

## Ride & Tie - Two People, A Horse and an Exhilarating Race

Although the sport of Ride & Tie has been in existence since 1971, it is a relatively unknown sport that combines trail running, endurance riding, and most of all, strategy. The object is to get all three team members (two humans and one horse) across a 20-100 mile cross-country course by alternating riding and running. Sounds simple enough. One team member starts out running, the other starts on the horse and rides down the trail as far as they think their partner can run (or walk) and still keep up a decent pace. At that strategic point the rider stops, dismounts, ties the horse to a tree or fence post, and continues down the trail on foot. The team member who started on foot gets to the horse, unties it, mounts, and rides to catch their partner up ahead. When they get to their running team member they can either stop and exchange, or ride further up the trail and tie the horse and then continue running. When, where, and how a team exchanges is up to them, and this is where the strategy lies. Every trail runner has their strengths and weaknesses, and the same is true for horses. Factor all the strengths and weaknesses of two runners and one horse, along with weather conditions and the topography of the course, and you can understand why Ride & Tie is as much mental as physical. This is why such a growing number of runners and riders are joining the sport of Ride & Tie. It's fun!



Trail runners find the sport exhilarating. The horse adds an interesting and at times an unpredictable element. It has a mind of its' own. It thinks and reacts, but not necessarily how you think it should. One cannot be a mere passenger, nor can one treat a horse as though it were a machine. It is flesh, blood, and spirit. It is a herd animal, and you and your partner are the herd. It is competitive, and remarkably aware of how the "game" works. Its' camaraderie and willingness to compete along side its' human partners as a team is amazing. It can pick you out of a crowd and identify you from a distance. It acknowledges your arrival by whinnying and is ready to do its' job as soon as you get a foot in a stirrup. Experiencing a horse giving you all his power, agility, and heart so willingly is truly inspiring.



Endurance riders find Ride & Tie challenging. They have asked their horses to carry them for countless miles over rough terrain. They have asked their horses to be tough and continue on in spite of minor aches, pain or swelling, in heat, humidity, cold, rain, snow, wind, and darkness. They have asked their horses to travel miles without eating and sometimes drinking. Now they are the ones on foot, experiencing just a little of what they have asked their horses to do all along. The result ♦ empathy, appreciation, and an entirely new respect gained for one's horse. The endurance riding motto is "to finish is to win", and Ride & Ties are the

epitome of this thought. Why run when you can ride? Because one day you may have to and it will help your horse perform better. If a rider is out of shape, the horse must work harder. Riders seem to need motivation to get themselves in shape and having an upcoming Ride & Tie as a goal seems to help. The thought of their horse and a good friend depending on them to do their part is enough to motivate any rider. The real reward, though, is the sense of accomplishment when you finish a Ride & Tie. In spite of your self doubts, you endured. You are tired, sore, and probably a little dehydrated, but the only thing that matters is that you finished ♦ and that feels GREAT!

Beyond the physical challenge and mental strategy of Ride & Tie is the out and out "rush" of a Ride & Tie start. Picture an open meadow with as many as 100 horses, riders, and runners warming up, stretching, waiting anxiously for the shotgun start. The electricity of anticipation in the air is the unmistakable excited and nervous anticipation in horses and humans alike. Both participants and spectators will admit to goose bumps and butterflies as the warning, "one minute to start", is announced. When the "Ready, set, GO" command is given, the butterflies are immediately replaced with a adrenaline rush as the herd of horses, once standing 15-20 wide, and 5-6 deep, flood across the meadow at a flat out gallop. "Riiide & Tiiiie!" is heard over the thundering hooves and a "YeeHaa!" is almost impossible to resist.

All teams have the same strategy for the "start". It is simply to survive it. Riderless horses at times can be seen racing to catch-up to the galloping herd while their dumped riders run after them. Although serious injuries are rare, the majority of mishaps occur within the first 1/2 to 3 miles. A well-known truth to veteran Ride & Tie participants is you won't win a race in the first three miles, but you can definitely lose it. This sobering fact keeps the majority of teams "bridled".

With limited visibility from the haze of dust, the runners quickly maneuver the meadow in hot pursuit of their mounts. Most are well prepared, with bandannas covering their noses and mouths, and glasses to protect their eyes from dust and flying rocks from the speeding horses in front.



As the trail narrows into the woods, horses tied to stout trees dot the sides of the trail. Decorated with brightly colored ribbons or strange or unusual grease pencil markings to distinguish them from other horses, they wait, standing in a cloud of steam from their own body heat. Their flanks rapidly pumping air through their flared nostrils acting as a radiator to help cool them, their eyes are wide with excitement as they search down the trail for their human partner.

For the first couple of miles, the trail is crowded with runners and horses each dodging the other. The unspoken rule of the road is to pass on the left, so runners try to keep to the right, leaving as much room as possible for upcoming horses. Some horses are tied, some are being ridden, and some ♦ are loose. "Loose Horse" is the call for anyone and

everyone to look out, not just the runners but the riders too. A loose horse usually settles down after a bit, and is easily caught. Usually.

At about mile five, the crowd begins to thin. Horses settle as their team gets into a riding and tying rhythm. With the worst miles behind (or the best depending on how you look at it) but many more in front, it is time to put their race strategy to work. There is only one constant in Ride & Tie, and that is that nothing is ever constant. Every mile and every tie has another set of circumstances to deal with. A team must be focused, recalling many details from the maps, rider meeting, and pre-riding the course to anticipate what lies ahead, and quickly make adjustments to their strategy to maximize all three team members to the team's advantage. Although every team has a different strategy, all have the same goal in their minds ♦ get to, and especially out of, the vet check.

Midway in the race is a mandatory check point called a vet check. Every Ride & Tie has at least one vet check, and usually two or three. It's purpose is to protect the horses from being abused in any way. The horse must meet a predetermined pulse and respiration criteria, then be examined by veterinarians for signs of fatigue, sickness, dehydration, and lameness. Any horse in question will not be allowed to continue.

The last part of a Ride & Tie, is more like multiple mini-races within a race. Equally matched teams will tend to group and spread out from other groups of equally matched teams, creating competitive skirmishes amongst the four or five teams in the group. Although the competition is great, all know that the real competition is the course itself and the weather. Both can be amenable, or relentless, and both must be considered in combination.

Finishing a Ride & Tie is both humbling and gratifying. You are not there by your own efforts, but by the efforts of all three team members. Your partners, one two-legged and one four-legged, have given to you as much as you have given to them ♦ everything. To most participants, a Ride & Tie is not won by the fastest team. It is won by those who have the will and fortitude just to finish.

Ride & Tie: two people, a horse and an exhilarating race! Go Ride & Tie!