



New to NATRC?...

Introduction

A competitive trail ride (CTR) is a competitive distance event over a measured distance and completed within a window of time. In NATRC™ competitions, the horses are evaluated by an approved veterinary judge, and riders are evaluated by an approved horsemanship judge. The judging begins at the preliminary examination, usually the day before the ride, continues during the ride, and concludes at the final examination one or two days later. The equines (horses, ponies, and mules) are evaluated on condition, soundness, their trail manners, and way of going. Riders are judged on horsemanship as it applies to competitive trail riding. Trail safety and courtesy are key elements as is the ability to care for a horse during and after a long day in the backcountry.

Competitors haul their horses to the ride site, perhaps in a grove of trees or in a meadow, where they set up camp. After checking in with the ride secretary, riders present their horses for a preliminary veterinary inspection. Later in the evening a briefing is held to tell riders about the trails.

Competitors are timed out from a starting point usually the next morning. With the aid of a map, they follow a marked course.

The horse's pulse and respiration (P&R's) are checked at least 2 times on the trail (see Some of the Basics page on P&R's).

If the day's ride includes a lunch stop, it will be at least 45 minutes. Some rides do not hold a lunch stop on the second day to allow for earlier awards. Most rides will transport your lunch to the lunch stop and some will take your bucket too. Ride management may provide feed for all horses at lunch or other places on the trail. This varies from ride to ride and is at the discretion of ride management.

The judges will examine the horses at the end of a day's ride and again before timing out on the second day. The final vet check, after the ride, is similar to the pre-ride examination. Competition is over when this final vet check is done. As soon as the scores and placing are completed, awards are presented and riders presented a hard copy of their scorecard.

How far and how fast competitors travel depends on the division of competition. The Novice Division is for riders and horses new to competitive trail riding. Competitive/Pleasure (CP) Division is for riders who are more experienced in CTR but who prefer the distance and pace of the Novice Division. The Open Division is for experienced CTR riders with experienced, well conditioned horses. Novice and CP competitors cover about 40 miles in a 2-day ride at 3.5 to 5 mph. The Open competitors cover 50 - 60 miles in a 2-day competition at a faster average pace of 4 - 6 mph.

NATRC also offers a Distance Only (DO) option in all three divisions. DO participants must follow all NATRC and ride rules with the exception of those pertaining to leg protection. Participants may choose not to do judged obstacles, but they must participate in veterinary checks for soundness and condition, P&R checks, or other checks for the welfare of the horse. DO participants receive mileage (distance only) no placings or awards, and they do not count as competitors for establishing points. They do, however, receive scorecards with informative comments at the end of the ride. DO participants may do 1 day of a 2-day ride.

Competitive trail riding is a great family activity. Children aged 10 or over at the beginning of the ride year can compete. Parents who are competing may ride with their competing children. Non-riding family members can relax in camp or perhaps assist management personnel while the riders are out on the trail.



NATRC has six regions covering the country from Alaska to Florida. Each region puts on rides in their geographic area. It is not a requirement to be a member to enter a ride. All are welcome - all riders, all breeds, and all types of tack and disciplines of riding. Entries for any ride are welcome from anywhere. Some rides are held on private property or public lands that are not otherwise available to the individual rider.

Individual rides are local events with NATRC sanction given for using our rules and approved judges. Each ride is unique, yet follows the same basic structure.

NATRC rides are NOT races. Our rides emphasize the skill of pacing your horse to maximize his longevity as a distance horse. NATRC boasts horses with over 20,000 miles of competition.

From the scorecards and from the experience of conditioning and competing, riders learn more about techniques of good trail equitation, pacing techniques, and methods of care that help their horses perform well.

NATRC competitors share the challenges of terrain and weather conditions, or timing and being judged, and sometimes the treasure hunt quality of staying on course, making for a spirit of great camaraderie. Our riders compete year after year, not just for the competition, but for the friendships, old and new, the ongoing education, and the enjoyment of the partnership that develops between horse and rider. Winning ribbons or ride awards and year end awards is a bonus!

Excerpts from the in depth NATRC Rider's Manual (currently out of print)

