

**A boy horse named Tulip
18 Years old and 18,265 Miles
AERC High-Mileage Horse of All Time**

“How We Did It “

By Les Carr

Well, as the saying goes, one of our boys did it! Yes, the AERC High-mileage horse of all time is now Tulip, a registered Morab. The American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) is the official sponsoring agency of endurance rides and keeper of ride records. AERC provides its members across regions a broad range of services, for example, continuing education, posting ride schedules, supportive of international competition, accurate record keeping of ride results, working to maintain trail preservation, and a monthly magazine that is well-written and full of helpful advice. Endurance rides can vary in mileage from a one-day 50 mile ride (must complete in 12 hours or less) to a 100 mile ride (must complete in 24 hours or less). Multi-day rides are a fast growing choice of endurance riders. A multi-day ride can be anywhere from three consecutive days (155 miles) or five consecutive days (250 miles). A most popular multi-day ride is the XP Ride (Pony Express) orchestrated in a highly superior manner by David Nicholson, D.V.M., and his energetic family members. XP rides are scenic, challenging, and lots of fun. All endurance rides must involve the same rider and horse for any one day 50, 75, or 100 mile ride. During the endurance ride there are mandatory breaks/lunch stops where the horse must pass rigorous vet checks. To get credit for a particular ride the horse must finish the ride in a sound condition. Horse care and safety is a primary concern of AERC, as well as its Board of Directors, and worldwide members.

Prior to Tulip's accomplishment, the AERC hi-mileage horse of all time in the world was an Arab, namely Rushcreek Lad with 18,215 lifetime miles and ridden by Trilby Pederson - a dedicated, determined, and highly skilled rider. Tulip is still going strong with 18,265 lifetime miles which includes 6,850 multi-day XP miles. Most impressive, Tulip has completed an array of multi-day rides. In 2004, and again in 2006, Tulip was the winner of the XP Gold Medal Award. To win this award the same horse and rider had to finish, without a single failure, all XP multi-day rides (115-250 miles) in a particular year - that is complete 1060 multi-day ride miles in a year.

There are breeders and others reading this article who may be interested in knowing of Tulip's blood lines. Tulip was born 6/16/88 - a gray gelding. The rumor is that a bed of lovely Tulips was observed during his birth.

Tulip was bought from Steve Hanson (Powder River Partners). Very frankly, I have never been influenced

by blood lines. In fact, Tulip is the third horse that I have ridden over 10,000 AERC miles. My choice of a horse is influenced by my intuition and the behavior of the horse in an actual 50 mile ride. However, since a slew of knowledgeable horse breeders may read this article, the blood lines of Tulip are as follows. Tulip is by the Morgan stallion Calamity's Pizzaz, whose sire is from the Kingston line. His dam is Belif, a granddaughter of Bu-Zahar, a son of Ferzon-Hall of Fame sire of National Champions. It is conceivable that Tulip was inspired by having such a distinguished blood line - and this equine inspiration was a significant factor in determining his hi-mileage success

I purchased Tulip at his age of approximately 4 and a half years old, and was pleased that Tulip was somewhat of a runt in height, barely reaching 14 hands. I am 5'8" and about 148 pounds, so I preferred a horse in height on the small size. But Providence had the last laugh and Tulip grew to be 15-2 and an approximate one thousand pounds.

Up to the first day of the very recent (12/28/06) Death Valley Ride (multi-day 200 mile ride) Tulip had completed 18,115 AERC miles in competition, as compared to the hi-mileage horse, Rushcreek Ladd, who had completed 18,215 AERC miles in competition and was the AERC hi-mileage horse. Quite by chance, Tulip had completed exactly 100 miles less than Ladd, and Tulip, to be the hi-mileage horse, had to complete 101 miles or all 3 days of the 4 day, 200 mile, Death Valley Encounter. The first day of the Death Valley Encounter was tough as we braved throughout the day 70+ miles/hour winds mixed with sand - and at times, riding on relatively high mountains.

So Tulip and I spent a difficult first day riding through intense sand storms for the entire day. The second day was calm and sunny; a welcome change of weather. Now one more day to go to break the AERC record for a hi-mileage horse. Having completed 100 miles over two days, we then had to finish a third day 50 mile ride in order to gain the one (1) mile required (101 miles in all) to break the world record. That night of the third day, upon completion of the ride and Tulip establishing a new hi-mileage record, Tulip and I received warm congratulations from my fellow riders, as well as the vets - Dr. David Nicholson and Dr. Gene Nance. Both vets were really there, providing excellent services for both the riders and horses. I am blessed with my wife, Jill, who is an excellent endurance rider and rode her quiet and trustworthy mule along with Tulip and me for all three days of the Death Valley Encounter. For those fans of Morabs, I am pleased to inform you that Jill's mule, named Walker (for Walker, Texas Ranger), is part Morgan (and for fun titled a "Morass"). Jill worked 10 years as a vet tech with various vets. Jill's passion is to train and drive carriage and harness horses for both wagon trains and living history. Jill and I elected not to do the fourth day of the Death Valley Encounter

so we could go home and celebrate the New Year with family.

Now for the rest of the story-how Tulip and I succeeded to accomplish this goal of Tulip becoming the AERC hi-mileage horse of all time. Accomplishing this goal took place over a period of thirteen years doing approximately 1,000 miles per year, plus or minus over the 13 years. However, this last year of 2006, Tulip and I completed 1970 AERC miles completing a wide array of rides (one day, two days, and multi-day rides).

Following are the strategies and principles that led to our completion of the 18,265 AERC miles. However, there are certain considerations to ponder as an endurance rider. As an endurance rider I must make a decision as to my riding style. The AERC motto is "To Finish is to Win." However, winning can be accomplished in different ways. One can win by attempting to "top ten" that is to ride as fast as your horse permits with the goal of finishing any ride in the top ten horses, and hopefully even winning the ride by coming in first. However, it is rare to find a top ten horse that continually top tens over a period of several consecutive years and remains physically and psychologically sound. Another way to win is for the rider to make the decision to ride the same horse over a long period of time-and placing in the middle of riders or coming in at the tail end of the ride. The latter approach has been my choice. Tulip and I usually come in toward the end of the ride. AERC provides endurance riders the opportunity to engage in a range of alternative choices-slow riding, fast riding, riding in international competition, etc.

Free-Range Raising

My objective was to search for and acquire a fully registered young Morab that was raised more in a free-range manner rather than raised in a stall and limited area. A young horse's physical and mental superior potential is much less likely to be attained when the horse is not challenged by its environment. Tulip was raised in the rough terrain of Montana and had unusually strong looking legs and was generally quiet when ridden, and displayed an excellent slow and smooth trot.

Start the Horse Going Slowly and Carrying Light Rider Weight

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to sponsor an excellent light-weight young junior, Lainey Porter, who rode Tulip in the beginning for approximately 5500 miles. I was campaigning Surrablue at the same time I sponsored and accompanied Lainey who rode Tulip slowly and followed my strategies and lead. Lainey's father, Jim Porter, is an excellent horseshoer and also helped out crewing. Surrablue was retired after our completing 10,590 AERC miles.

Pace of Five and a Half Mile/Hour

For some folks, my style of riding Tulip would be boring and seem uneventful. But that was a critical factor as to strategy. Regardless of how good or bad the terrain and environmental conditions, Tulip and I trotted the majority of the ride averaging five and a half miles/hour. This choice of slow pace resulted in my being on Tulip-in the saddle- for an average of 9-10 hours during, for example, a 50 mile ride. (I have never cantered or galloped Tulip-ride or no ride.)

Riding Standing-Up in the Stirrups

For any and all rides, while trotting, I stood up with my legs unbent and held straight into both stirrups. While trotting, it was quite rare that my backside touched the saddle. Even when walking, I spent most of the time standing up in the stirrups, off the back of the horse. For the last approximate 5,000 miles of endurance competition, my saddle an Abetta with an Abetta "ultimate" sponge type pad. I started out with a Stonewall saddle that also worked well until with age and miles, the confirmation of Tulip's back changed. At no time did Tulip have a sore back. This is quite amazing given Tulip's completion of 18,265 miles over a period of 13 years. However, I would caution that there is no magical saddle and pad. Tulip's conformation changed and changing saddles and pads was a necessity.

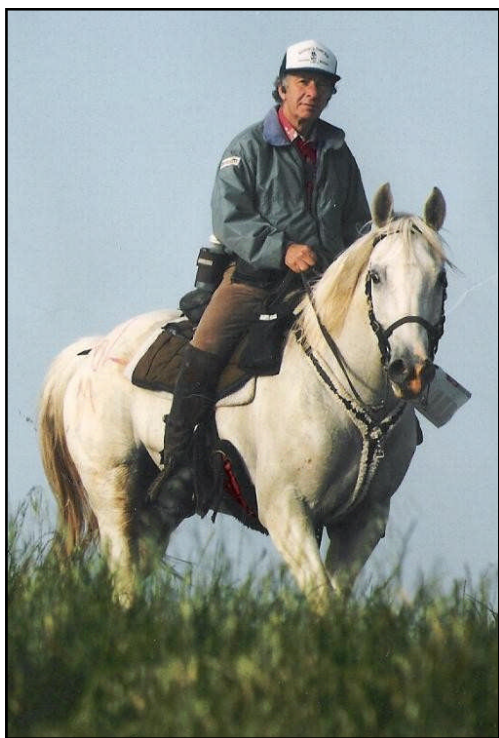
Focusing on Urine, Feces, and Water Intake

For some readers, my emphasizing a focus on Tulip's urine, feces, and water intake may seem unnecessary, if not obsessive on my part. However, riding Tulip so many miles in competition, I believe strongly that the quality and color of urine, the composition and frequency of feces, and the quantity of water taken in, as well as Tulip's desire for water, all provide significant clinical signs as to the condition of Tulip along the trail-both his physical and psychological condition which are interactive and influence one another. Yes, I confess that I was focused to an obsessive degree on such clinical signs of Tulip's condition along the trail of 50 + miles.

Continual Eating and Drinking Along the 50 to 100 Mile Trail

Having a strategy of going slowly, for 50 miles, with an average time of nine to ten hours on the horse, and with an average speed of five and a half miles/hour permits Tulip to eat constantly and continually along the trail. I believe strongly that a major factor determining Tulip's longevity and ride completions was his constant eating along the trail and being an easy drinker of water, and an easy keeper in general. Every 15 or so minutes, Tulip would eat various plants along

the trail and frequently drink water. Tulip's habit of continual eating resulted in a happy horse and a great amount of "poop"-and intestinal tract given to frequent elimination of poop. Psychologically Tulip might be thinking about pooping for several miles, and patience was required on my part not to push him to go faster, but to simply walk while Tulip was preoccupied with eliminating waste (urine or feces). I believe that if your horse is not given to eating along the 50 to 100 mile trail, it may top ten-- and even win some rides; but is very unlikely to remain sound over a number of years and thousands of miles-that is continuing to remain sound beyond 3,000 miles of



Les Carr and PR Tulip

endurance competition. There are exceptions; but they are truly rare. Furthermore, if the horse you are planning to purchase or use in long-distance type endurance competition is not an "easy keeper" then you would be wise in not becoming emotionally bonded to a horse that is likely to fail to perform well.

Drinking Water Along The Trail

There is the time honored truism-"You can lead a horse to water; but you can't make him drink". If you wish to purchase and/or use a horse for endurance riding, or other forms of competition, make certain that the horse naturally drinks water along the trail of many competitive miles. Some horses are born to drink water frequently and hydrate naturally. Other horses are born with a lack of desire for fre-

quent and necessary drinking of water and are prone to electrolyte and other water-related problems that are not easily overcome. It is indeed distressing to view riders on the endurance trail greatly concerned and anxious that their horse was not naturally drinking water. Washing your horse down does in no way substitute for or replace the horse's need to take in water frequently. For the rider who rationalizes his horse's lack of interest in drinking water by stating that the horse does not require a great deal of water along the competitive trail, my response to the rider would be, "You should be riding a camel rather than a horse."

Risk Assessment

My first hi-mileage horse of 12,130 AERC endurance miles, Astro Aires, died on the trail of salmonella. We were on an endurance ride some 200 + miles from a vet clinic or hospital, and the ride vets simply did not have the quantity of fluids and medications that would be required to treat salmonella. Astro Aires died in my arms and I will never get over what was a frightening and horrible experience. So, I would caution you to recognize that I may be over-reacting to Astro Aires' death in my sense of risk-assessment. My second hi-mileage horse of 10,590 miles, Surrablue, is retired in sound condition and as Tulip's friend serves as an important factor in keeping Tulip psychologically happy.

Regarding risk assessment, my policies and practices in this regard are rigid and quite strict. If Tulip is even slightly off in his gait (mild number 1 lameness), and even if the vet judges that Tulip can continue in the ride, Tulip and I load up and go home. If Tulip has very mild colic and we might be able to work it out by walking for some miles, my policy is to load up and go home-as soon as possible. In Tulip's history of 18,265 miles, he has had mild number 1 lameness approximately three times, and mild to moderate severity of colic approximately 4 times. Any sign of colic results in my immediately pulling Tulip from the ride and requesting immediate vet treatment. My operating philosophy is that there is always another endurance ride to do; but not another Tulip. Again, I would caution you that I may be to overly cautious in my concept of risk assessment and its application in the case of Tulip. I will never get over the death of Astro Aires and until the day I die will wonder how I could have found a way to prevent Astro's death.

Happy Horse and Happy Rider

In the case of myself, psychologically, I really enjoy my relationship with Tulip and being out there along the endurance trail. Beginning in 1963 and to date I have ridden approximately 10,000+ competitive miles and 40,000+ endur-

endurance miles, in many different geographic regions. I always ride listening to tapes on a range of subjects, or an FM radio with my selection of country Western music and religious related stations. For me, riding is a mystical and spiritual experience-Tulip and I connecting with the universe and its elements, so to speak. Between rides, to keep in shape physically and psychologically, I engage in a routine of bodybuilding and weightlifting, doing high reps to build endurance potential. Also, between rides, I spend time catching up on office paperwork since my doctoral degree is in psychology and mental health, and I still function as a practicing clinical psychologist and university administrator.

In the case of Tulip, he has definite needs to maintain his psychological happiness on the trail and at home. If he is not permitted to eat along the endurance trail, he becomes angry and depressed. If he is not permitted to eliminate his wastes while walking slowly and sometimes stopping (both urine and feces), he becomes depressed and lethargic. Tulip prefers to walk up hills and mountains, and prefers to trot slowly down hills and mountains that do not have sharp falls or declines. When it is a steep downhill, he prefers to walk very slowly and cautiously. My standard operating policy is most of the time, but not always, to go with his desires and moods rather than imposing my own attitudes and needs upon him. Thus, I must practice rider impulse control. In fact, I have often fantasized that ride managers in addition to having ribbons all along a well-marked trail should also feature periodic signs with the statement "Curb Your Impulses". So if it is an intense rain, or the rider feels tired, or the rider feels impatient and wishes to get home, the rider should curb his impulses and go at a pace that is best for the horse-rather than what is best for the rider's needs. For example, if on a particular day of a competitive endurance ride, the rider's horse performs in a superior manner for a few miles, and the rider feels tired and/or impatient to get to his nice comfortable camper, the rider must find ways and means to curb his impulse to rush home -----with the rationalization that he/she is riding "super horse" with the capacity for significantly increased speed.

Horse and Rider Rest and Conditioning at Home

My policy regarding Tulip is to provide him complete rest (no riding whatsoever) between multi-(3-5 days; 155-250 miles). Except in very rare circumstances, my policy is to do one multi-day ride per month and to rest Tulip between multi-day rides. Resting Tulip involves his running freely on approximately 5 acres with his friend and companion Surrablue. Where there is a time gap of approximately four to six weeks

between endurance rides, one week before an upcoming ride, I simply walk Tulip up and down mountains, each day, for about 10 miles. I do not trot; I do not canter or gallop Tulip; I simply walk him at his own desired pace. I continue to believe that a hi-mileage horse doing repeated endurance or competitive type rides experience unseen and not easily detected minor tears in tissues and ligaments, so rest time rather than overtraining, is an absolute must for healing to occur between rides. If you are going slowly, the ride itself can serve as an excellent form of conditioning for the horse.

What I Did Not Do

It is important to emphasize that "what I did not do" may only apply to the horse and rider who ride slowly in competition average five and a half miles over 50 miles with 12 hours to complete. Also Tulip is permitted to eat and drink freely along the endurance trail. Not many riders have a riding style of standing straight up in their saddle stirrups while slowly trotting most of the endurance ride. For the rider who wishes to top ten or win the ride, strategies and policies and practices of riding, training, and feeding are likely to be quite different than the hi-mileage longevity approach of Tulip and me.

No Excessive Use of Supplements

I have not used the variety offered of nutrition, vitamin, and other quasi-energy type supplements. In fact, the only supplements I have used are Purina Equine Senior mixed with electrolyte powder. At home 4 days prior to a ride and 4 days after a ride, Tulip is fed two scoops of Equine Senior mixed with electrolyte powder, along with a thick flake of oat or grass hay in the evening, and a thick flake of alfalfa in the morning. After the four days of feeding after a ride, then Tulip no longer gets the Purina Equine Senior. During the ride, Tulip receives the same hay and grain feeding with electrolyte powder during the ride breaks and lunch stops.

No Go

In the morning when I arise, always two and a half hours before the ride begins, thereby permitting me ample time to feed and observe Tulip, I will not go on the ride if I see no evidence of urine waste and/or no feces deposited overnight and/or the feces deposited overnight that was overly loose or overly hard; and/or the hay and/or grain was not eaten during the night. Any of the above conditions resulting in my decision to "no go" was most unusual during Tulip's 13 years of competition and cumulative 18,265 miles. But there were times it was a "no go".

No Wrapping of Legs

During my riding of Tulip in competition, I have never, even once, wrapped or treated Tulip's

legs. Going slowly on Tulip along with his strong legs to begin with, resulted in an absence of any swelling or ligament problems.

No Getting Off of Tulip

During my riding of Tulip in competition, I seldom ever dismount from Tulip except for vet checks, lunch stops, and pit stops. So going up and down the steepest mountains, I remain on him rather than off Tulip and on the ground. I do ride standing up straight in the stirrups, with my rear not touching the saddle. Going up mountains and even moderately high hills I ride off the saddle and leaning way over his neck, thus taking stress off his hindquarters.

On one XP ride, my being on rather than off Tulip, may well have saved me from getting hurt and/or losing Tulip and his possibly getting hurt. He and I were following three horses and riders (the three were walking off and in front of their horses, each with a lead rope) on a 8 foot wide ledge type trail bordering an 8,000 foot high mountain, and to the left of the ledge type trail it was simply straight down, and to the right of the ledge type trail was a very steep incline. The lead rider in the front and walking along in front of her horse, lost control of her horse. Her "nutty" horse panicked, broke loose from her lead rope and ran up the steep incline to the right, about fifty feet, and panicked again and slid down back to the ledge trail, running past the two horses and their riders walking with lead ropes. Then the herd instinct prevailed and it became three horses running full blast toward Tulip. Tulip and I held our ground and two of the three horses bounced off of Tulip and ran past Tulip toward the three horses behind him. The three riders on the ground behind us lost control of their horses. The three horses in front of Tulip now joined in running with the other three horses behind Tulip a herd of six horses galloped freely down the mountain and ended up in different places. It took searching to the next day to find all of the missing six horses. One of the missing horses was fast becoming Tulip's main competitor as a hi-mileage horse. When finally found the next day, this horse was hurt and is no longer participating in endurance rides. So, in conclusion, not even counting the safety factor of being on the horse and in control when difficult times suddenly come to pass, it is possible to not get off a horse and "go the distance"-----without the horse or rider having a sore back or leg and joint problems, as in the case of Tulip and me.

No Perfect Horse

Well-documented in the Bible (Old and New Testaments), is the wisdom that there is no perfect human being. We all have our particular strengths and weaknesses. The same is true of

horses. Tulip is a great believer in practicing the major theme of Frank Sinatra's song, "I did it my way." Tulip is constantly observing the trail with his head aimed downward evaluating the ground and looking all around. It takes a minimum surprise for Tulip to shy with an extremely energetic jump of a few feet to either side of the trail. So, I must ride Tulip in a non-stressful relaxed manner, at the same time being prepared to be thrown to the ground. On the one hand, Tulip might seem rather exceptional given that he has twice, not once, won the XP Gold Medal Award. To achieve this award, the horse must complete, without failing even once, all of the XP Pony Express multi-day rides (155-200 miles) during a particular year, thus completing over 1,000 miles on XP trails. But he is not the mythical "perfect" horse--even with all his accomplishments.

On the very first day of the multi-day, four day, 200 mile Death Valley Encounter, as described earlier, we encountered 70+ mile/hour winds all day. About ten miles out the first day, Tulip, excited by the winds and riders cantering up a short steep hill chose to also canter up the hill. I tried to hold him back to walk slowly up the short but steep hill. Tulip's response to walking up the hill was, "The Hell with you Les," and, Tulip, my strong-minded Morab bucked me off (a long fall for me down the side of the hill). I managed to get up, walked up the hill, and there was Tulip at the top. As I walked up the hill, shaken somewhat from having been thrown hard, I kept thinking of Tulip singing like Frank Sinatra, "I did it my way." As I indicated earlier, it was indeed rare that I did not follow Tulip's lead. He and I finished the first day, and the next two days of the Death Valley Encounter. Fortunately, I was not hurt and had no lingering aches or pains during the rest of the ride miles.

FUTURE PLANS

At what point does one retire a horse from competition? Tulip is now 19 years old and still going strong with no problems to be aware of and overcome. It is not unusual on the 100 mile Tevis Ride (Western States Trail Ride)-a most difficult and challenging ride-for a 20+ year old horse to finish well. My judgment as to continue riding Tulip in endurance rides will be determined by how he does and his clinical signs and symptoms from ride to ride.

However, as a precaution, Tulip and I will no longer do multi-day rides spanning a period of five consecutive days (250 miles). He and I will be limited to one-day 50 mile rides and doing multi-day rides spanning a period of three days (155 miles). I will continue to use all of the strategies and policies that I have described in this article. In other words, I do not plan to

change my riding style or practices with Tulip. Maybe he and I will do only one more ride or we will advance from Tulip's record of 18,265 AERC miles to 19,000 AERC miles. Life along the endurance trail is unpredictable in line with our universe that is inherently chaotic and unpredictable.

At what point does a rider retire from endurance riding competition? I am 71 soon to be 72 years of age. I am blessed with good health and personal endurance. My very supportive wife will continue to ride her mule or mustang with me on a number of the endurance rides and share the crewing and driving back and forth to rides. I am absolutely convinced that the most dangerous part of endurance riding is driving your rig on the roads to and from the ride and avoiding accidents with vehicles that cut in and out in front of your rig.

I hope to be riding in endurance rides well into my late 80's. On all endurance rides you must follow the official trail of ride management, often marked with colored ribbons along the entire trail. I will probably agree that it is my quitting time when I am riding along the endurance trail and I look way up at the sky and I see little pink ribbons hanging from the clouds. This will be the last trail for me to follow; hopefully riding Astro Aires from one cloud to the other.

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