

Never in a million years did I think I would be riding a horse 25 miles, let alone 100 miles. In 2007, I was told of a person, Lori Windows, who needed someone to help condition her endurance horses. Upon talking with Lori, I agreed to campaign her 23 year old Arabian, Gandi, to his 8,000<sup>th</sup> UMECRA mile. We achieved this goal—riding over 350 miles together that season. Gandi not only took care of me, but also taught me how to hang on and endure. The following year I attempted my first 50, but was pulled at 40 miles—still a great feat for me, since it was perhaps the fastest and furthest I had ever gone.

At the end of 2007, a friend gave Lori and I a horse named Saleros Legacy. “Legs” and I rode Competitive and Limited Distance rides in 2008, his first real season and my first attempts at riding by myself at a ride. We went on to win the 2008 Arabian Horse Association National Competitive Ride. The following year, 2009, we began our “Endurance career”. We tried—and failed—our first 100 miler. It was very disheartening to have put in all the work and to feel so good going into mile 60, only to have a horse so sore he didn’t even want to move. After a few adjustments, we came back in 2010 and completed the Run for the Border 100 with a lot of help from friends, both human and equine.

Lori, still a great friend and mentor, pushed me into a sport that I thought I was going to die doing. Now I love it! It is very difficult sometimes, especially when the rides get long or difficult, but the end results are well worth it. I have gone from having a love of horses, to being addicted, especially when it comes to knowing how a horse thinks, acts, moves, eats, and works. I never realized that my own mental perspective could have such an effect on my equine companion. Even when I’m tired at mile 40 (or even mile 22!), I still try to keep an attitude that will give Legs more energy—instead of pessimism, trying a little optimism. I am a fanatic about my horse(s) eating—being a trail rider first, I was dead-set against it. The saying “no feet, no horse” could translate into “no eat, no horse”, for a horse’s appetite has the potential to directly impact his performance, and his overall health. And because I had to learn about my horse’s diet and well-being, I had to translate it into my own health. I now make sure that I am properly “electolyted” and “fed”. (Who knew that I would be sprinting to my horse’s stash of electrolytes when my legs cramp up?)

My advice for new riders might be to push yourself all the time. Riding a lot of miles is difficult, physically and mentally. I had no idea how difficult it was until I started riding for Lori. Four miles didn’t seem like much at the beginning, but when you’re constantly trying to balance, direct a horse, and hang on for dear life hoping you won’t die from a massive heart attack or pass out from a lack of oxygen, it seems like it will never end. You may not want to go out in the cold or rain, but sometimes the best rides are those that are performed in the harshest of circumstances. Another thing for “newbies”—learn, learn, learn! There is never an end to learning, or such a thing as too many sources. Learn from many people and events, then take what you learn and use it in a way that is best for you and your horse.

I still don’t know how some of these fantastic athletes go as far, or as fast, as they do. Someday I hope to be like them!