

Starting Endurance

Endurance is a very friendly sport catering for riders from eight to eighty years old, child to grand-parent. Whether you are on a horse or a pony, a native breed, a heavy horse, a cob, a thoroughbred or an Arab every combination is welcome and can compete successfully. All you need is for your horse or pony to be sound, healthy and fit for the distance you are asking them to do. The sport of endurance offers you endless opportunities – whether you choose to be competitive or not. When you first start, as a member or a non-member, you can enter pleasure rides which are between 14km (8 ¾ miles) and 32km (20 miles) which you need to complete the ride between 8kph (5mph) and 12kph (7 ½ mph). If you then become a member you are able to enter Graded Endurance rides which start at 32km (20 miles). These rides start at novice level where you have to complete the ride at a speed of between 8kph and 15kph (just over 9 ¼ mph). As you gain ride experience and start riding further you can qualify for higher levels progressing through, from Novice to Open and finally to Advance level. Once you have upgraded to Advanced you can then qualify to ride in the Competitive Endurance rides.

As the welfare of the horse is paramount, all the National rides have a pre-ride vetting. The first stage is that you will take your horse in either a headcollar or a bridle to the farrier who will check your horse's shoes or hooves if it is barefoot. Following this you will go to the vet who checks your horse has no abrasions or sore places. They will ask you to trot up thirty metres to check your horse is sound. You can ask for them to check your horse's heart rate, although this is not compulsory until you are completing Graded Endurance rides. You can then tack up and start through the start gate. At the finish you are required to present your horse once again to the vet within thirty minutes of the finish where they will once more check your horse, as they did at the beginning. This is an exceedingly cheap way of having your horse's health checked! The vet sheet is ready to be collected from the Secretary about 30 minutes later and they will have calculated your completion time and speed for Pleasure riders. Graded riders will receive (depending on their speed, pulse and whether they are riding as novice, open, advanced standard) a graded rosette from a grade 1 to a completion.

When you have entered the ride you will receive (in the week prior to the ride) a map, sometimes a description of the route called a talk-round, a vet sheet, (used at a national ride for the vet to write their findings down) and a vet time. You need to arrive at least twenty minutes before your vet time to allow you to go to the Secretary hand in your paperwork and pick up your numbered bib. Members have a log book for their horses where all the rides the horse enters will be recorded as well as the result. You will also keep all your vet sheets in here.

The ride will be marked for the whole course either with tags hung from the trees, biodegradable chalk arrows on the ground or plastic arrows on posts. The ride will take you across fields, along bridleways, through gates and sometimes along roads or lanes. Every now and again you will go through a check point manned by other members. This enables the organisers to sure you on the correct course and that you are safe. You are free to either ride on your own or team up with another rider. At no time will you be required to jump.

Each region in the United Kingdom has a local group which is the first port of call for members. This is where you will find a friendly face and someone to give you some advice or confidence. In this area we are known as the South East group. Every ride has an organiser, a secretary and a technical steward. (They check everything is running smoothly and to Endurance GB rules) The rides have many volunteer helpers as

there are lots of jobs such as the check point stewards out on course, the vet steward to send you into the vets, the vet writers to write down on the vet sheet what the vet has found, to the ride starter.

It is an excellent idea when you start to offer to help at a ride - we have found this to be really useful as one meets more experienced riders who are always willing to explain things to us and answer any questions that we had. This is where you will learn an amazing amount about the sport and make new friends. There is comprehensive advice on the South East group's web site www.enduranceegbsoutheast.co.uk as well as the main Endurance GB web site www.endurancegb.co.uk both these web sites will give you information on the dates, locations and class distances of the rides and some helpful hints. The South East group's page can also be found on Facebook just search for "Endurance GB South East (official)" and you can follow us on twitter @EnduranceGB

As you progress in the sport, or even at from the start, if you have a willing partner, friend or helper you may like to have what is usually called a crew. Their job is to drive round the roads meeting you at certain agreed spots and give you and your horse drink, possibly food and water to pour over the horse to cool it if it is hot. As you return for the vetting they can help get the horse either cooler or warmer depending on the weather and generally help you prepare it for the vet.

Come along and try a ride, should you only wish to do the shorter distances then all your horse needs to be able to do is to hack out for around an hour a few times a week. As the distances get longer you will need to do more but there is no pressure to progress to longer distances unless you wish to. Whether you and your horse enjoy hacking and enjoy riding on different terrain in new places or you wish to get fit for eventing, or to make new friends we hope to see you at an Endurance GB ride this season.

Written by

Rosemary Attfield UKCC level 3 Endurance Coach