

# The Long Way Home

## *Madison is Crazy for Endurance Riding*



My name is Madison MacPhail and I'm 11 years old. I love endurance riding. Wait, I'm crazy about it! I did my first ride at the Cooley Ranch Ride in California, when I was eight years old. My mom and I had our "ups" and "downs" at this ride – and it was hilly too.

I was riding 18-year-old Sam, who we borrowed from our good friend Ruthie. Sam was a "been-there, done-that" horse. I rode him all over for six months before the ride. But that day Sam must have been thinking about his glory days as a young racehorse. He wanted to run. He knew we were at a real endurance ride, and not just a camping weekend.

My mom almost had a heart attack when Sam pulled the reins out of my hands and galloped down the trail! "Hold on! He'll stop at the top of the hill!" she yelled. I held on and when he stopped, I jumped off so fast. Sam and I both walked the trail until we all calmed down. There might have been a little crying, too.

But we didn't give up. There were many miles still to go. We ended up finishing the ride with about 10 minutes to spare. Boy, I really understood what the saying "to finish is to win" means that day. I was so happy we finished!

Maybe I should explain. Endurance riding is amazing. Horse and rider teams





take on really challenging terrain like steep hills and rushing rivers over long distances – sometimes even up to 100 miles (160 km) in one day. Endurance horses are great athletes. Us riders have to be pretty fit too! It's all about safety, pace and strategy.

After that first ride, I started riding my mom's horse Tai Juan because he was so calm and sweet and steady. This was my mom's secret plan when she bought him but it wasn't supposed to happen quite yet. He was only five but had the most amazing mind. He takes good care of me.

Tai is my best friend! At 14.2 hands tall, he's the perfect size for me. He can sometimes be a stinker when we ride at home because he thinks it's really fun to race with our dog. He has the smoothest trot ever and loves to do a tiny jog up hills.

He is a little goofy too. He always chooses a trail that leads away from the barn. I guess that's what makes a real endurance horse — always wanting to keep going down the trail.

When we go to an endurance ride, though, Tai is a real professional. He doesn't goof around at

all. He is so serious! He's like a little engine, chug-chug-chug, with his ears forward and his mind so focused. He gets so annoyed if I need to stop on the trail to fiddle with something (or pee).

So I try to hold it and make it to the vet check so I don't irritate him.

That's OK, he deserves it!

So I can do this sport, I help my mom with lots of chores on the ranch where we live. My mom is in charge of the barn and the horses so there's always plenty to do. I scoop a lot of poop, sweep stalls, rake the barn, clean water troughs, feed all the horses and bring them in and out of the barn. I also

help her exercise the horses, which is my favorite part! I'm proud of myself because this year I'm allowed to ride all of the horses.

I really love walking down to the barn with my dog Osa, and doing the work all by myself. The barn is one of my favorite places in the world to be. I love the smell of fresh hay and horse hair. When the horses nicker "hello" to me, I feel so at home.

So far I've done 11 rides including two 50s. I can't wait to do a 75-mile ride. I'm also excited about

## Did You Know?

Endurance riding is the fastest growing of all the equestrian sports around the world. Endurance riding is a true test of speed, soundness and good horsemanship. Its origins in North America relate back to the time when the U.S. Cavalry tested its horses on a five-day, 300-mile (483 km) ride, each carrying over 200 lbs (91 kg). It became a competitive sport when Wendell Robie traced the Pony Express route from Nevada to California in less than 24 hours.

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racine a few rides – when we are all ready for it. I'm so lucky that I'm allowed to do this sport!

My favorite thing at an endurance ride is the morning when all the horses are calling out to each other and people are starting to get up and feed them. There is excitement in the air – it is almost crackling! I wipe the sleep from my eyes and go outside to pick up poop, and feed and water our horses. This is always my job while my mom makes breakfast. I am so excited in the morning. I just can't wait to get on the trail with my horse!

The worst part? The finish line. I hate when it's all over. It makes me sad! I always want to ride more. Like I said, I'm crazy about endurance riding!

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Madison was 5 when she first rode all by herself in the arena. Riding Sandy, 22-year-old Arab mare.