



Hey Neighbor



For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

Healthy Horses Compete In 515-Mile Endurance Ride

Horses were healthy when they competed in the recent Great Santa Fe Trail Endurance Race.

That was guaranteed by the veterinarian team accompanying the horses and riders from start through finish, according to Dr. Leon Self, head veterinarian from Wyandotte, Okla.

"The horses had to pass a health qualification test earlier this summer, before they could even enter the race," added Dr. Patricia Schroeder, designated treatment veterinarian from the All Around Vet Service at Council Grove.

A qualifying endurance race was conducted at Dodge City, and Schroeder was invited to assist in health checks for the one-day, 50-mile race. "After that, I was hired to bring my mobile veterinary unit to handle treatment of horses when necessary and also as backup for health checks during this long race," she indicated.

"Veterinarians are very important to this sport," continued Schroeder, who worked with the handful of other veterinarians on the ride starting Labor Day, Sept. 3, and concluding Saturday, Sept. 15.

"If these horses weren't evaluated as they went along, some of them wouldn't be able to make the ride," she emphasized.

The qualifying ride included potential participants not only from the Midwest, but also from as far away as California and Tennessee. "They wanted to find out more about the terrain and get their horses somewhat acclimated to this region before entering the competition," Schroeder recognized.

Saturday, Sept. 1, was an organizational time for participants arriving with their horses at Santa Fe, N.M. "The day before the race began, every horse that was intended to participate went through a complete

health examination," Schroeder related. "We checked everything possible from circulation to heart rate to muscle tone to soundness."

All horses were painted with an entry number on their hips for easy identification by the veterinary team, other competitors and race officials. "We had a trot test for lameness on each horse right before the race started," Schroeder continued.

Vet checks were then conducted every 15 to 20 miles along the race. "We first let the horses cool down and then checked their pulse rate, which had to be less than 60," the veterinarian noted. "Then each horse was again given a whole examination, including a muscle evaluation and soundness check."

If the horse passed the vet check, riders had to rest

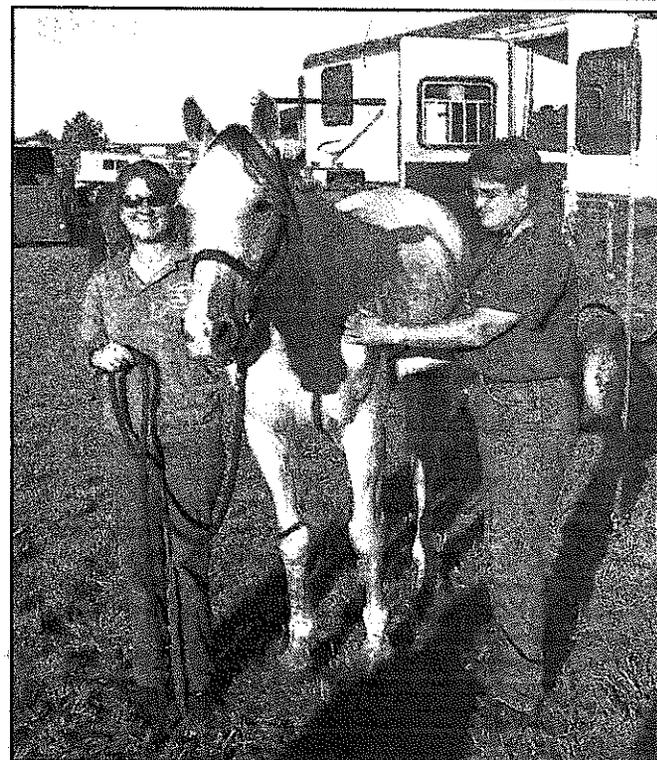
their horse for 45 minutes before they could continue on the race. "Water for the horses and riders was located every five miles along the ride, including at the vet check," Schroeder said.

Many horses had to be pulled during the vet checks, according to the veterinarian. "Often it was due to lameness, and we had a few vet pulls due to wounds inflicted along the trail," she informed. "Sole burning was a common problem due to the varied, rough terrain in which the horses had to compete."

"If a horse didn't pass his trot-out test, he was pulled from the race that day," she confirmed. "That doesn't mean the horse couldn't be used the next day if it passed the health check."

Contestants have varied opinions on how to care for their horses' feet. "Some horses have shoes with pads and other protection, and others just have a regular set of shoes," Schroeder stated. "There were a few riders who rode their horses barefoot."

While the old trail was followed as closely as possible, riders found their horses traveling on the complete realm of terrain: pasture, roadsides, ditches, sand and gravel roads, paved high-



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ways and even some mountains. At Elkhart, riders rode the original trail in the large pastures.

"Endurance horses must be use to all kinds of environments, and we had wet, muddy conditions one day," Schroeder admitted. "These horses have been conditioned very well. Their owners really take good care of them."

No major illnesses were recorded up through Wednesday of the race. "We haven't had to administer any fluids intravenously," the veterinarian reported. "One horse was given electrolytes for mild dehydration and responded well."

One horse had a mild case of choking, another was treated for colic and there were a number of horses with lacerations which required some treatment.

Sometimes even though a horse passed the vet check, owners would decide to pull it out of the ride if the horse didn't act like it felt well, or had other conditions that were not at peak. "They have the right to do that," Schroeder asserted. "The riders sure don't want to push their horses too far."

At the end of each day's race, the first ten finishers, both riders and their horses, are evaluated for body

condition and given a combination score and recognition. "It is an honor to be a BC Winner," Schroeder stressed.

An accident on Wednesday, Sept. 12, near Canton cost the lives of two horses finishing first and second in that day's leg of the competition. "I was standing at the finish line when it happened, and those riders just kept racing past the line across a road, in front of a passing car which hit and killed the horses instantly," Schroeder explained. "It was a very unfortunate situation, and it is such a blessing that the riders and motorist were not seriously injured."

This was a freak mishap. In general, endurance riders keep just about as good care of their horses as they do themselves, Schroeder concluded.

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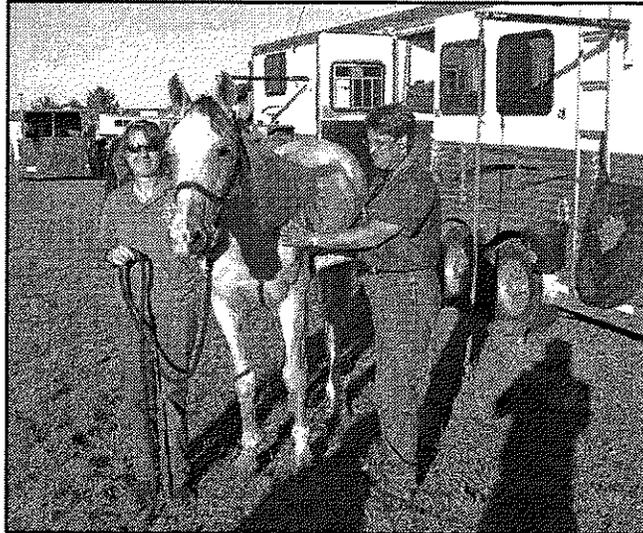
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