

SCOTTISH ENDURANCE RIDING CLUB

Introduction to Endurance Riding

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The Highland Long Distance Riding Club was founded in 1982 in Inverness. However, due to the ever-increasing popularity of the sport, the Club expanded. Eventually Branches serving the whole of Scotland were formed. The name of the Club was subsequently changed to the **Scottish Endurance Riding Club (SERC)**.

Endurance riding can be enjoyed at any level! Any horse or pony that is fit, healthy and sound can successfully take part in shorter long-distance rides. Members also have the option of entering the SERC grading system. This starts at Bronze level, progressing to Silver and ultimately to Gold Series or even Platinum level for both horses and riders.

The involvement needed to train and compete an endurance horse can help to develop a unique relationship and understanding which many horse owners are simply not aware of.

Getting started

When you join SERC you are provided with a Rule Book and a Constitution. You will find it helpful to read and understand the rules before you enter your first SERC ride. However, there is no substitute for helpful advice from experienced riders - most are more than happy to talk endlessly about the sport! Communication between experienced and novice riders is actively encouraged, this allows novice riders to learn from the more experienced ones and also from their mistakes! *Never be afraid to ask a more experienced rider if you can ride along with them for a while.* Some branches run mentoring or 'buddy' schemes for new members.

Training. All Branches hold training events designed to help riders and crews at all levels. These are well worth attending and if you are not sure whether this is the sport for you, will be a good starting point.

TYPES OF RIDES

Pleasure rides: There is always a pleasure ride class at every SERC ride and new members should start by entering Pleasure rides. These rides can be between 10 and 19 miles and ridden at a speed of between 5 and 7 miles an hour.

Training rides: These allow riders to take the next step from Pleasure to Competitive without being penalised for mistakes. The distances are normally 10-20 miles. A speed category must be nominated before the ride and the challenge for horse and rider is then to achieve that speed with no vet or speed penalties. The Speed Categories are: SC1: 8mph and over; SC2: 7mph to 7.99mph; SC3: 6mph to 6.99mph.

Competitive rides: For the more ambitious rider, the next step is a Competitive ride. These rides are against the clock, not against other riders. The objective is to complete a course of between 20 and 50 miles at a speed nominated by the rider before the start. Veterinary inspections will be held before the start and up to 30 minutes after the finish. During longer rides there will also be further inspections approximately every 20 miles. Once you have attained your Bronze Thistle Final, you no longer need to nominate a speed category.

Gated rides: The ultimate competition in endurance riding is the Gated ride, which may be up to 100 miles in a day, but it is always 40 miles or over. This is a "first past the post" competition open only to qualified riders. Gated rides involve "vet gates" during the ride. At these the clock remains running until the horse is presented to the vet. Its pulse rate must be 64 beats per minute or less in order for it to continue. The longer gated rides /endurance races require tactical expertise, supreme fitness and a well-trained support team, known as **Crews**.

PREPARING FOR YOUR FIRST PLEASURE RIDE

The horse: If you hack your horse out for a couple of hours, a few times a week, you should both be fit enough to comfortably complete a pleasure ride. Vetting procedures are relaxed and informal but it is important that you do not overtax your horse. You may not be used to riding on a course with other horses doing different speeds, so you must have the control (brakes) and be able to set your own pace.

Entries: Make sure you send in your entry form before the closing date (usually two weeks before the ride date). Your entry may not be accepted if the Ride Secretary receives it after the closing date. You **MUST** always fill in your entry form correctly and enclose a large SAE for map and instructions.

Horse logbooks: It is mandatory for all horses entered in a Competitive or Gated ride to have an endurance riding logbook. The logbook must be taken to each ride and the plastic wallet containing the master card (which records results of competitive rides) and cumulative mileage card (which records results of all rides) handed in to the administrators. It helps if you also keep your medical card in this plastic wallet. Make a label and stick it on the outside of the wallet showing your name and the name of your horse. This will help the administrators process the results more quickly.

The logbook stays with the horse for its endurance career and is recognised by the other UK endurance bodies.

Maps: These can be either black and white or colour photocopies. You may prefer to transcribe the route on to a proper OS Landranger Map so that you can clearly distinguish contours, water etc. You should familiarise yourself with map reading. Looking for lost riders can be a worrying and frustrating time for organisers - there is no substitute for good map reading. Maps will always be accompanied by 'talkrounds' of the route.

Packing: Even for short ride packing requires thought, so it helps to establish a routine. This is a checklist of what you might need. On pleasure rides you may not need everything but it is better to be well prepared.

Saddle (don't forget the girth) and numnah	Bridle	Easyboot/Shoof boot or similar
Spare numnah and girth	Breastplate and martingale (if used)	Hat, boots/riding trainers
Grooming kit (extra hoof pick for crew)	Spare reins and leathers	Stethoscope
Hay net, hay and feed (particularly sloppy sugar beet)	Spare head collar and rope	First aid kit in bum bag or saddle bag
Spare set of shoes already shaped, if possible	Water containers and slosh bottles	Watch
*A variety of rugs i.e. sweat, New Zealand, cooler, woollen, thermatex etc	Buckets	Baler twine & penknife
Waterproofs for rider	Map case, map, instructions & times	Mobile or money for phone
Whip (under 30" and of acceptable design)	Glucose tablet/energy food and drink	Food and drink for crew.

***Rugs:** In our climate it is easy to underestimate the weather and the need for **rugs**. You may start with a fresh horse in the sunshine and finish with a sweating horse in freezing rain!

First aid kit comprises: Wound bandage, triangular bandage, vet wrap, space blanket, whistle, glucose tablets, rider ID card. You could also include Elastoplasts and a wound gel or cleansing agent.

Travelling: Allow plenty of time for your journey to avoid rushing and upsetting your horse once you arrive at the venue. Give your horse a smooth journey, as he may become a bad traveller if he is thrown about.

On arrival: Check your horse over then collect your number from the Ride Administrator. Also hand in your mileage card(s) to the administrator with the ride details already completed. Check if there are any last minute changes to the route, or any other information you should have. Find out where the vetting, tack and farrier inspections are and where the start is. Make sure you are wearing your number and have your vet sheet (also called a ride sheet) with you before going to the inspections. Take your helper/crew with you, if available.

INSPECTIONS: You and your horse will be subject to a number of inspections before you are allowed to start any SERC ride.

Farrier inspection: There should be a farrier in attendance at all Competitive rides. There is normally no farrier present at Pleasure only rides. He will check the shoes and clenches are tight, with sufficient metal to complete the ride. He will also check the horse is properly and comfortably shod. These farriers should have some specialised knowledge of the demands of endurance riding, so please listen to any advice. The farrier will sign your vet sheet once the inspection is complete. If your horse pulls a shoe off in transit, or during the ride, the farrier will be happy to replace it, provided you are not holding anyone else up. Remember to pay the farrier for any work he does for you. **Do not expect your horse to be shod at the ride!** - unless you have made a prior arrangement with the farrier and you do not hold up other riders waiting for their horses' shoes to be checked. The farrier is only present to carry out ride duties.

Vet inspection: this is done by a vet at competitive rides and sometimes by a competent layperson (if no vet is available) at Pleasure only rides, before and after the ride.

Pre ride vetting: Try and have someone (crew) to help you at the vetting. If it is cold or your horse is clipped, keep the rugs on until you are asked to remove them. Your horse's heart rate will be taken and you will have to trot up your horse over a distance of 30 metres with rugs off so he/she can be checked for soundness. Always turn your horse away from you before trotting back to the vet in order to give him a clear view of the horse. Also trot your horse on a loose lead rein (if possible), again to give the vet a clear view of your horse. The vet will also check for lumps and bumps. You can note any existing cuts, bumps, or action peculiarities your horse may have on your vet sheet. The vet is only interested in new bumps which may affect your horse's performance during the ride, e.g. scabs which may have come off or knocks received in transit. The vet will sign your vet sheet if your horse passes the vetting.

Tack inspection: The Tack Inspector will check your **riding hat** (which must be of current British Standard or better), **footwear** (which must have a heel unless you use a caged stirrup). **Whips** must be no longer than 30" and of acceptable design. Riders on all types of ride must also carry a **medical card** (this forms part of your membership card), and a **First aid kit** (see above). This can be attached to you or the horse but bear in mind you may become separated from it and your horse in the event of an accident.

Your **tack** must be in a good state of repair and fit your horse properly. Stitching and all leather and metal parts must be in good condition. Stirrup leather stitching should be checked carefully BEFORE the ride. If your tack does not come up to standard you will not be allowed to start until it is adjusted correctly or replaced. Ultimately you are responsible for the safety of your tack. The way to avoid embarrassment at a tack inspection is to check your own tack every time you clean it. Remember, the tack inspection is done for your benefit and safety. If you pass this inspection, the Tack Inspector will sign your vet sheet.

Times: You must be ready to start at your allocated start time. At many rides you are given a "flexible" start time, i.e. a time band to start between rather than a precise time. However, if you are very late you may not be

allowed to start the ride at all! You should also work out your riding time for the ride to help you achieve your speed category. This will become easier with experience. If you are lucky enough to have a crew (essential at longer rides) you can also use the map, distances and times to work out the best places to meet. You may find it easier to wear a second watch, set to 12.00 as you start, and work on elapsed time, rather than real time. Stopwatches are also readily available.

Crews: Try and persuade a horsey friend or member of the family to come to rides and crew for you. It is recommended that riders competing in distances over 30 miles have a crew. On hot days you and your horse will need extra water out on course and on cold days you and horse may need warmer clothing. At vet gates your crew must be there with all the items you need and this should help take the pressure off you, giving you time to sit and eat etc... Also at the end of the ride, when you are tired and feeling under pressure, it can often help to relax your horse if your crew calmly takes the horse to the vet.

Marking: Routes can be marked differently but generally, strips of red/white coloured plastic tape are used, together with flagged canes on open ground. Some rides use lime or coloured spray on the ground. Single markers mean that you carry straight on, a double marker (i.e. two side by side) means a turning is due. There is a single marker shortly after the turning to confirm that you have turned the right way. **Gates:** If the route is to go through a gate and the gate is to be shut after you go through it, a marker will generally be tied on the gate at the cleat/locking end. If the gate can be left open, a single marker will be tied on the left hand gatepost. If in doubt, always shut gates after you. Be aware that people do sometimes remove markers and stock sometimes eat them. Unless you are sure a gate can be left open, make sure ALL gates are shut and fastened after you. It is through the goodwill of landowners that we are able to hold rides and if stock escapes or is mixed up we will certainly not be invited back.

Riding the course: Hand your vet sheet to the starter who will ensure your sheet has been signed by all the necessary inspectors and will note your start time as you cross over the start line. If you intend to set out at a brisk pace make sure your horse is warmed up first, otherwise start off slowly. Make sure you have enough braking power (i.e. strong enough bit), a snaffle bit at home may not be enough when your horse is out in company and other horses are going at a faster pace than your horse is fit for. This can cause major problems for everybody, not just you. Fingertip control with a strong bit is preferable to hauling all day on a mild one. You will acquire penalty points if your horse comes home with a bruised or cut mouth.

Overtaking: When horses are passing you from behind make sure that you keep your horse's quarters turned away from them. If you are passing others, do it slowly and steadily. Let the riders in front know that you are coming past and which side you intend to pass on. Be sociable and polite as you pass regardless of your hurry!

Manners: If another rider opens a gate for you do not ride off and leave them to shut the gate unless they are happy for you to do so.

Drinking: Always encourage your horse to drink at every opportunity. If your horse stops to drink, try and ensure another horse waits with you so your horse continues to drink without getting upset at being left behind. This is very important as water intake is vital as you progress to do longer rides. Make sure you drink too – dehydration is not comfortable!

The finish: At a halfway halt or finish, it is much better not to come in as a group as this can cause confusion with finish times and create queues at the vetting. If you are within your time, try and walk for the last half a mile or so. This will pay dividends particularly in a Competitive ride as your horse will be relaxed, will cool down and the heart rate will start to drop even before you cross the finish line.

Post ride treatment: Place a rug over your horse's hindquarters, remove his/her bridle and offer a drink. You can encourage your horse to drink by adding a handful of sloppy beet to the water. Remove the saddle unless

your horse is prone to pressure bumps, in which case leave the saddle on and gradually loosen the girth over a period of 15 minutes approx. This is not ideal and the solution is probably a better fitting saddle. However, some horses are very sensitive and it is wise to follow this procedure regardless of how well fitting the saddle is. In cool weather sponge the horse down with a minimum amount of water on his neck, belly and between his back legs, then towel him dry. A water container filled from the hot tap before you leave for the ride and then wrapped in bubble wrap and/or towels will still be warm when you finish and is less of a shock for the horse. A spare hot water thermos is also useful.

Pulse rate: Take the pulse rate and if still above the necessary parameters (64 beats per minute), take it again in five minutes. If it is coming down and is below 60, quietly walk your horse around with rugs adequate for the weather and any unexpected weather changes. (Pleasure riders are not eliminated if the horse's heart rate is over 64 beats per minutes. However, it is good practice to aim to get your horse's heart rate down to an acceptable level.)

If the pulse is high and the weather is hot, keep sponging cold water on the under side of the neck and high inside the back legs. These areas are where the arteries are closest to the surface. Scrape the water off immediately, otherwise it acts as an insulator. The objective is to cool your horse's blood without chilling him. This will bring your horse's temperature down and ultimately the heart rate drop. Never apply water over the large muscles on his rump. Don't panic if your horse's pulse does not start to drop immediately, some horses can take longer than others.

Generally discourage your horse from eating until after the vetting as this may put the pulse rate up. He may resent this initially but will soon get used to the routine. However, rather than fighting to stop your horse eating the grass and getting him worked up, the occasional nibble while walking round is probably a safer option. Keep him moving gently, so that his muscles do not stiffen up. The art is to balance this need for movement against the seemingly opposing requirement for relaxation and cooling. Gentle massage, movement and warmth in the right places are the secret. Watching and asking advice from more experienced riders will also help you achieve the "magic formula" for your horse.

Vetting at halfway halts and at the finish of competitive rides: This is similar to the pre ride vetting. However, the horse will have its heart rate taken before and after the trot up (called a minute or Ridgeway test), and it is the second pulse that determines your award. He will also be given a pinch test to check for dehydration. You must encourage your horse to be well mannered and stand quietly for the vet to pulse him and keep him in control (in a bridle if necessary) for the trot up. Allowances can be made for inexperienced horses but your horse must not be a danger to anyone.

Post vetting: Once the horse has been vetted: take him back to your vehicle and rug up and bandage as appropriate. Give him a hay net, water and a small sloppy feed before you travel him home. Don't forget to praise him/her for being such a clever horse!! Return your number bib to administration and collect your mileage card (and master card if applicable) and hopefully your award. Please be patient if your results are not ready, there is always a lot of pressure on the administrators and they will process the results quicker if left in peace and quiet. Don't forget to thank them and the ride organiser - it makes all the difference.

When you get home: Make your horse comfortable by quickly brushing off excess mud and sweat. Give him another small feed. If he lives out, turn him out, with a rug on unless it is very mild. If stabled, leave him in peace but come back periodically to check that he has not broken out in a sweat. If he does, rub his ears with a towel and take him out for a walk.

Next morning: Thoroughly check your horse over, looking for any signs of heat or lumps and bumps on the legs. Trot him in hand to see if is quite sound, then start planning your training for the next competition.