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Preparing for Competition

How do I Prepare for Competition?

If you have taken advantage of the training rides in your area you will have a pretty good idea of how to condition for your first ride. If not here are a few suggestions.

If your horse is very un-fit or overweight start slowly by walking about 3-5 miles at least 4 times a week.

Increase your speed and distance until you are going about one fifth of the mileage you plan to compete in at a pace of about 6-7 miles an hour.

If your horse is being ridden regularly this may take about 4-6 weeks depending on his fitness.

Plan an extra three weeks for the overweight or very un-fit horse.

Choose as varied terrain as possible-rock, sand, hills, flat, creek crossings, road work and introduce him to as many "spookies" as possible. (Although inevitably he will spook at the mailbox he has seen a zillion times and not flinch when the UFO lands on the trail in front of you.)

Count time in the ring in your conditioning as well.

As his fitness increases (and yours) increase the mileage (and the pace) in correlation to the mileage you will be competing (and the pace you will ride).

There are as many different conditioning methods as competitors. Whole books have been written on conditioning.

You can also do things like lunge on an incline, walk up and down hills to build muscle or go for a good mile gallop when your horse is fitter to build his wind.

Don't be afraid to ask veterans their training secrets - you may come away with some really good tips.

Teach your horse to accept being mounted and dismounted and to lead from the "wrong side". This makes life easier for anyone checking incoming pulse rates.

Teach your horse to drink out of different water containers and drink "foreign" water.

Teach your horse to accept being sponged down on trail without squirming.

Teach him to accept strangers hands touching him all over and especially. to having his temperature taken--and no, they don't take it under the tongue! Practice regularly.

Teach him to lunge quietly at the walk and trot.

Teach him to trot beside you on a loose lead rope.