for getting to park with the cool kids. Angie and Beau, of course, did it perfectly. And off we went, just as it quit raining.



Davern and Stephanie riding through the Morning Glories

We missed the first turn out of lunch which is worthy of comment only because the trail was so well marked everywhere else. We got back on track, but this was the scariest part of the ride for me. It was *so* slippery, I honestly thought that we were going to go down several times. We were following Beau, who is one of the most sure-footed horses I've ever ridden with, and he was slipping. Sunny was panting like she was dying, but I think it was nerves more than respiratory stress. We finally made it to a relatively flat part, and Davern and Stephanie caught up with us. We had gotten into the line to embarrass ourselves (the observed off-side mount at lunch) in front of them, so we were able to leave on time and ahead. Anyhow, just as they were joining us, I heard a loud, "HEY!" so I turned around to see Davern and Tux both on the ground with Tux looking to roll. Davern scrambled to her feet and got Tux to his. They couldn't dust themselves off - it was too muddy - but Davern verified that neither of them were hurt, she climbed on and continued. Davern and Stephanie passed us shortly after that.

We continued into the last P&R. While we were all waiting to get checked, one of the P&R volunteers came up and said to Angie, "We're worried about your horse, it sounds like he has a heart murmur." We were puzzled because Beau was still 7 minutes away from being checked. After some confusing conversation, we realized that the volunteer was talking about Eddie, one of Angie's other horses that one of her students was riding. We got pulsed out and headed toward the point where Carol, the vet, had set up shop and was keeping Eddie. While Beau and Sunny were being checked out, Carol and Angie discussed Eddie's condition and, because he had a really high heart rate, they decided to trailer him back to camp. However, the trailer couldn't get up to where we were, so Eddie had to walk down to the trailer, about a mile. So Angie's student, Claire, rode Eddie, and we did a pretty stately walk down to the trailer. Angie spent a couple of minutes with Claire, coaching her on getting Eddie into the strange trailer, then we continued our ride. About 10 minutes later, Beau nickered as the trailer passed us on the road, which runs parallel to the trail at that point. Angie thinks that Beau was able to smell Eddie before we saw the trailer. Pretty cool, eh?

At that point, we were substantially over time, but decided to see how much of it we could make up. We were pretty consistent in moving as quickly as we could, but the surface was just too sketchy to take any

chances. But at the next time point, we'd made up almost 15 minutes, I think. This was really weird because we'd calculated that we'd need a 4.8 mph average on that stretch to meet minimum time, and Angie and I agreed that we didn't come close to making that rate - but at the next point, we had pulled in all that time and, according to the GPS, we'd done all the distance. Hum the Twilight Zone music now.



Some Novices Ahead of Us

Then we had just about 3 miles to camp, mostly flat. There was one more obstacle - we had to cross the mercury pond. At this point, that was pretty anti-climactic - we'd crossed about 25 creeks during the ride, so I'm not sure either Beau or Sunny even noticed that we were doing water. Then we finished, I think about 20 minutes over minimum time. Whoo hoo.

When we finished we got a post-it with a number and a time on it. The number was our finishing position, which was the order we would return to see the vet to vet-out. The time was 15 minutes after we got in when we had to get the horse's Cardiac Recovery Index (CRI) measured. To do the CRI, all the horses have to have it done in pretty much exactly the same amount of time after their finish - that is, you had to be there at your scheduled time or the comparison with other horses wouldn't be fair. The CRI wasn't actually used in calculating placings because they're still working out the particulars, so these are practice runs, for the riders, the P&R crews who are doing them, and ride management to see how they can be used. At the CRI, your horse's pulse is taken, then, at the P&R person's cue, you trot your horse 125 feet. Exactly one minute after your cue, your horse's pulse is taken again. It should be the same or lower than the first time it was taken. Sunny did really well - 11 and 10.

After that, we returned to camp and I tried to get Sunny as clean as I could. Carol the Vet had told us at the Ride Meeting that we didn't have to worry about getting our horses spotless; it was just too cold to wet them down to get them clean.

When we returned to the vet, Davern and Tux, who had finished well before us, were still there. It turned out that Tux's gut sounds had almost disappeared, which was really surprising to me because he had looked great every time they had passed us, and they had passed us quite a few times. They had left a message for the on-call vet, Davern was just walking him to keep him moving, and Carol the vet was

keeping an eye on him. In between Tux checks, Carol was vetting the rest of us out.

Sunny met all Carol's criteria, and her short-stridenedness hadn't gotten any worse, so I was happy. After being the floor show at lunch, I knew that we weren't going to place well, but getting through the first ride of the season with good metabolics was a real relief, so I felt like it was totally appropriate to give Sunny her junk food and to have a beer myself. Again, I had lucked out with the neighborhood I was in and Steve and Gene and Lee were all available to have a beer, too. Life is good.

At about 7, I toddled down to the clubhouse and enjoyed the beautiful view along with dinner. After dinner, there was a raffle in which there were no prizes that I didn't want - it was pretty amazing.

After the raffle, we had the awards. Gary was given a special sportsmanship award for his handling of the early accident. While giving the award, Ride Management also gave us an update on the rider who was thrown: she had a broken rib, a broken clavicle, a concussion, and bruises all over her body. The Ride Manager had talked to her, and she was coherent and feeling pretty good, considering. She was going to spend the night in the hospital, but was scheduled to go home the next day. Gary also won the Heavyweight Novice Horsemanship and Horse categories. I guess it wasn't a huge day for him, since his career is saving lives, but still. The rest of us got our prizes and certificates and went happily to bed after a long, long day.

Oh yeah, Davern and Tux. They never did get in touch with the on-call vet, so Tux was trailered over to UC Davis where he was treated. He's fine and will be competing at the Cowboy Camp ride in 2 weeks.