

This Year's 'Ride of a Lifetime'

AERC National Championships 2008 Preview



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—Stagg Newman

Edward Kidd and a junior rider make their way along the technical trails during the Top of the Rock Ride. Photo © Genie-Stewart-Spears, www.geniess.com.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY GENIE STEWART-SPEARS

Southern Indiana and the Daniel Boone Distance Riders Association, on October 16 and 18, are offering AERC members a ride of a lifetime by hosting the National Championships on trails in the Clark State Forest. Recently the DBDR bridged an AERC/Clark State Forest partnership through trail funding. The oldest state forest in Indiana, Clark State Forest is comprised of 24,000 acres of wooded forestland, with headquarters in the town of Henryville, just 25 miles north of Louisville, Kentucky.

Endurance rides have been held in the Clark State Forest for 15 years. With its varied terrain, from flat ridge tops and hills—referred to as “knobs” in this region—to low-lying creeks and valleys, neither you nor your horse will get bored in either the 50- or 100-mile championship. For the most part the trails are wide enough for two horses abreast or to pass safely. The trails will be golden with the fall foliage and the views are breathtaking. Why would you want to miss such a spectacular ride?

Making it possible

Feeling the money crunch with high fuel and food costs? Be creative in finding ways to make it to the AERC National Championships. Instead of a summer vacation, make the nationals your destination this fall. Base camp will open the Friday prior, and there are a number of day trips you can take with family and friends (see “Things to do in the area”).

If you normally travel alone, buddy up with a friend or two to save on expenses. Riders who buddy up can have a “money pot” where each person traveling together puts in, say, \$100 or \$200 or more, depending on the travel distance, to be used for fuel, oil, or any minor repairs (tire blow-out, for instance) on the road. When the trip is over, what is left is divided up and given back to the participating parties.

A family affair

Do you have a junior rider who would like to enter the championship? Meghan Delp and her mother Lisa drove from Maryland to preview the trails during the Top of the Rock Ride in late May. “I liked the pretty views, and although it wasn’t

always an easy trail because of some of the steep switchbacks, it wasn’t scary,” said 14-year-old Meghan Delp, who completed the 50-mile course in ninth place overall and first junior. “I really want to come and ride in the National Championship because the trails are enjoyable,” she added.

Her mother stated, “I would strongly encourage parents to bring their children to compete with them in the rides. What a wonderful way to spend time with your children! Think of the strength you are building in your children to be able to do this sport. They learn how to discipline themselves and it gives them confidence. And, when they fail to complete, although disappointing, it also teaches your child how to deal with problems, work on fixing them and move forward.”

What to expect at base camp

Base camp is on veteran endurance rider Bill Wilson’s farm with plenty of parking for rigs and grassy space for pens. While the twisty, narrow road to base camp may make a few pucker up, you’ll quickly forget the less than a mile of road when you hit the trails.

Ride managers Amy Whelan and Cindy Young are working diligently to make this a classy event. Young said, “We’re still lining up vendors and sponsors. Horse Lovers Outlet/Distance Depot with Kristen Lacy will be one of the vendors, as will Running Bear Farms with Teddy Lancaster. I am working with a local business, Metzger’s Country Store, to have a truck on site with supplies such as hay, feed, shavings and other things riders might need.”

Specialized Saddles has committed to donating a Euro Lite saddle to the first place overall winner in the 50-mile event.

Besides nice completion awards, each participant who enters the ride will receive a grooming bag, T-shirt and portrait. (I’ll be serving as ride and portrait photographer.) Reminder: wear appropriate attire to the vet-in for your portrait session.

For the 100-mile entrants, there will be a pasta dinner the evening before their event, and coffee, juice, fruit and doughnuts the morning of the start. Lunch and snacks will be available during the day for them

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too. The awards brunch will be Friday mid-morning. (All meals subject to change.)

The 50-mile entrants will be treated to a pizza party the evening prior to their event and also be offered coffee, juice, fruit and doughnuts the next morning. There also will be snacks during ride and an awards banquet Saturday evening. (All meals subject to change.)

"I'm sure we'll have some sort of raffle drawing/prize giveaways," added Young. "And, the two events will wrap up with a great party and band on Saturday night.

What to expect on the trail

Tom Gower of Wisconsin, who recently won best condition on JG Saqr in May's Biltmore 100, has competed over these trails and plans to enter both the 100-miler and 50-miler. "The course," said Gower, "has a little bit of everything: single track, dirt roads, a small amount of pavement (at least if we use the traditional course) rolling hills, flat sections for moving out, and some short steep climbs and descents. This is definitely not a course where the rider just sits backs and asks his/her equine partner to canter an 8- or 9-hour 100 miles.

"It is a technical but fun trail and, at times, your equine partner will appreciate you hopping off and getting up the hill on your own on some of the short but steep hills!" said Gower.

"The course is technical," stated past AERC president Stagg Newman, "and smart riding takes advantage of a horse's strengths. A climbing horse should use the hills to its advantage while galloping-type horses should use the flatter sections. Riders will need to keep reserves for the steeper hilly sections."

Because some of the trails have a base of white rock, Jan Worthington says she pads her horses. Although Jan and a few riders recommend padding the horse's feet or using hoof boots, especially for the 100-mile distance, Gower said, "Overall the course has good footing, with little rock. I have never used pads at Chicken Chase [spring ride] or Spook Run [fall ride]. I would not consider it a concussive ride.

"I have ridden this ride in rain and that adds another fun challenge and requires riders to make smart horsemanship decisions about the trade-offs of risks versus gains," said Gower.

"There are many stream crossings," he continued, "and ride management does an

excellent job making sure water tanks are at strategic locations and that they are full."

Speculating on the winning time for the 100, Gower said, "I suspect the winner will do the championship course in around 10 hours, but there are places where walking will be required.

"This is a great venue because of the great trails and because ride management is also all down-to-earth, easygoing endurance riders who will do everything in their powers to make you feel welcome and help you have a good time," said Gower.

A word from the RM

Ride manager Cindy Young stated, "The National Championship is in a good central location this year, allowing riders from several adjoining states the opportunity to come because it's close. I hope others traveling longer distances can buddy up to come.

"These are some of the most beautiful trails in this area, and challenging as well. I sometimes forget how fortunate I am to have these trails to train on a regular basis," said Young. "We're all looking forward to putting on a great competition and I hope people make the plans to come!"

Nearby getaways

If you come early to the National Championship rides, there are numerous day trips you can take. In Louisville, there's shopping, a tour of Churchill Downs Museum or the Louisville Slugger Museum. Perhaps an evening on the gambling boat Caesar's that is docked on the Ohio River at New Albany is more your style. (Check out www.gotolouisville.com for other places and things to do.)

If you are into antiques, Louisville and the surrounding areas are rich in treasures. Prefer hiking, jogging, or fishing? You are in a haven of outdoor recreation.

Lexington is only 100 miles away and the Kentucky Horse Park—site of the 2010 World Equestrian Games—is a wonderful place to visit. Don't miss the museum as it is well worth the trip.

Or you can just relax in camp and enjoy your horse the entire time. Should you take a liking to the area, you might want to ride or drive over to the Deam Lake facility where you can make plans to return and camp and ride with your horse. This new facility was opened this year and offers 10x12 stalls, electric and water hookups, and direct access to the beautiful trails you are about to ride in the National Championship.

Nearby necessities

If you want to go out to eat, the closet places are hometown restaurant Schuler's and a pizza parlor in Henryville, near the interstate. Cracker Barrel and other restaurants are in Scottsburg, 14 miles north of base camp, also the site of a 24-hour Wal-Mart store.

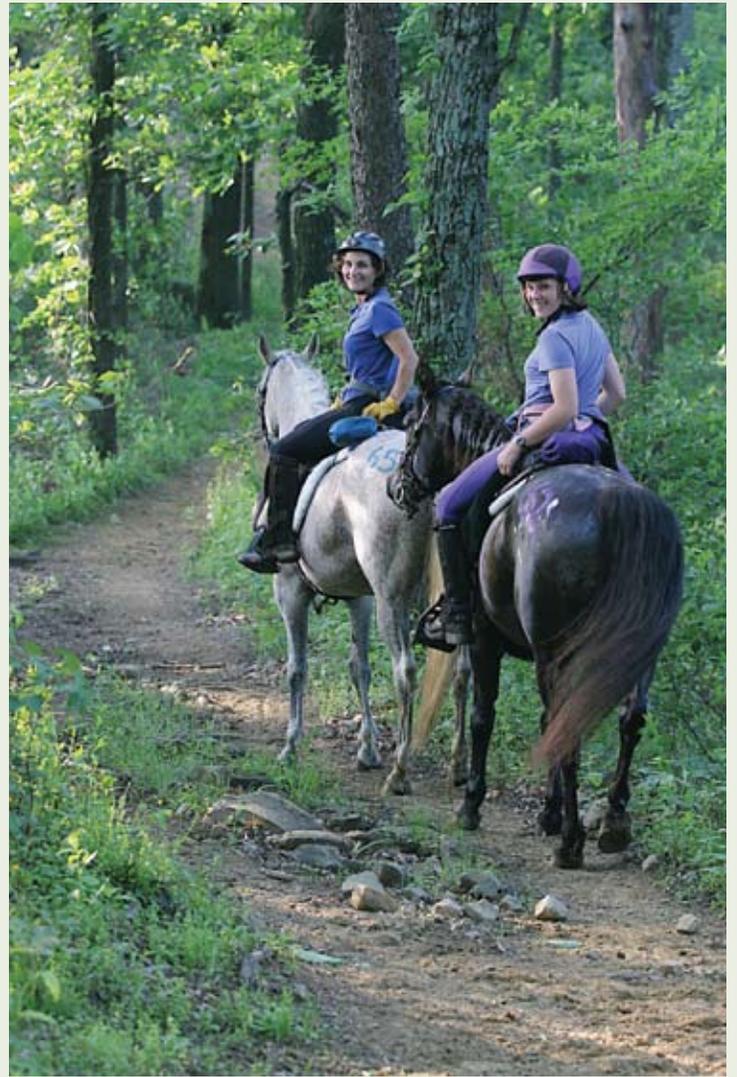
There is fuel at the Scottsburg exit (#29), Henryville exit (#19)—where you get off I-65 to go to base camp—as well as at the Memphis exit (#16), where you can find food, fuel and an RV repair shop.

Should you need accommodations for family or friends, there are motels in Scottsburg and Sellersburg, both of which are approximately 12 miles from base camp. There are grocery stores in these towns if you need to replenish your camper's pantry.

If you have friends or family flying in, the Louisville airport is only 28 minutes away but due to traffic, it is a 40-minute-plus drive. —GSS



Riders make their way along the technical trail during May's Top of the Rock ride. Spring's green foliage will be replaced by spectacular fall colors during October's National Championship ride. Photo © Genie Stewart-Spears, www.geniess.com.



The mother-daughter team of Lisa (left) and Meghan Delp came from Maryland to check out the National Championship trails at the Top of the Rock 50. The pair will be back in October—"a wonderful way to spend time with your children," said Lisa. Photo © Genie Stewart-Spears, www.geniess.com.