

Shannon L. Loomis, DVM & Quail Meadow Star



American Endurance Ride Conference

AERC Decade Team



1210 Miles, 23 ride completions
First AERC ride: 1991 Region: NE

Tell us about your horse. When/how did you come to get him/her? When I was 14 (1986), the horse I was riding was injured. My dad gave me the option of flying lessons or a new horse. I chose the new horse.

What is your horse's breeding? Morgan. Pineland and Devon lines.

Sex: Gelding

DOB: May 24, 1981

Horse height: 15.1 hh

Approx. Weight: 915 lbs

Color: Liver Chestnut

Shoe size: 1

Why did you decide to purchase this horse (or if you didn't purchase, why did you choose to use this horse in endurance)? Dad and I always liked Morgans. We went to an all-Morgan auction and Star was the right sex, age and size, so we bid on him and brought him home.

Did you do endurance with any other horses before this horse? No

How many different horses have you ridden in this sport? Just Star. But I rode my first horse, Lucky, once and an Arab, Quark, twice on Competitive Trail Rides.

Do you participate in any other horse sports or activities? Yes, Star and I also do Competitive Trail (Ohio rules), eventing, dressage, hunter/jumper, and hunter pleasure and I am starting to get involved in Carriage driving with my young horses.

How many years have you been involved with horses? In endurance? I had my first horse at age 7, 24 years ago. I started in competitive trail in 1985 but did not enter my first endurance ride until about 1990 or so. I do not really remember exactly and I have lost the records from my early days.

What got you interested in endurance riding? What was it that kept you interested? I started in endurance because I needed miles for year-end awards for my local distance organization (Ohio Arabian and All-breed Trails Society ñ OAATS; formerly the Arabian Horse Assoc. of Ohio (AHAO) Distance Program). I like endurance because it is more relaxed. You can pace yourself according to how you and your horse feel that day and the conditions of the trail. I also like doing 50 miles in one day ñ 25 miles on Star doesn't feel like anything! He gets to the end and looks for more trail!

How old was your horse when first started? First ride? Star was already broke when I bought him at age 5. I do not know how old he was when he started or how much he was ridden. He was still pretty green when I got him, so I don't think he ridden too hard early on. His first trail ride was in 1987 at age 6, a 20-mile competitive trail ride.

How many rides did you do the first, second, and third ride seasons? I am sorry, like I said earlier, I do not remember exactly. I seem to recall we started out with 2 to 3 20 or 25-mile rides those first few seasons, with maybe a two-day 50 in the third or fourth season. I don't think our first one-day 50 was until 1994, when Star was 13, but I am not 100% certain about that.

What mileage distance did you start with? 20 and 25s.

How long till you top tenned or 'raced'? (if you did) Top tenned in 1994. Most of our tens are “survivor tens” where everyone else gets lost or pulled and Star keeps chugging along.

How much time off do you give between ride seasons? Depends on the year. Some years we do more shows and events and hunter paces than others. Also, school and family have determined our schedule. Lately, he gets about 3 months off, with just occasional hacks.

If you have done 100's, how much time off do you give after doing one? What is your schedule in the month leading up to the ride? We did one 100, last year. We did not compete at all the month before. Two weeks after was the club's mandatory 50 miler, then we were done for the year.

If you have done multadays, how much time off do you give after doing one? What is your schedule in the month leading up to the ride? We did Shore to Shore this year. Again, we did not compete in the month before, but only because I had a fairly serious riding accident about 3 weeks before and couldn't ride as much as I wanted. After, he had about a month off.

What kind of tack do you use? I used a McClellan saddle for about 15 years with varying felt and wool pads and linen and felt girths. Last year, his back started to sway and the McClellan was not fitting as well, so I purchased a Lag Tree Torsion Treeless endurance saddle with wool insert pad and a wool dressage girth. I am not completely satisfied with it yet (I really miss my McClellan!) but the saddler is helping me fine-tune the fit for Star. As for bits, we started in an egg-butt snaffle but through the years have experimented with a huge variety of bits and hackamores. We currently use a kimberwicke most of the time, though I am known to change just before the ride or at the halfway. I think I own a dozen sets of bit hangers.

What kind of shoes do you use on your horse? He wears plain keg shoes, which my farrier clips, taps and rocks slightly. He also wears full Shock Tamer pads with EquiGel underneath. Since the shoes are

tapped, I can change out studs as I need them. I do own a full set of Easyboots for winter riding, when I pull metal shoes. I always carry an Easyboot when I ride, though I have only used it once, and I keep a full set of spare shoes with pads attached in my trailer just in case.

What kind of problems have you encountered? Arthritis is the major problem. He has developed arthritis in the neck and front feet. At age 19, he started tripping severely due to the pain in his feet and I thought we would have to retire, even though he was still eager to go. Lots of experimentation and a new farrier fixed the tripping, though he cannot go more than 5 weeks between shoeing.

What was the worst or most severe injury your horse has had? This fall, he fractured a molar and developed a severe tooth root abscess and sinus infection.

How did you work thru it? He needed surgery to remove the tooth and clean out the sinus cavity. I just removed the sutures last week and it is still draining, but he should recover fully.

Describe the best ride you ever had on your horse? Lincoln Trails 100 last September. The footing and weather were beautiful. Star was a perfect gentleman. We hooked up with another Morgan for the day and rode a reasonably fast pace. I was concerned because he was 21 and it was his first 100, but he ate and drank and took care of himself and never balked at going back out on trail. A wonderful day.

Describe the worst day you ever had with your horse? The third day of Shore to Shore this summer. The sand was very deep and it was very hot. I kept trying to hold him back through the bad footing but Star fought me furiously trying to keep up with the horses in front of him. It was miserable and I really thought we might have to stop because he wore us both out until I was in tears and he was blown from the heat.

What was your most humbling experience? Sitting on a 22 year old horse as he pranced through the streets of Empire, MI on our way to Lake Michigan at the end of the Shore to Shore.

What lessons have you learned along the way that you feel are the most important? You can never know enough. Always listen to your horse. Keep an open mind but don't blindly follow. Ride your own ride. And most important, to finish is to win.

Where does your horse live? At home in a seven-acre pasture 12 hours and dirt lot 12 hours. Morgans are prone to weight gain and founder, so I am very careful not to put them out on too much grass. But I am also adamant about turn out, so they are in a dirt lot where they can move around and exercise. I do have stalls, but they are inside only in the most inclement weather.

What kind of environment did your horse spend the first few years of its life? I think he was in a herd in his youth and then in a show barn for his 3-year-old year before being turned back out. I bought him at age 5 and he was turned out 24 hours.

What are your horse's strengths? Weaknesses? Strengths are soundness and heart. He has legs like iron with just one small splint that he had when I bought him. He will go down any trail for as long as I ask. Weaknesses include that same willingness to go. I don't know if he would ever stop until he literally dropped from exhaustion. Another weakness would be stubbornness ñ as he has aged, he is sure that he knows more than I do and will sometimes argue to get his way, though he has saved us a few times because he can find any trail, markers or not!

What advice do you have for new riders? Take riding lessons. Find an experienced rider or two to hang around and ride with.

Looking back, what would you do differently? I would take more lessons. I would have ridden more rides earlier, but early on I didn't have a vehicle, and then, in college, I didn't have any money.

What do you feel you did right? I don't take my horse to any ride that I don't think we can finish. I give him lots of variety by showing and jumping and doing other things. We school dressage regularly to improve balance, flexibility and obedience. He gets plenty of time off and over-conditioning is just as bad as under-conditioning (listen to your horse!).

What was your highest goal for your horse? Did you achieve it? To win the American Morgan Horse Association Sport Horse Award. This is a lifetime achievement recognizing versatility in open competitions. Star won the award in 2000.

Describe your horse's personality? How is it like or unlike yours? Star is somewhat aloof. I think his owner before me was abusive. He is not cuddly or like to be petted but he does like to go and do his jobs. He is also stubborn at times. We are actually quite similar now that I think about it!

What kinds of rides do you enjoy the most? 50s.

Describe your electrolyte protocol. One dose in water the night before, one dose plus probiotics before the start and the same at every vet check and at the end. One dose the night after in water.

Is there anything special about your nutrition program you attribute to your success? Just watching the horse so he doesn't get too fat or thin. Providing plenty of grass to keep his guts happy and not overdoing the concentrates by adding fat for energy.

Are there any major changes you've made to your nutrition program (i.e., changed from one hay to another, added something special) that you feel made a noticeable improvement or solved a problem? Star would get mild muscle cramps between his hind legs so I added a Vitamin E/Selenium supplement, which seems to have eliminated the problem. I have also started offering a large variety of feeds at rides (making sure he is used to them at home) because he is a pig at home but very picky at rides. I carry a virtual feed store in my trailer of hays and feeds so he will eat something, but it seems to do the job.

What kind of supplements (if any) do you use? Generic Cosequin, biotin, Accel (multivitamin and mineral supplement), and Tie Free (vitamin E/Se).

Do you give any kind of joint products? Adequan IM once a week for a month, then every 2 to 4 weeks as our schedule warrants. Generic Cosequin orally every day and occasionally IV Legend.

How far do you usually travel to rides? I used to not travel much more than 3 or 4 hours when I lived in Ohio but once I moved to WV, I travel a minimum of 4 hours and usually 5 to 6 hours. We will travel up to 10 hours or so but not more than once a year.

Do you go to many rides outside of your region? Not really. I do not usually go to rides that are not OAATS sponsored. I did go to some MW rides this year that were OAATS sponsored.

Name three people involved in the sport of endurance that you look up to, and why? Helen Cantrell and Mary Chmielewski are two riders that I respect and admire the most. They both took me under their wing when I was a wet-behind-the-ears junior. They always have a smile and an encouraging word. They seem to know everyone. They are competitive but the horse is the most important thing, not winning.

Whenever I can, I enjoy riding and camping with these wonderful women. Mary broke her right wrist this summer and instead of staying home, she was bound and determined to go to Shore to Shore (which she and Helen talked me into entering!), cast or no. She and Vana Berry completed the first 3 days before she decided to stop due to a saddle problem. Helen will never pass a soundness check if the riders were judged, but she never complains. To these great riders, a perfect day is a beautiful trail, good friends and a fit horse. The third rider I admire is Molly Krumlaw Smith. She has been riding 100s for years and manages several rides a year. She is also president of our local distance club. I think she has done so much to educate and encourage riders in our region. She always encourages me to stretch my horizons and is the one who convinced me that Star and I were capable of a 100 mile ride. She is involved in every level of distance riding in our region and a very nice person to boot.

Did you have a mentor or first trail partner? Tell us about him/her/them. If I had to choose a mentor, it would be Cindy McDonald. Cindy was the leader of my 4-H club when I was 12 years old. The club was called the Trail Bandits and we were the only all distance club in the state. She taught us about conditioning and care of our horses and took us to competitive rides. At the state competitive ride one year, only 6 kids out of 20-some finished, including all 4 entries from our club. How she put up with all of us, I have no idea, but I believe that it was her love of riding and distance riding in particular that started me down the trails.

My first trail partner was Tracy Edwards. Tracy rode a half-Arab/Welsh pinto mare that was as tough as nails and I rode an ancient, arthritic half-Morgan who loved the trail. Tracy actually joined Cindy's trail club first and I followed when I saw how much fun they were having. In 1985, at 12 and 13, we rode together before juniors had to have sponsors or helmets. We had never heard of electrolytes or biothane, but we had a blast and Cindy had taught us well enough that we could handle 20 miles on our own. I was second place on that old horse at that first ride. And I was hooked on distance for life.

In choosing your next horse, what would you look for? I bought my next competition horse 4 years ago, a leggy Morgan weanling colt with a loving and willing personality. Quest is going on 5 years old now, and hopefully will be starting limited distance next year, while my daughter rides Star. I wanted something with good conformation and a sensible brain. I still enjoy other things besides trail, so I wanted a versatile horse that could hold up. Would I buy another Star? Probably not. Looking at his conformation, he never should have lasted this long. I had a lot of training problems with him which I hoped to avoid by buying a weanling. If I screw up this one, it is all my fault!

Add any additional comments or stories that you can think of: Star hopefully has a few more seasons of 50s in him. I will compete him next year on the longer rides, and I hope my daughter will ride on the LDs. He has a lot to teach her.

One of the hardest things is that our horses grow older so much faster than we do. Star and I started out together as adolescents and now, as I finally approach the time in my life where I have the time and money and ability to really compete, Star is an old man. The grey hair and sway back have snuck up on me. Under saddle, going down the trail, he rivals any horse half his age, but every once in a while, I look at him and see the senior citizen. The day he retires will break my heart, and even more, I dread the day he will no longer be with me. Star has been by my side for high school, my parent's divorce, college, vet school, marriage, two children and 9 moves in 10 years. He has been my partner, my constant companion and best friend. Quest is a wonderful, athletic horse, but he isn't Star. He has the biggest shoes in the world to fill.