

# New to the WORLD of COMPETITIVE TRAIL

BY CHERYL CALENTINE



Author Cheryl Calentine with her CTR mount, \*AHT Romantico. Photo by Juli Welby.

**TRAIL RIDING IS** often seen as being relaxed and non-competitive but I have had different experiences. I enjoy riding out on the trail with friends, both horse and human, but I love to compete as well. For these reasons, I had always been curious about competitive trail riding (CTR) but had never had the opportunity to do it.

Shortly after moving to Santa Ynez, California, I had the pleasure of meeting and riding with Lynn Kinsky, well known for her experiences in competitive trail on her Peruvian Horses. She would fascinate me with her NATRC (North American Trail Ride Conference) stories; it sounded like something I would like to try. The previous year, I had a bad riding accident that left me with a back injury and a fear of riding. While I had the desire to ride NATRC, my panic attacks and fear of riding kept me from accomplishing my dream. After a few years on a wonderful teacher, MMC Napolitano, I regained my courage and started to ride a new, young horse, \*AHT Romantic. Romantic and I quickly developed a bond. He is truly the perfect horse for me and my equine soul mate, a once in a lifetime partner. I attended a CTR clinic at Lake Cachuma in Santa Ynez with Romantic and we had a blast; I finally felt ready to tackle my first NATRC ride. Unfortunately, scheduling was not in our favor: all of the rides conflicted with shows that year.

I attended the 2004 Peruvian Horse Nationals with no intentions to show. I had just had hand surgery on both hands and was advised to stay off horses for a few more months. At the last minute, my family decided to take Romantic for my stepmother, Karen, since her performance horse was unable to make the trip. I begged her to let me ride in La Prueba since it was a condition ride at the walk, approximately 10 miles, and the trail course which was also at a walk. Due to the lack of strength in my hands, that was all I could handle. My plea was given in to and I was allowed to ride. And, of course, I did not inform my surgeon of this! I entered La Prueba with the intent of showing my horse in hand properly and enjoying the ride. While we placed very low, I met my goal of proper presentation and I was hooked. After we placed 3rd in the Natural Trail class I was determined to enter a NATRC ride and finally fulfill my desire to try CTR.

With some encouragement and guidance from Lynn Kinsky and Lionell Griffith, I entered the November 2004 Sage Hill Ride. My trailer was packed and we were ready to go. We had a bad rain that year so the ride was cancelled the night before. I wanted to ride so much that I was prepared to ride the whole 30 miles in the rain. However, I had to wait another six months for the 2005 Helen's River Romp in the spring; it was torture. I spent many hours preparing Romantic and talking to Lynn about the spring ride.

Come May, we were ready for our first NATRC ride! I entered the ride with Charlotte Dicke and we had the time of our lives. I got to camp, ride challenging obstacles and enjoy the day with my best horse and a good friend. We rode the One Day Novice division and Romantic did great. We ended up placing 2nd in Horse and I got 1st in Horsemanship. The Horse award is based on Romantic's manners, soundness and condition, while the Horsemanship award is based on my camp, riding and handling skills of my mount. The horse and rider are judged separately at each obstacle. It is possible for the horse to perform perfectly and score high while the rider will score low due to poor trail equitation or improper handling of the horse. My little buddy came in 100% sound and had perfect manners. He made a big impression on other competitors and I was hooked.

Our next ride was the 2005 La Prueba at the Peruvian Horse Nationals where he got a 2nd place. Less than 3 weeks after a grueling National Show (La Prueba and six classes) and a long drive back and forth from California to Texas, Romantic and I competed again. At the Sage Hill Ride in November of that year, my little "Energizer Bunny" was perfect. We won High Point Novice Gaited Horse, beating out Tennessee Walkers and Missouri Foxtrotters as well as a 3rd in Horse and Horsemanship over a two-day, 40-mile ride.



Cheryl is checking Romantic in with the Ride Vets at the 2005 Helen's River Romp Ride. Photo by Lionell Griffith.

“I AM CERTAIN OUR BOND IS EVEN DEEPER AFTER HAVING SPENT HOURS AND HOURS ON THE TRAILS TOGETHER, AS WELL AS WEEKENDS OF CAMPING.”



Cheryl and Karen finishing the La Prueba class at the 2005 Peruvian Nationals. Photo by Lionell Griffith.

# COMPETITIVETRAIL



Cheryl riding in on Romantico with Charlotte on an Andalusian at their first NATRC ride. Photo by Lionell Griffith.

Through my NATRC experiences, I have learned how to better care for my horse, ride with a much lighter seat and my horsemanship has improved tremendously. It has been such a wonderful growing experience for Romantico and I. I am certain our bond is even deeper after having spent hours and hours on the trails together, as well as weekends of camping.

He seems to thrive on the attention he gets at the rides and is such a wonderful ambassador for the breed. I get innumerable compliments on his attitude and his short compact body (quite an asset in the tight maneuvers and small ditches we have to ride). I joined the local, all-breed trail club and attend monthly rides with other CTR enthusiasts. Karen joined this year too and we are now enjoying the trails together. It's been a wonderful experience for us both.

I have learned about camping: something I have never done before. Let's just say a city girl needs a serious sense of humor to survive her first camping trip. I won't give all the gory details but I can tell you that I now inspect my food before I eat it (ants are a little crunchy but have no flavor). I also am now enlightened to the fact that birds do steal food, out-of-control mules will step on your dinner despite the fact it's on a grill, gloves - wear them, avoid burrs when you take a trail potty stop, tweezers in your trail bag is a wonderful asset, wear thick breeches, wear your clothes for the next day to bed (5:00 am is not the time to change into cold clothes), a sponge bath in the trailer before the sun comes up is a bad idea and, most of all, make friends with the people from New Mexico who bring the portable hot tub.

Lynn Kinsky sparked my interest in competitive trail, but it was the 2004 US National La Prueba ride that put the burning desire to ride NATRC in my soul. What a wonderful way to showcase what the Peruvian Horse can do competing against other breeds and what a fantastic class to introduce the sport to the Peruvian owners. I have heard that a show horse cannot do both NATRC and show. \*AHT Romantico is a Champion of Champions show horse and a NATRC winner, proving that the Peruvian Horse can do anything they set their minds to. TP