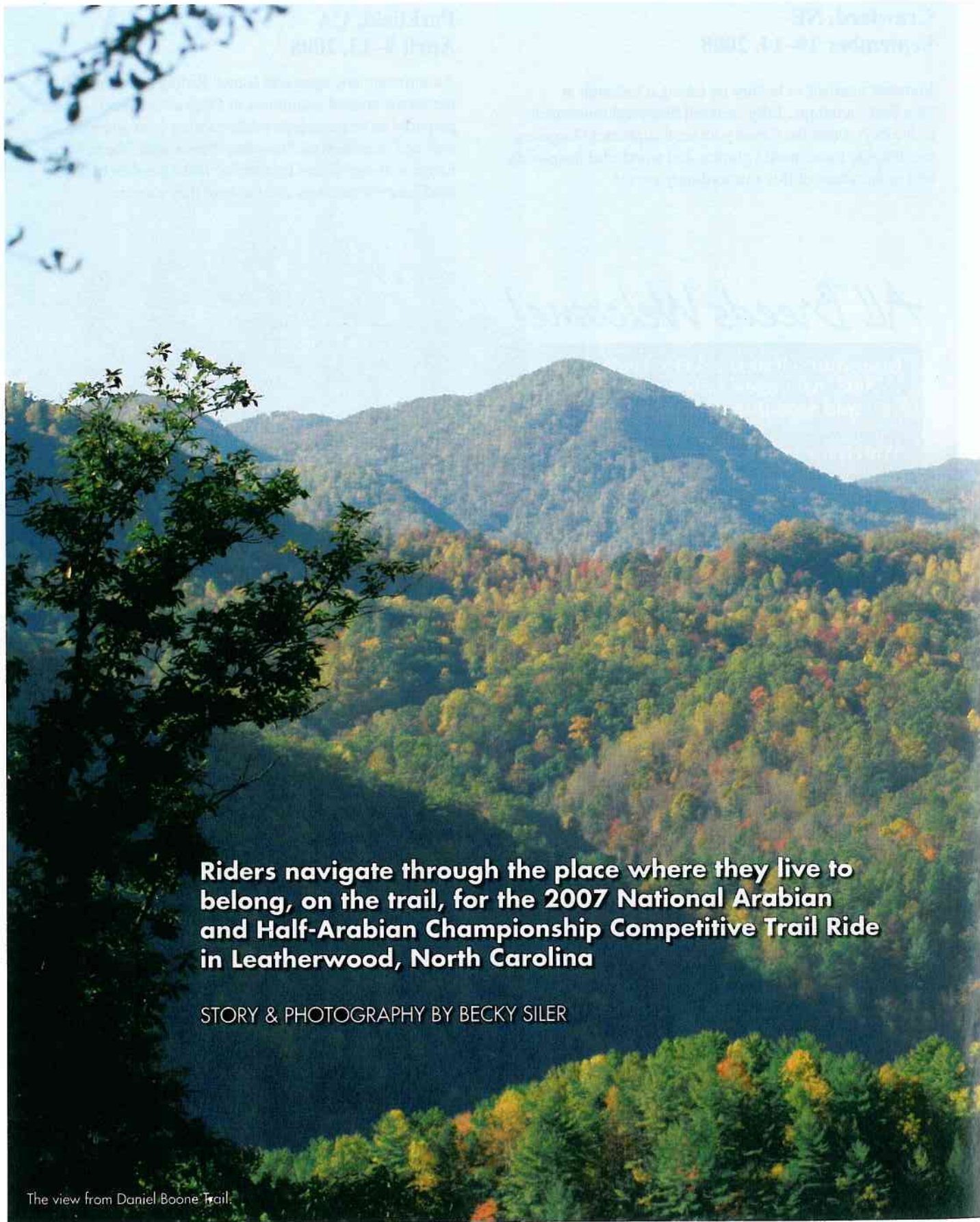


Take Me Home,
Country
Roads





Riders navigate through the place where they live to belong, on the trail, for the 2007 National Arabian and Half-Arabian Championship Competitive Trail Ride in Leatherwood, North Carolina

STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY BY BECKY SILER

The view from Daniel Boone Trail.



ABOVE LEFT: Two “friends” discussing their game plan for the national championship ride. ABOVE RIGHT: A frosty ride morning at Leatherwood Mountains Resort. BELOW: Lee Ann Clarke with HS NUBARR ON+ share a bonding moment prior to tacking up for the first day’s ride. Unfortunately, the pair did not complete the ride.

Deep in the Blue Ridge Mountains on a frosty fall morning, the shrill call of one Arabian horse to another pierces the early dawn. Along the shed row, their human companions gather tack and begin to saddle up for the long day’s journey ahead.

Excitement builds as the sun touches the surrounding mountains, and the time draws near for the 25 horse-and-rider teams to negotiate the challenging trail before them.

The setting was the beautiful Leatherwood Mountains Resort and its surrounding woods, located in Ferguson, N.C., and the event was the 2007 National Arabian and Half-Arabian Championship Competitive Trail Ride (CTR) held on Nov. 3 and 4.

Friday afternoon evolved into a beautiful, warm sunny day, as the riders checked their horses in with the two ride veterinarians, Art King, DVM, of Ontario, Canada, and Maureen Fehrs, DVM, of Michigan City, Ind. The combined judging experience of these two enthusiastic vets totals more than 40 years. The vet judges were very thorough in their inspections as the buzz around camp was that the trail would be extremely challenging, and possibly the most difficult that many of these horses had ever seen. One team, who hauled in from the mid-west, experienced the heartache that a major competition can bring when their horse was slightly lame and was not allowed to start the ride.

Later, on Friday evening, Abbie Hanchey, the ride manager and Leatherwood’s program director, had this to say at the rider briefing: “go slow and take your time, these trails



have a way of weeding out the horses who are not fit enough or try to barrel their way through.”

These words rang true as horses came into the first vet check back in camp Saturday morning. After negotiating 16 miles of trail, two teams were pulled out due to lameness.

Kathy Neunzig and her Half-Arabian mare PAR Snickety+/ (Rohara Samurai++ x Nite Song) were on their fourth national championship CTR. “The trail is very tough on the horses with short steep climbs and descents,” Neunzig



ABOVE LEFT: Nine-year-old Junior rider Cassandra Roberts checks in her horse AV Tempress. ABOVE RIGHT: Art King, DVM, performing a preliminary vet exam. BELOW: Friends Waltrine Miller and Jeff Skaggs pose for a pre-ride photo.

said after negotiating the loop. "I pushed her where the trail allowed, and took it easy when the going got tough."

Neunzig and PAR Snickety+/- took grand champion of the Arabian division and had to negotiate the trail on their own after her friend's horse was pulled on the first day. Neunzig of Charlotte, N.C., has ridden and competed with "Snickers" all across the southeast. In the past couple of years, the pair has ventured out west to Utah and Arizona to compete in the western mountains.

On this year's ride, Neunzig says, "Leatherwood Mountains is a true test of a national champion horse; although not necessarily the toughest trail I've ever been on, it ranked right up there with the most technical."

Nine-year-old junior rider Cassandra Roberts on her mare AV Tempress (*Galeon x Pershina), rode the first loop with her sponsor Shelly Scott-Jones. There is nothing to

spice up an event of this caliber like the enthusiasm of a young rider. When Scott-Jones pulled voluntarily due to her painful ankle, which she broke in May 2007, Jewel Griffin gladly guided the young rider on the second 16-mile loop. Unfortunately, Cassandra's mare had to be eliminated at the end of the second loop due to poor pulse recovery.

The trails are labeled with names like "Johnnycake," "Daniel Boone," "Stackrock" and "Hunkabo," and the second loop proved nearly as difficult as the first. The long ridges and fewer elevation changes enabled the riders to make better time than the first loop, but the competitors still took it easy to conserve their mounts.

On the second day of the ride, Griffin of Jacksonville, Fla., who took reserve champion honors in the Arabian division on her gelding The Living Proof (NF Proof+/- x Seyvilla Dawn), commented that "the scenery was spectacular, the trails marked perfectly and the staff was organized, pleasant and efficient." Griffin has more than 5,000 miles in competitive trail riding since 1976. Also in her 70s, she is back in the saddle after a training accident on The Living Proof in 2002. Griffin's love for beautiful and intelligent Arabian horses won out after her early years competing on Quarter Horses. Griffin compared the toughness of this year's trail to the grueling Vermont 100 CTR, which she and The Living Proof took reserve champion at in September this year.

One of the most noticeable facets of competitive trail riding is the friendships that are formed during the training and conditioning process. Many hours spent in the saddle and many miles through the woods are what it takes





Riders depart camp for the second loop on the first day.

to mold a champion trail horse. This can be accomplished alone with one's horse, but it's usually more fun to have a training partner.

One such friendship forged on the trail is an unlikely story in itself. Thirty years ago, a petite, spry woman, already pushing four decades, fell in love with Arabian horses. She dedicated her time to developing a breeding program at her modest farm in Brooklyn, Miss. Aptly named "Plum Nearly Farm" (because it is plum out of the county and nearly out of the state), Waltrine Miller began a business raising Arabian horses for the show ring. Reports from friends say she took better care of her horses than herself.

Two years ago, she met Jeff Skaggs, who seemed like he could use a little guidance, at an Arabian show in her state. So began an unlikely friendship that most horse events would rarely see between two people whose ages and genders differ so greatly. Miller talked Skaggs into doing competitive trail riding with her, and the pair both completed and placed on the national championship ride this year. One of the most incredible aspects is that Waltrine had a severe non-riding accident with a horse two years ago that nearly took her life. After recovering from a fractured skull and crushed right leg, she bounced back and now competes with her Half-Arabian gelding Khiss N Bandyt (Pusher All Color x Khande Khiss) with nine screws in her right knee and hearing loss in her right ear.

Other friendships were observed such as that between Maris Ramsay, a doctor from Orlando, Fla., and Karen Jones, a teacher from Altoona, Fla., have stood the test of time on the trail and on the road. The pair has trailered thousands of miles together to national Arabian events for the past three years. Amy Wallace-Whelan and Cindy Young have ridden together in Kentucky for many years. Married couple Timothy and Lisa Germann have competed miles and miles together and remain best friends through their Half-Arabian horses. Lisa took Champion of the Half-Arabian division on her gelding Over Brooks Image+/ (Overbrooks Elixir x Image's Golden Gal), and Timothy placed in the top 10.

resources

RESOURCES TO CONSULT

The Leatherwood Mountains Resort is a premier gated vacation resort and residential community nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It is based around an equestrian lifestyle and hosts nearly 100 miles of mountain trails. There is a full-service boarding stable and restaurant on the premises, along with luxurious vacation cabins spread throughout the 3,000-foot peaks.

For more information about Leatherwood and the surrounding area, visit www.leatherwoodmountains.com.

"The scenery was spectacular, the trails marked perfectly and the staff was organized, pleasant and efficient."

—Jewel Griffin

Meg Sleeper, an international level endurance rider competing in the national championship ride, had a pressing reason to get her final vet check completed shortly after finishing the ride. The following day, Meg was scheduled to hop a plane to compete in a pre-ride for the 2008 championship endurance ride in Malaysia.

At the awards ceremony on Sunday evening, door prizes in the form of blankets were drawn out of a hat. Ride officials were recognized and given belt buckles.

Many competitors said the professionalism of AHA ride coordinator Cara Finken and processor Molly Hibl, along with Leatherwood's staff were stellar, and the riders came away from the event feeling as if they had accomplished a superior feat.

Overall, this year's National Arabian and Half-Arabian Championship Competitive Trail Ride was a fun event, which truly tested the athletic distance abilities of both horse and riders. Hanchey says: "As ride manager, I feel that the ride went exceptionally well. Great vets, volunteers and pleasant competitors make a ride manger's job much easier! The trails at Leatherwood have a way of thinning the pack and showing the true ability in distance horses. All of the competitors seemed pleased with the challenge and should be very proud of their accomplishments. Leatherwood was honored to host this event and would love to work with AHA on future endeavors." 🐾

Becky Siler has owned horses for 30 years, and she worked 25 of those professionally with the horses at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. With her personal horses, Becky has logged more than 3,500 career miles in distance riding, both competitive trail and endurance. In 2004, she completed the famous Tevis Cup 100-mile ride in California on a borrowed mustang.



Cassandra Roberts shares her lunch with her mare AV Tempress at the first vet check.

information —

QUALIFYING FOR THE NATIONAL CTR

The prestigious championship challenges qualified Arabian and Half-Arabian horse-and-rider teams from all across the country to negotiate 65 miles of tough mountainous terrain over a pre-set minimum and maximum time for two days. To qualify, registered Arabian and Half-Arabian horses must have completed 100 miles or more of AHA-sanctioned and recognized competitive trail rides of not less than 25 miles. A top-five placing in an AHA regional event or a top 10 in a national event can be used for pre-qualifying. A prior national champion is automatically qualified for life, and a reserve champion is qualified for four years.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Jewel Griffin and The Living Proof were named Reserve champions in the Arabian division. Lisa Germann and Over Brooks Image+/- won the Half-Arabian division with a 191.75. Maggie Ricketson, riding Mardi Gras Tuesday, went reserve in the Half-Arabian division.

AHA NATIONAL COMPETITIVE TRAIL RIDE CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS

Arabian Division – 17 Horses Started, 12 Completed

PLACING	HORSE NAME	RIDER NAME	OWNER NAME	SCORE
Champion	Par Snickety+/-	Kathy Neunzig	Robert Or Kathy Neunzig	192.0
Reserve Champion	The Living Proof	Jewel Griffin	Jewel Griffin	191.5
Top Ten	TLA Monkey Bzness	Amy Wallace-Whelan	Amy Wallace-Whelan	188.25
Top Ten	Chanticleer Shadow	Elaine Steele	Richard & Elaine Steele	187.0
Top Ten	Indigo Blue	Nancy Sluys	Nancy Sluys	184.75
Top Ten	Lord Of Kings	Cindy Young	Cindy Young	182.0
Top Ten	Imdals Kharrismah	Diane Roemer	Diane Roemer	174.5
Top Ten	Khracker	Jeff Skaggs	Waltrine Miller	173.75
Top Ten	Edition MTA	Karen Jones	Karen Jones Or Tara Davis	172.0
Completion	CA Csea Mistral +/-	Maris Ramsay	Maris Ramsay	169.0
Completion	Syrocco Reveille	Meg Sleeper	Meg Sleeper	N/A
Completion	Eclipsed	Margaret Summers	Margaret Summers	N/A

Half-Arabian/Anglo-Arabian Division – 8 Horses Started-6 Completed

PLACE	HORSE NAME	RIDER NAME	OWNER NAME	SCORE
Champion	Over Brooks Image+/-	Lisa M Germann	Lisa M Germann	191.75
Reserve Champion	Mardi Gras Tuesday	Maggie Ricketson	Margaret Summers	189.25
Top Ten	Khiss N Bandyt	Waltrine Miller	Waltrine Miller	183.0
Top Ten	Justkiddingaround+	Timothy Germann	Lisa M Germann	180.5
Completion	O Pocohantas	Linda J Miller	Linda J or Morriss M Miller	177.75
Completion	WOA Ravens Premier	Debby Searle	Debby Searle	176.75



Kathy Neunzig and PAR Snickety+/
captured the Champion title in the
Arabian division with a score of 192.

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—Kathy Neunzig