

Tips for Winning *Your* Tevis Buckle

By Donna Snyder-Smith

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The Journey Begins

You're looking for a personal best, but no six second bungee jump or six minute skydive will satisfy your life long craving. You dream of a twenty-four hour adrenaline rush, of conquering the imposing Sierra Nevada mountains on horseback! You'll pit yourself and your horse against temperatures up to 120 degrees, and a rock known as "cougar" that climbs almost vertically into the sky and lies in wait like its name sake to challenge those who successfully arrive at its base, deep in the heart of the Tahoe National Forest. You'll do battle with your personal fears, with fatigue, and dehydration. You'll ride through the dark on trails so narrow you can't turn around without danger of you and your horse plunging down the mountainside into the rushing American river.

Personal tests of toughness, such as the Tevis Cup, attract those who like to compete against themselves and the odds. Most years less than 50% of starting horse and rider teams reach the finish line in Auburn. Riders, which have won the ride, have returned only to be denied even a finish by Lady Luck, who jealously and zealously guards the trail. Ultimately, Tevis is a mind game. To succeed at this undertaking you need a good horse, a master plan, a conditioning schedule, a crew, a ride strategy and some luck. With all the pieces of training and careful preparation in place, the mountains and their weather will ask the ultimate question. Can you and your horse stay focused during what will inevitably be one of the toughest 24-hour periods of your lives? If the answer is yes and Lady Luck smiles, you'll triumph over one of the most grueling equestrian tracks in the world and in twenty-four hours or less, take your victory lap at the Auburn Fair Grounds, earning the right to wear the copyrighted silver Tevis buckle, awarded to those who successfully finish this testing competition.

When it is to be your year, you need to start preparing your horse early in the ride year. Ride rules say the horse must be at least five years old but I do not recommend riding a horse of that age in this event. It would be far better to wait until your horse is seven years or better yet, eight or older. Horses in their teens have done very well, so if your horse has spent its life as an active performance horse, taking family members for long rides on the trail between show ring performances or is a long time trail horse, you are at a good starting point. If you have a young horse, plan several years ahead for this goal and begin by riding the trail on a regular basis, working up to long rides at slow speeds until the horse has a solid three year conditioning base, *then* you can aim for the challenges offered by this internationally known event.

If you are thinking of buying a horse for this particular event, look for a gelding which has at least a two year history of slow, long trail conditioning; a horse with a good record in competitive trail (N.A.T.R.C., U.M.E.C.T.R.A or E.C.T.R.A., etc.) would be a good choice. All sexes have successfully completed the Tevis, finished in the top ten and even won. But since both stallions and mares have hormone issues that can sometimes affect their training and performance, if you are selecting a horse primarily for this event, I recommended a gelding. Size is a personal choice and while I don't normally recommend heavyweight riders select a horse who is only 14.2 hands,

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statistics will show such matches have been successful, so bone, heart size, tough feet, a tough mind, a strong back, etc. are more important to the success of your endeavor than the height or weight of your prospective equine partner.

HEALTH

If you are buying a horse, you will have it vet checked to make sure it is healthy and sound. But this is also a good thing to do at the beginning of training even if you are using your own horse. While x-rays of fetlock joints and feet may seem extreme, they can be early warning tools, helping you to spare a horse which may have years of sound service left if worked only on the soft, level footing found in arenas and the show ring. A horse with detectable early arthritic changes could develop premature lameness when subjected to the extended pounding on hard rocky trails or perhaps develop lameness problems during the event. While a "pull" on any ride is no fun, a pull at Tevis is heart breaking, especially if you and your horse have made it past the half way point. To their credit, the vets and rules committee members of the Tevis enforce strict standards when it comes to the welfare of the horses entered in the event. Horse HAVE been pulled at both the 96 mile highway 49 crossing AND the finish line.

Begin your attack on your goal with a basic "health check list," and repeat it in the spring of the year you intend to ride, including the x-rays. Have your horse's teeth checked by an equine dentist. Get your horse vaccinated and have your vet draw blood to check the red cell count. Have an equine chiropractor check your horse. If all is well, have the chiropractor check your horse again one month before the ride. If your horse needed an adjustment during the initial check, have your horse checked periodically during training. Put your horse on an effective worming program and have your vet check fecal samples periodically to be sure the program is working. I recommend Platinum Performance as a supplement as I have been very pleased with the results I've seen while using it, both on my own horses and multiple client horses as well.

"Foot Work"

When it's your year to "do it" count backward from the date of the Tevis and make all of your shoeing appointment with your farrier. Your horse should be shod every 6 weeks, and you should schedule your appointment so you arrive at the Tevis with at least 3 weeks of foot growth, unless special circumstances apply. At the last shoeing before the ride, have your farrier make an extra set of shoes which fit your horse and have your crew carry them to the various vet checks along the route. If your horse throws a shoe, the ride farrier will only need to tack on one of your pre-shaped shoes. This will reduce the risk of handicapping your horse with a mismatched set of shoes throughout part of the ride and it will also reduce the risk of a strange farrier, unfamiliar with your horse's needs, doing anything "inventive." Carry at least one easy boot on your saddle during the ride (two if your horse needs a different size boot for his front and hind feet), which has been fitted to your horse. If your horse has foot/shoeing problems, you may want to reconsider your choice of mount. "No foot, no horse," is an old horsemen's adage which is especially true for this test of

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endurance. Getting a jump start on good hoof care which may include feed additives to insure healthy horn production, is another way of "beating the odds" on this demanding ride. If your horse's feet can't endure multiple miles of rocks, the rest of the horse can't get to the finish line either! The first section of the trail is *especially* rocky! Successful horses have been shod with a variety of shoes, from steel, to sneakers, to easy boots, with and without pads. A good farrier is a necessary member of your prep team. Expand your personal assessment tools by asking your farrier to show you how to read the "wear patterns" on your horse's shoes. With the training and conditioning time you will put in, muscular changes could change the way your horse moves over the ground. Such changes would show up in how the shoe is worn between shoeings. A drastic change in wear patterns between shoeings is a red flag and should be noted and addressed immediately with your farrier and possibly your vet or chiropractor as well.

EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

The Golden Rule of Equipment: "Never use anything for the first time on the day of competition!"

Always thoroughly test every piece of equipment you will use on both yourself and your horse during your training, before ride day. Both you and your horse must be as comfortable as possible during this grueling test. The saddle must fit you *both* well. Saddles which have fit in the past may cease to fit when your horse becomes well enough conditioned to perform well at this level of test, so be on the look out for any of the following which could indicate saddle fit problems: dry spots under the saddle, white hairs appearing on your horse's back, shaved hair under the cantle/loin area of the back and/or "ruffled" or distorted hair patterns under the saddle. If any of these conditions currently exist, you will want to remedy them before you begin your conditioning season. Surely everyone knows by now that training in an uncomfortable (for you) saddle will create compensating movement patterns in your horse! These patterns could undermine your efforts at a crucial moment, for instance, when the stress load of the ride pushes the system to the edge of its limits. Not only that, but any compensating pattern (one that is inefficient because it asks systems which are not structured to perform a particular task to step in, because the optimal systems have been compromised and are no longer able to perform their job comfortably) maintained long enough, WILL lead to eventual structural breakdown (emotional instability might be one of the first red flags in this sequence of events).

Riders have successfully completed the Tevis in a wide variety of saddles. While I have personal favorites, including a popular saddle which bears my name, I will not recommend one specific brand over another UNLESS I KNOW BOTH horse and rider, because NO saddle I've ever encountered in 45 years (no matter how well made) suits ALL horses and rider body types. In riders, tall is not the same as small and it's seldom just a difference of adjusting stirrup length. I DO recommend any serious endurance rider have one "treeless" saddle (there are now multiple brands of treeless saddles) in the tackroom. It may not be your regular saddle, but when Murphy's Law strikes in the

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area of saddle fit issues (and it will if you ride long enough and/or ride or own a variety of horses over the years), you won't be forced to choose between continuing to train in a saddle which you know doesn't fit, or wait for your budget to permit the new purchase of another saddle even IF you can find one that fits immediately, which is rare.

Regardless of your saddle choice, I recommend trying a sheepskin saddle cover for added rider comfort. Choose broad, light weight stirrups with a shock-absorbing cushion. Heavy stirrups (such as the type found on many western saddles) will tire your ankles and classical English stirrups that concentrate the pressure on too small an area of the sole, can contribute to numb feet.

The type of pad you choose will depend on the fit of your saddle and the sensitivity of your horse's back. The variety of saddle pads on the market is mind numbing and many cost well over \$100.00 so buying 3 or 4 to try isn't always an option. Here are a couple of tips that can help. First, MAKE SURE YOUR PAD(S) ARE CLEAN, especially when you go to a ride. Changing pads half way through a ride at a vet check can help prevent pressure sores, as different pads will subtly change the weight distribution of rider and saddle. Every pad you use needs to be tested BEFORE the ride. Stay away from pads that don't allow the horse's back to breath (gel pads can create skin scald at humid rides). Practice simple 4-H horsemanship when saddling: make sure your pad is properly placed (no wrinkles or twists) under your saddle and is pulled well up into the gullet of the saddle, so it will not abrade or bruise the wither area of the horse. Several years ago one of my horses was pulled from Tevis when the vets thought they saw a slight lameness. An hour later, when the horse arrived at Forest Hill, I trotted him out to try to determine where the problem was. He not only trotted absolutely sound, he never showed any signs of lameness the following day or the next. After a week off, the horse was being bathed when a hunk of skin and hair several inches long, sloughed off right over his withers when he was being rinsed. The "mysterious" lameness wasn't hard to figure out after that. With the long down hill stretches through the canyons, the pad, which had not been properly pulled up into the gullet of the saddle when the horse was saddled after the vet check at Robinson Flat, had worked itself down tight, cutting off the circulation in the thin skin over the horse's withers, causing bruising and pain there. When the horse was trotted for the vet at Michigan Bluff, the saddle was still on so the pad continued to irritate the bruised, now tender withers. As a result, he "stepped short" in front, in an attempt to avoid rubbing the tops of his shoulders against the painful saddle pad pressure. When he was put in the trailer after having been pulled, the saddle was taken off. When he was trotted later that day for a vet, then examined the next day, he wasn't wearing any tack, so the hidden sore was not irritated and consequently there was no sign what-so-ever of any lameness. Moral of the story, a poorly adjusted pad was Lady Luck's excuse for spinning that particular horse and rider from the game on that day.

I strongly recommend both a breast collar and a crupper unless you are absolutely sure your saddle is a perfect fit and your horse never has even the tiniest problems with the saddle shifting to the front or rear on steep terrain! "Remember the adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Bridles, breastplates, and girths made of biothane or Zilco are a better choice than leather because those

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materials will wipe clean quickly and easily at each vet check. Some type of protective boots should be used to keep the horse from getting cuts on his legs from rocks and/or interfering when they become tired. I do not recommend the "supportive" type boots as they generate excessive heat in this prolonged event.

Endurance specific equipment can still be hard to find at local tack shops, but you can find discipline specific riding equipment such as stirrups, sheepskin saddle covers, heart monitors, etc. at stores such as "Long Riders Gear" and "Sportack." They also offer a variety of canteen and pommel packs to carry important items like water bottles, electrolytes, energy snacks and energy drinks, and the little necessities like aspirin, Tylenol, salt tablets, Band Aids, Kleenex, sun screen, etc.

The most comfortable pants for long distance riding are riding tights. Riders who want extra leg protection often select half-chaps over tall boots and since you may spend some time walking or "tailing" your horse, your footwear must offer your foot support both in and out of the saddle and can not rub or pinch.

A light weight, white shirt with long sleeves will offer the best protection against sunburn, dirt, brush, etc. and can be wet from your water bottles as you ride along during the heat of the day. You will also want some type of head protection and a light weight, well ventilated safety helmet is recommended, as are unbreakable sun glasses secured with a strap so they don't become dislodged/lost. A thin sponge can be cut to size and worn on the top of your head, under your helmet. Periodically wetting this sponge from your water bottles will help keep you cooler during the heat of the day. Have your crew keep frozen water bottles in an ice chest. At each vet check you will take one or two bottles of frozen water and use them to drink and cool your head as the ice melts.

CONDITIONING

The Golden Rule of Conditioning "Never increase both speed and distance in the same training session."

The following conditioning schedule is *very general* and assumes you and your horse are already active athletes and pretty fit. Its goal is to peak a horse for the current years Tevis event. It also comes with the following disclaimer **ATTENTION: NO ONE** can design the best training schedule for a horse and rider without knowing a lot about the individual team, i.e., how old, how fit, how many previous training and competition miles, what is the stabling situation (pasture, paddock, field, etc.), what are the rider's time constraints (family? job?), what is the available training topography, what is the primary training surface (hard pack, rocky, sandy, etc.) what is the emotional demeanor of the horse (on training rides, during trailering, alone, with other horses, during a competition, etc.) and that is not the end of the list!

In order to succeed, every day you **MUST** listen to your horse, you **MUST** observe little details and you **MUST** be constantly thinking; putting "two and two" together and coming up with four, so to speak. For example, you arrive at your barn for a long slow training ride. Your horse is standing quietly, but you notice the dirt is

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churned up in one corner of the paddock and he hasn't quite finished his breakfast. Ask yourself why the dirt/bedding was so disturbed. Ask yourself why there is still a little bit of hay left when normally your horse is a good eater. Then, before saddling and heading out for that training ride, check his gut sounds and heart rate. If there are no gut sounds and his heart rate is elevated, he may be in the first stages of colic. The churned ground is where he was pawing because he was uncomfortable or he may have become cast during the night and struggled to rise for some time before wrenching himself free, etc. *Champions, whether finishers or first place winners never walk into a horse's environment with their mind some where else.* They are always on the alert to signs that might tell them a change in their routine is required in order to avert a later disaster of greater proportions. The task you take on when you set your cap for a Tevis buckle will demand you think like a champion *before* you get to the starting line of this grueling 100 mile race.

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Sample Training Schedule/Protocol

February: 2 slow rides per week averaging 20 to 30 miles total
2 rides of approximately 25 miles done in about 6 hours.
Give a day off after each ride, give two to three days off after each 25 mile ride. Train in the arena two times a week working on balance, suppleness and obedience to the aids.

March: 2 slow rides per week averaging 30 - 35 miles total
1 ride of approximately 25 miles done in 5 hours
1 ride of 30 miles done in 6 & 1/2 hours
Continue time off and arena training as above.

April: 3 SLOW rides per week averaging 40 miles total on hilly topography
1 ride of approximately 30 miles done in 6 hours
1 ride of approximately 40 miles done in 9 hours
Continue time off as above, except give 3 to 4 days rest after 40 mile ride.
Continue arena work as above

May: 1 medium speed ride per week of 12 to 15 miles -1/3 walk
2/3 working trot (8 mph) - break up trot periods with walk
1 *slow* ride per week of 15 miles (5 mph or better walk)
1 ride of approximately 35 miles done in 6 hours
1 ride of approximately 45 miles done in 9 hours

June: 2 medium speed rides per week of up to 15 miles each
1 slow ride of 30 miles done in 7 hours followed the next day by a ride of 40 miles done at moderate speed (7 mph) riding time of 8 hours or under 10 hrs if topography has lots of climb and descent.
Continue time off as above, except give 5 days of rest after the back to back 70 mile training ride.

July: 2 light rides per week, 15 miles each
1 35 mile ride at moderate pace (7 mph)
1 50 mile ride (could be an endurance ride) in 10 hours

Last two weeks before the event, give light work. Reduce concentrates by 70% each day the horse is not worked. Eliminate concentrates if horse is not worked for more than two days in a row. Continue vitamin supplements and salt. Begin giving electrolytes 2 days before trailering to ride site. Continue through ride.

If possible, haul to Auburn Fair Grounds a week before the event and train over the last part of the trail to familiarize yourself and your horse with it. Be sure to bring a full set of shoes preshaped by your farrier to your horse's feet.

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THE RIDE

The earlier you get your entry in, the better. Tevis almost always reaches its limit of 250 riders in April or May (some years it may happen even earlier). For an entry, contact the Western States Trail Foundation in Auburn, California (530) 823-7282 or on the internet at www.foothill.net/tevis.

You will want to reserve a stall at the finish line (Auburn Fair Grounds). If you get your stall reservation in early you can request and probably get one of the open air paddocks (under roof) which are much cooler than the hot, enclosed stalls (unless you have a stallion who requires isolation from his neighbors). A hotel reservation for you and/or your crew is another item to tend to early in the year to insure its availability. Many riders have living quarters in their trailers and/or pull trailers with an RV or camper. There is lots of parking space for these units directly behind and beside the Fair ground, but no hook ups.

The start of the ride is at Robie Equestrian Park in Truckee, Nevada. The drive in is about six miles on loose gravel and dirt roads and the camping area is spread out over an extensive area. Vetting, vendors, ride secretary, etc. are all located in the same spot, just above the "meadow" where Friday dinner is always served and the rider meeting is held. Like any other ride, your horse will need to pass a preride vet inspection. You will want to electrolyte your horse on the day(s) you trailer him, especially if the trailer ride is more than an hour or two in length.

Plan to arrive at ride camp with enough time to allow your horse to rest, recover, and rehydrate from the trip before being presented to the vets. If you're hauling a long distance (entrants have come from as far away as the East Coast with their horses), consider arriving a week in advance and stable your horses at Auburn prior to the ride, then haul up to Robie Park (2 hour trip) on Friday.

Since the Tevis is a straight line route, you will need someone to take your trailer back to the Auburn fair ground after they are sure you have made it past the Hwy 89 check point. It is a good idea to have them wait in base camp for at least two hours after the start of the ride (5AM). If anything would happen to you or your horse in the first 10 miles of the ride and you double back to camp, you and your horse won't be stranded there while your rig is headed for Auburn!

The best strategy is to have two crews and two sets of everything you may need along the way. Send one to the first vet check at Robinson Flat the night before, which will insure they don't get caught up in the occasional traffic jams which can occur on the narrow forest service road into the stop and miss you. Your second team can go with you to Robie, see you get vetted in and make a trouble free start the next morning, then drive to the second major vet check at Forest Hill in plenty of time.

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Once you clear Forest Hill vet check, your crew will not be able to meet you again until the finish line, although there are still several vet check stations which you and your horse will need to successfully pass before you complete the ride. Your crew from Robinson Flat can leap frog to the finish line and have everything you need ready and waiting for your arrival. If you don't have the man power for two separate crews (2 people or more), one person can make all the checks if you are riding the ride slowly and there is someone to bring your trailer down from Robie Park to Auburn. If this is the case, be sure to carry essential items, like electrolytes for your horse in your saddle packs. The ride provides hay and water at all the stops, but that is a minimalist approach and I don't recommend it on your first attempt. Gas up whenever possible and carry an extra couple of full five gallon gas cans with you if possible. A couple of five gallon containers of water are a good idea as well. They can be used for your horse or they can be used to cool a radiator that is about to over heat. Be SURE to have a spare tire which is in good condition for BOTH your towing vehicle AND your trailer.

Get up early enough on the day of the ride, so you have time to eat something. Starting this test on an empty stomach is not a good idea, even if you feel too nervous to want to eat. Drink plenty of water/liquid both the day before and the day of the ride. Dehydration contributes to fatigue that can lead to poor decision making and slowed reflexes. Take your time getting your horse ready, checking everything TWICE. Make sure you have enough time to walk or ride your horse around for at least 10 minutes before the start of the event. You will have approximately 250 other horses and riders for company at this point, so expect things to be crowded. You must give your number to the starter before the start of the ride. Once you've checked in, you can position yourself according to your riding plans, anywhere along the road leading to the starting line. If you're riding to win, and want to start fast, position yourself at the front. If you are riding to finish and it is your first attempt, position yourself further back in the group. If you have a horse who trots fast and is fit, you will not want to start too far to the rear, as the first section of the ride has a lot of single track trail which sometimes gets congested. A forward horse can become agitated if stuck behind slower moving horses early in the event.

The first section of the ride is probably the trickiest. There is a lot of rock, and some boggy sections. There is also cougar rock (you do have the option of taking a trail around the famous landmark). Remember to electrolyte your horse the night before the ride, as well as before the start of the event in the morning, and since the first vet check is not until 30 miles, it is also a good idea to dose him with electrolytes at the half way point (15 miles in) as well. Cougar Rock is a good spot for this, especially if you have to wait in line to ride up over the face of the rock. The start is crowded, it's dark and the trail can be slippery or dusty and difficult to see. It is cool and the horses are fresh so they're feeling good and of course, even if you're scared to death, you'll be on an adrenaline high as well, so over riding is a real danger. The percentages of pulls each year at the first vet check, Robinson Flat, prove this to be true.

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Ride each leg of the event individually. Keep your mind focused on the leg you are on and don't daydream or worry about sections of the trail you haven't arrived at yet. **Don't waste any time in the vet checks.** There are cut off times for each leg of the ride and they are *strictly* enforced by ride officials! Every year there are riders eliminated for being over time somewhere along the route.

You don't have 24 hours of RIDING time! When you are figuring out your (riding) time schedule (the times you would like to reach each check point), remember that the hold times are subtracted from the allowed riding time of 24 hours, so you don't really have 24 hours of *riding* time, because some of the 24 hour period is used up in the holds at vet checks. Plan a faster pace in the early part of the ride, to allow enough time to slow down in the canyons if necessary and/or to allow for the probability, that your horse's pace will slow a bit as miles accumulate and the day wears on. A plan which includes riding a 6 to 7 mph pace (medium trot) where the going is easy, a 5 mph pace (slow trot) in moderately difficult sections and a 4 mph pace (walk) in the difficult sections will succeed in reaching your goal of completing within the allowed time. If you start the ride by just making cut off times in the early part of the day, it is almost guaranteed you will be pulled before the finish of the event. Of course, if your horse is experienced and very fit, you will ride faster, but always remember you want something in the reserve tank for the second half of the ride.

Arriving at Robinson: If you come into Robinson early, have your crew use a cooler to keep your horse's hind quarters from becoming chilled. Take care of the horse and move him through the vet line as soon as possible, then go to your crew area to rest, rehydrate and eat. Have a crew member keep an eye on the clock so you can relax. Offer your horse a variety of food, including some type of very sloppy (wet) rice or wheat bran mash. Just before you leave you will give another dose of electrolytes (Endura-Max or Lyte-Now).

A Steady Pace is Best: Once you've out of Robinson Flat, you and your horse will face the canyons. Trotting down and tailing your horse out is the most efficient way to tackle this energy draining part of the trail. Some riders elect to run, leading their horse into the canyons on the narrow switchback trails, and ride out. Whatever your choice, a steady pace is best. If you are using a heart monitor, keeping it below 150 should guarantee you are not over using your horse on the long climbs out of both canyons between Robinson Flat and Michigan Bluff. Another dose of electrolytes can be administered at Deadwood.

Heat is Definite Factor in the Difficulty Level of this Ride: You can expect this part of the trail to be hot, so carry plenty of water for yourself and water your horse whenever possible.

Your Mental State can make the Difference Between a Pull and a Finish: It is good to ride with another rider when possible. Horses are herd animals and often do better when in company. A horse alone who doesn't know the trail can become mentally depressed and give the same signals as a physically tired horse. It's hard to

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distinguish between the two and most riders don't feel comfortable pushing their horse in such extreme circumstances. Worrying about your horse won't help *your* peace of mind or energy level either. You can expect your own emotional state to fluctuate through out the day. If you let yourself get down in the dumps and feeling tired, your horse will pick up and mirror your feelings. One way to curb, if not avoid the lows of the effort, is to stay well hydrated as you ride and eat high protein snacks, such as nuts and dried fruit along the way. Even a candy bar can provide a temporary pick up in energy.

Eat and DRINK: Be sure your crew has something nourishing and tasty that you like to eat at each of the vet checks where they can meet you. Then tell them in advance to make sure you eat it - no excuses!

When you exit the canyons and come into Michigan Bluff (at 55 miles) there will be a short vet check (hay and water are provided for your horse, but crew vehicles aren't allowed). If you've taken care of your horse in the canyons you shouldn't have any problems. Draw a breath and let yourself feel good about getting through the toughest part of the ride, but don't get cocky. You still have Volcano canyon to climb before Forest Hill.

Forest Hill Vet Check: The Forest Hill check will be the one where the vets look hardest at your horse, since most riders will now begin to ride into the dark.

No Crews Allowed At: there are no crews allowed at either of the remaining two check points, Francisco Bar at 80 miles or Hwy 49 Crossing at 90 miles. Use the full hour at FH to rest both yourself and your horse. Administer electrolytes again and continue to offer the wet mash. Wet the hay as well. If you are moving along slowly, and it is beginning to cool, make sure your crew keeps your horse from stiffening up. Sponging should be limited to the horse's neck and legs at vet checks once the temperature has begun to drop/after dark. Rub the horse's legs to stimulate circulation.

Clean Dirt and Sweat From Gear Whenever Possible: If you are using boots, have your crew clean off any mud, dirt, etc. at each vet check. Clean the girth as well and be sure to closely inspect your horse's shoes before leaving each vet check. A change of saddle pads (make sure you've test rode all equipment *before* using it at the ride) half way through the ride is a good way to keep possible saddle pressure points from building up and keep a clean pad against your horse's back. A change into a clean, dry shirt and a change of socks here is good for the rider as well. Consider taking a light wind breaker with you out of FH especially if you feel a little stressed and tired. Even the winners of this ride cross the finish line in the dark.

After leaving the FH check you will ride down the main street of the town. Much of the trail from here to Auburn is single track and down hill.

Make Sure Glow Bars Are Attached So They Don't Swing! If you are going to use glow bars, now is the time to attach them to your gear. Tape them so they don't swing. Some riders who fail to secure glow bars report experiencing motion sickness from the

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swaying lights. You will be vetted again at Francisco Bar, but in recent years there has not been a mandatory hold.

An Important Decision: Once your horse's pulse and respiration are down, and he has passed his vet check, it is up to you to decide whether it would be best to move on slowly or to rest and allow him more time to eat. Most horses seem to show an increase in energy once the punishing heat of the day is behind them and they will often times pick up the pace of their own accord. You will cross the American River after leaving Franciscos.

Prepare Your Horse for Fast Moving Water. You should prepare your horse to enter fast running water that can get as high as your stirrups in the middle of the river. Train through broad, fast moving streams before the ride so this final obstacle doesn't catch your horse by surprise and cause you problems at this late point in the ride.

Your last vet check will be at the Hwy 49 Crossing.

Crews Are Not Allowed So Stay Alert: if your horse is tired and you stand around, there is the chance he will stiffen up and appear lame. Let him grab a bit to eat and drink and walk him slowly. Hopefully he will arrive at the check at or close to recovery criteria so your wait won't be long. Never hesitate to seek a veterinarian's help if you are the least bit concerned about your equine partner's welfare. There are tons of wonderful volunteers who staff the Tevis and they are always ready to help out, especially at locations where your crew is not permitted, so don't hesitate to ask for help. After crossing highway 49, you'll begin to climb to Auburn and the finish line. You'll see the lights before you actually come out of the dark into the parking lot. The vets will check your horse here and if all is well, you will continue down into the stadium area for your victory lap and your final vetting. Some riders take their horse to the barn area after the victory lap and this is permitted, however if your horse is in good shape, it is just as well to get the final vetting out of the way as soon as possible so you are assured of your completion. Then take your partner to his or her stall to rest.

Make sure the horse has plenty of water, hay and salt. I like to bed the pen or stall very heavily with shavings so the horse can lay down to rest. A light blanket or sheet if they're used to one and the temperature is cool. Feed another mash, but withhold large amounts of grain until around noon on Sunday. Rub their legs well and if you know how to bandage correctly, you can apply support wraps. You can wait until the sun is out around noon and then use a hose to rinse off body salts and grime. Check legs for cuts and treat as necessary and if your horse is prone to scratches, inspect and treat the fetlock areas with an antibiotic cream. Have one of your crew check on your horse every couple of hours to make sure they are resting easily. A short hand walk every 2 to 3 hours will help keep them from stiffening up too much. There are vets at the fair grounds until 5AM, so should anything look amiss, take the horse back to the vets and get it looked at. If you were pulled from the ride for anything other than lameness problems, allowing the horse a day to rest before transporting it home is a good idea. The longer the trailer trip home, the more important it is that the horse be fully recovered before beginning the trip.

Tips for Winning *Your* Tevis Buckle

By Donna Snyder-Smith

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The day after the ride the best conditioned horse (Haggin Cup Award) will be selected by the veterinarians from among the first ten horses to finish the ride. The exams are held in the main arena at 10AM. Ride photos, T-shirts and Tevis memorabilia will be available at the barbecue area of the fair grounds where the awards ceremony is held at 3PM. Each rider who completed the ride will be called up on stage to receive their Tevis buckle. Recognized and honored by distance riders the world over, it is worn with pride by some of the greats in the history of equine sports.

Donna Snyder-Smith won her Tevis buckle on one of her show jumpers in 1966, in her first attempt at endurance riding. Today Donna gives seminars through out the nation, and at her facility in Northern California (located in the Bay area, 2 hours from the Tevis trail). More than a dozen of her clients have successfully completed the Tevis (many on their first try). Several have placed in the top ten over the years. In 2000, her client Judy Reens won the event. Donna often works with new and novice endurance riders as well as many experienced national and international competitors