

Region 2 Riders Complete the 2009 Tevis Cup on Their First Attempt

TEVIS. This word conjures up many different thoughts to the competitive trail rider. I think just about every competitive trail rider knows what Tevis is. But just to be sure you know after reading this article, modern-day endurance riding began with what is now called the "Tevis Cup" and it is the inspiration and model for many challenging endurance rides worldwide. The Western States Trail Ride, known as the Tevis Cup Ride, was founded on a bet in 1955 by one of Auburn's prominent citizens, Wendell T. Robie. Many people in the 50s doubted that any modern-day horse could cover the rugged trail from Lake Tahoe to Auburn in a single day. Wendell and a few of his friends proved them wrong in August of 1955. He continued to hold the ride annually thereafter and organized the Western States Trail Foundation to preserve the 100 mile trail and the Ride. Tevis has been cancelled only once since its 1955 inception and that was in 2008 due to nearby wildfires.

Each rider who completes the 100 mile course from Tahoe to Auburn within the 24 hour limit and whose mount is judged "fit to continue" is awarded the coveted silver Completion Award Buckle. 8,751 riders have started the ride with only 51% completing. This year the completion rate was 51%.

The Tevis Cup trophy is awarded to the person who completes the 100-Mile One-Day course in the shortest amount of time and whose horse is in sound condition and "fit to continue."

The 54th running of the Tevis ride started at 5:15 AM on Saturday, August 1, 2009. 172 riders started and we had three Region 2 NATRC members start the ride. Thor Halseth, riding Road Rage (Roadie); Allan Horn riding Royal Sassa HP (Sassa); and Gayle Pena riding Sweet Legacy+. Lynn Rigby rode Lauren Horn's horse Red Hot Rosa+ (Rosie).

I asked Thor, Allan and Gayle some questions about their Tevis preparation and experience and this is what they had to say:

Why Tevis?

Thor: The first and hardest endurance ride in the world.

Allan: It's the "mother of all competitive distance rides". I heard all the stories, I love the challenge and I really wanted a Tevis buckle!

When did you decide to go for it?

Thor: When I crewed for Sylvia Beverly and Helen Logan in 1996.

Allan: Last September. I was talking with friends about it and my horses were doing good.

How did you prepare yourself for it?

Thor: There is a mandatory 300 miles of 50+ miles in AERC rides to qualify for Tevis. I did several 50's and a 100 as well a lot of miles on the trails.

Allan: Not much, I'm pretty much in shape but I did start jogging a little bit. I did a 100 mile ride in Feb. to see how it was.

Gayle: Running, hiking trails, getting a feel for the grades and slopes. Unfortunately, I've had to train on my horse mostly alone, which is a huge disadvantage. My horse prefers company and in the end that was a big factor.

How did you condition your horse?

Thor: A lot of hill work on the Malibu endurance ride trail.

Allan: Multi-day endurance rides, training rides at home. Not much different from what we always have done. I did one night ride to prepare and we did attend the Educational Ride.

Gayle: Alternating speed on the flat with slow on technical climbs with a lot of straight up which is what you encounter on Tevis. A lot of climbing!

Was it what you expected? Easier? Harder?

Thor: I knew it would be hard and it was!

Allan: It was harder. You always hear how hard it is, but at the educational ride I got a good taste of the trail and it was definitely tough. The first part of the ride (which I didn't pre-ride) had the largest climb in the ride (over Squaw Valley ski resort) and being a heavyweight I decided to go slow to save my horse. That part took longer than I expected.

Gayle: O.K. I only got to see the first 28.5 miles, although the next 7 miles to Robinson Flat was not difficult. The climb out of Squaw Valley was tough. I can't say it was harder, but the trails were not for beginners.

Did you ride up Cougar Rock?

Thor: Half way. Roadie stopped and started to back down and almost over the 200 foot drop. I stopped him and got off and led him the rest of the way over on foot.

Allan: No. My goal was a completion and I thought it best to go around. But I watched Thor and realized I made the right decision. ;-)

Gayle: Cougar Rock looked worse than I expected! Not better, so I bypassed, feeling that was unfair to my horse.

A couple of memorable moments (good or bad)?

Thor: Cougar Rock! ...Trotting full speed down the trail in total darkness. Real scary at first but you get used to it... Seeing the dead horse at the bottom of the ravine right after it happened. Real sad!!... All 800 volunteers and the people cheering you on. My crew, Karla (my wife), Toren (my son), Sylvia and Doug Beverly and Harca.

Allan: The full moon reflecting on the American river. What a site! ...Watching Thor almost going over backwards on Cougar Rock, I'll never forget that.... And the tragedy on the trail, coming upon the dead horse sobered us all.

Gayle: I left my riding shoes at home! A vendor GAVE me hers. I couldn't believe the support I got from others; chargers for my cell phone, help at the vet checks, turkey sandwiches! The nicest group of riders in the world were there.

*Author's Note: Approximately half way through the ride near Devil's Thumb check point, a rider was leading his horse which lost her footing and fell off of the trail and suffered a fatal skull injury upon impact.

How did your NATRC background help you?

Thor: I could not have done it without it. When I crewed for Sylvia and Helen, Helen told me, "if you are serious about riding Tevis, you need to ride NATRC first. It will give you and your horse a base to build on."

Allan: It helped me save my horse for the end. I kept horse food in my saddle bag and that helped my horse out on trail between checkpoints.

Gayle: I learned how to rate my mare and keep a consistent pace. I learned how to time myself, listen to my horse, know when she might be in trouble, and put her welfare first.

What would you suggest for other NATRC riders considering Tevis?

Thor: Train hard, on and off the horse. Do the Educational Ride. Allan and I rode this together and it was a great help.

Allan: Doing multi day rides and doing an easy 100 gives you some experience in the dark.

Gayle: Train with a committed partner who will follow through.

What was your strategy for starting the ride?

Thor: Not to crash into anyone in the dark.

Allan: Go at a good pace for the first 10 miles then walk the huge climb over Squaw Valley.

Gayle: You start out in the dark on the road packed in a line of horses. When the line starts moving, you do and you just stay in line. There's no other strategy unless you're in the front. You have to be prepared to trot at a speed of roughly 8 mph for at least 6 miles before you can take a break. People are yelling "My horse kicks", "Go faster", "You can't pass", "Keep back", etc.

What was your strategy for finishing the ride?

Thor: Stay on pace!!!!

Allan: "Save" my horse at any chance I could by jogging off the horse downhill and tailing up hill.

Gayle: Make the cutoff to Robinson Flat (36 miles) and then slow down to 5 mph to Forest Hill (68 miles) and then slow down to 4 mph to the finish line.

How did you feel coming into Foresthill (68 mile point)?

Thor: Great! All the people lining the rode cheering you on.

Allan: I felt great because of all the people cheering and lining up along the road a 1/4 mile before the check in. It was good to get a shower and change of clean clothes. The horse got a new saddle pad and girth and some massage. I was hoping to leave before dark but I was running a little behind schedule. But the fact that I did ride the trail before helped me in the dark.

What is the American River trail like in the dark?

Thor: Dark, real dark. The moon had gone down.

Allan: It was tough to get stuck behind slower riders and there are not many places to pass. We had glow sticks on the breastcollar and that helped.

No Hands Bridge?

Thor: I was ready to get it over with so not too bad.

Allan: No Hands Bridge is No Big Deal. There is railing on the side and it's big and wide.

How did you feel coming into the Stadium?

Thor: Roadie and I did it !!!!!

Allan: Crossing the finish line (not at the stadium) was a good feeling but the best was at the final vet check where the vet passed my horse and said Congratulations. The victory lap around the stadium was mandatory but it was a little hard to get back on your horse to ride to the stadium. I'm glad I got a Finish Line photo with my riding partner, Lynn, who was riding Lauren's mare, Rosie.

One hour later?

Thor: Don't ask

Allan: I was still on a "high" an hour later, but I wanted to make sure the horses got settled in.

And the horses?

Thor: Roadie is fine. He is one hell of a horse

Allan: The horses were tired. They chowed down for about 20 minutes then just zoned out for another 30 minutes. They rested all day Sunday. By Monday they looked very chipper and normal.

Have you recovered?

Allan: Yes, I was sore for a couple days but now I'm fine. The emotional reward feels good, as I set a goal, worked toward it and completed it. I'm totally stoked about my whole experience.

Did you do the preparatory Education Ride?

Thor: Yes, it was of great help.

Allan: Yes, it was a key component to finishing because my horse and I knew the last 60 miles of the trail.

Gayle: No, I couldn't afford both. I highly recommend doing it one year, and attempt Tevis the next if you can't afford both.

Extras:

Allan: I really believe that me running beside my horse about a total of 8-10 miles really helped and saved my horse. I believe that if I didn't get off, I may not have finished. I think I was one of the heavier riders on trail. Poor Sassa carried 246 pounds of rider and gear, about 25% of her body weight. My goal was to get a buckle and I did what I could to reach that goal.

Gayle: In the end, my mare simply didn't travel well and this was the furthest I had ever taken her. She failed to eat and drink normally at the trailer and although she had A's at check-in, the deficit in her fluids had already begun.

This was the first attempt for Thor, Allan, Gayle and Lynn and 75% of this group completed TEVIS on their first attempt. What a feat and these incredible riders also thank their crews for taking care of the horse and rider.

Author's Note#2: When Thor first crewed for Sylvia and Helen in 1996, Sylvia was riding Harca. On Thor's first Tevis, Sylvia crewed for Thor and gave Thor a piece of Harca's tail for good luck. Even though he is beyond our earth, Harca is still completing Tevis rides (8) ☺