**Endurance Boot Camp Success Stories:**

In this **Spotlight Article**we profile three successful and inspiring graduates of past endurance boot camps: Nora Mains, Melissa Powers and Tara Quinn**.**

*In 2019 Jeff Tryens took the initiative to develop a two-day introductory endurance rIde boot camp held at the Sisters (Oregon) Rodeo Grounds. Jeff’s goal was to provide an educational and fun experience to prepare new riders for success. Now in its sixth year, Jeff’s boot camp has received rave reviews from satisfied participants. The upcoming 2025 boot camp will be co-managed by Jeff, Forest Tancer and Tally Wren. \*(more information about the Boot Camp format at the end of this article)*

Hi! I am **Nora Mains**, currently 68 years young. I was always interested in horses but only had access to them at camp in junior high school. When I turned 41 years old I woke up one day and said to myself, “I thought I was going to be an equestrian. When is that suppose to happen?” I started taking stealth private riding lessons. Beginning to ride as an adult is difficult. I had been a competitive skier growing up and the movements are similar enough to help with balance and speed. After I retired my older horse, I found my mare Marvelous Portia, a 16 hand buckskin registered Morgan mare. We’ve been together for eight years!

Nothing could have prepared me for how much Portia would change my life. Anyone who has met her knows she is a lot of horse with way more go than whoa. The good news is that she doesn’t buck or rear, but man, does she like to go. She upped my riding game significantly.

I had always wanted to do endurance riding but didn’t feel like I was a good enough rider or that my first horse, Saturn could do it. With Portia, I decided to work towards my goal of entering the Klickitat Trek Ride. In 2018 I began riding with Stacy Livermore, Vicki Nelson, Julie Serres and Terri Powell. It was through them that I heard about Boot Camp.

At the time I was a tent camper with a little two-horse straight-load trailer and electric tape fencing. We got to the Sisters Fairgrounds where it was really really cold and windy. Jeff was there to check us in and had assembled a wonderful team of mentors and volunteers. These experienced endurance folks gave really informative presentations on what to expect and how to prepare for a ride, what to bring, eat, feed your horse and proactive solutions to common issues that occur at a ride. A vet was on hand at Boot Camp to examine our horses and discuss how horses would be scored and evaluated when participating in the ride. We practiced trot-outs and received tips on how to be successful during vet checks.

The second day of Boot Camp we rode a well-marked 12-mile mock ride with a map and an appointed mentor. I was overwhelmed. Portia and I had not done a lot of camping or riding fast, on purpose, with others. I found we ride out better alone which is something I still prefer to do. During the trot out after the ride, I will never forget Stace Moss laughing and saying, “Your mind has just been blown hasn’t it!” Yes! My mind was blown!

I highly recommend Boot Camp. This sport is complex and takes quite a few years to fully understand. Without the guidance, preparation and confidence building support I received at this bootcamp I don’t think I would have been able to complete my first ride. I actually went back to Boot Camp the next year to pick up more information that I wasn’t able to digest the first year.

Our first ride was the Klickitat Trek out of the Glenwood, Washington Fairgrounds in 2019. Everyone told me to wait 10 minutes after the start to avoid the chaos and to go slow. We did wait the 10 minutes, but unfortunately for me, Marvelous Portia didn’t get the memo on the slow part. She was incredibly amped up, strong and fast. I was totally scared. I had no idea what she was made up of until that ride. Suddenly I truly understood the term, “Race Brain”. I was way out of my comfort zone, made a whole lot of rookie mistakes but somehow, I stayed on and we placed 4th with a second BC.

Now hooked on the sport, I started to set goals of competing more. Things don’t always go exactly to plan. We have worked through injuries, rehab, fires, truck repair, nutritional challenges, doubt, and fear, but we always try and learn from trying. In 2022 we competed in the National Championships in Gooding, Idaho. In January of 2024 we decided to try for the Sandy Baar award by completing 10 rides without being pulled. We started doing back to back competition rides. This year we completed 11 LD’s in three states, earned our first 1st place, our first BC/High Vet score and our Sandy Baar award.

Words of wisdom? I highly recommend reading the book, Endurance 101, A Gentle Guide to the Sport of Long-Distance Riding by Aarene Storms to get the basics of long-distance riding. Ask questions of everyone. Ride an intro ride. Hang out at ride camp and offer to volunteer. Join the Green Beans. Don’t be hard on yourself, take care of yourself and your horse. Wear a helmet and a vest. Most of all enjoy the challenge and have fun on your journey!

Hi! my name is **Melissa Power**. I fell in love with horses when my parents bought me a My Little Pony for Christmas when I was three. I started my riding career in the Hunter/Jumper world. Fast forward twenty some years and I didn't feel comfortable jumping at home by myself so I discovered the joys of dressage (yes I do mean joy!). From there I put those two skills together and dabbled in Eventing which I have to say is the best of both worlds.

I bought my Appaloose gelding WH Miakoda (Koda) when he was eight months old. Koda is now 14 and he’s has been with me through my eventing phase and was, to his chagrin, put into work for my first year of endurance because my thoroughbred Avienda has some soundness issues.

I've had endurance friends for decades who have been telling me I should try this sport (mainly because my love for color was frowned on in the H/J and Dressage worlds and the distance community.

Let me tell you about my Boot Camp experience: It was wonderful! I had never camped with my horse before. The emails with planning and suggestions that we received weeks in advance were so helpful and I did all of them - thought through the various horse containment options, picked portable corral panels, practiced having my horse spend time overnight in the corral at home (while I also slept in the trailer). It made the bootcamp time that much easier to adjust to. From there I learned so much from the mentor I was partnered with on the ride (thank you Bianca!). We did end up a little lost (perfect example of how to learn to read the maps, use Ride with GPS, and train your eyeballs to see the ribbons on the trail), but her guidance and support meant so much to me. I'll be honest, I took my Appaloosa who I had no intention of doing endurance with to the bootcamp because Aviendha just wasn't quite right and I refuse to risk soundness ever. He was hot, hot, hot the morning of the ride and was more than ready to blaze down the trail. I've always been more of a lazy trail rider - trot and canter are part of my trail rides, but it was a lot of walking before the bootcamp. But bootcamp had us TROTTING. I thought we'd be lucky to survive as I had to hold Koda back for the first 4 miles but once we got away from the groups of people, my mentor had us doing different things to see how both myself and my horse handled them - leading, riding side by side, drinking on the trail, dismounting and mounting again. She talked to me about electrolytes and ensuring your horse is drinking and eating on rides, as well as ensuring they do so in camp as well. How often to do training rides and at what speed or terrain. IT WAS FANTASTIC. We arrived back in camp and Koda was clearly ready to do another loop. I was impressed. Both with the two of us, and with how well everything went. I felt that Boot Camp helped me 100% prepare for my first real endurance ridewhich was a 30 mile LD at Santiam Cascade. Koda and I did the intro/trail ride at Pacific Crest the weekend before so I figured we'd be good to go for this. Little did I know how LONG 30 miles actually is. We arrived the day before and were lucky to be there early so got great spots to camp right at the finish line for the ride. The camp, camp management, and the volunteers were very welcoming and so kind to answer the questions I had as a newbie. We vetted in and prepared for the ride the next morning. Knowing how things went at bootcamp with my hot horse seeing everyone else preparing to leave, we took Bianca's suggestion to head the opposite direction away from the start and let everyone else go before heading out ourselves. This plan worked pretty well but we still caught up to some people and were passed by some people and in the process I lost the bulk of my carrots out of my pack! The ride itself was stunning and I would not hesitate to go back and ride it again. This ride had an out hold which was obviously a new thing for me I was very lucky that a friend of mine who also did the bootcamp rode with me and she brought a crew with her. They took me in and helped Koda and I at the hold. That 45 minutes felt like 10. Crazy! But Koda ate and drank like a champ, I got to snack on some cheese and refill my water bottles, and we were back on trail. At some point on the 14 miles back into camp my riding partner and I realized that we'd have to pick up the pace some to make it in time. There was a water crossing perhaps 2 miles from the end and neither of our horses were inclined to cross it so that took up some time but we did make it (I dismounted and walked Koda through). From there we were passed by some riders who were riding the 50 mile course - amazing! But this made me look at my watch to see we had perhaps a mile to go and only 5 minutes before we'd be over time. I told Koda the situation and he happily poured more fuel in his tank and off we went. I can proudly say we made it into camp with 1 minute to spare! My friend and her horse pulsed down before me so Koda and I took the turtle award for the ride, which happened to be my goal. Suffice to say, I was hooked.

My endurance journey has gone a little sideways since that ride. Weather has affected my ability to get to some rides. It's also changed how I need to pack and prepare for rides. We went to the Bandit Springs ride a few weeks after Santiam and I was absolutely not prepared for how different this ride was than my first. Different for me in that I signed up for the sunset 25 mile ride. It was... not good. I packed the same amount of water and snacks in my pack as I had for Santiam but as this ride started at 4pm the weather conditions were much different and I went through all of my water within the first 4 miles. Koda was mad about having to work in the afternoon heat and it just wasn't pleasant. I dismounted and hand walked him several times, lost my riding buddy once, found some other people who kindly let me join their group, but ultimately I knew I wasn't prepared well enough for this ride and hand walked Koda the last 3 miles back to camp where I rider optioned. Koda vetted through fine which made me feel good - I at least took care of him well enough - but I certainly didn't take good enough care of myself. Something I had NOT really thought about in all of my preparations for endurance riding. I haven't been to another ride this year as a lot of other things were happening (we decided to sell our small farm and buy a larger one) so endurance was temporarily put on the backburner.

Words of wisdom I’d like to share with other riders who are considering entering the sport is to do your research. Overpack. Over-prepare. You WILL thank yourself for it later, I promise. And have fun. Remember why you're out there - to enjoy spending time doing something you and your horse both enjoy.

Finally, If you see me at a ride - come say hello. I'm an introvert by nature and find it hard to talk to someone I don't know. But I love horses and as horse people, I think we all know that we share a passion, a passion which can bring people from all different walks of life together.

Hi! I’m **Tara Quinn** and I live in Bend, OR. I’ve been involved with horses for 30 years, but did primarily ranch work/trail riding/and showing with my family’s Quarter Horses until six years ago when I started dabbling in endurance riding. I haven’t looked back since! I currently have two wonderful horses that I train and compete with: Cash (Al-Marah Cash Racer) and Mor (AM Three Stars UA). Cash has been my main man for the last three and a half years, and Mor is my young mare who is learning the ropes to take over from Cash as he starts to slow down. Cash and I have competed in everything from LD’s to 50’s to 100’s, and we even did in a ride-and-tie just to test the waters. I’ve only had Mor less than a year, but we were able to compete in her first LD in August at the National Championship ride. I’m hoping to start strong with her next season and have a successful year!

I originally wanted to learn about endurance riding when my sister and I entertained the idea of participating in the Mongol Derby. I was introduced to wonderful mentors who helped me learn the ropes through lots of catch riding opportunities. One of those opportunities was during the first year Jeff ran his boot camp, and he asked if I would be interested in riding his horse for it. I had already competed in my first endurance ride before the clinic, but the clinic definitely helped continue to build my confidence and exposed me to some of the unexpected situations that can arise at ride camp; i.e a loose horse. I had never camped with a horse before, and as I was settling down for the night, my mentor knocked on my window and told me Jeff’s horse had gotten out of her pen! Needless to say, I was panicked and mortified that something like that happened, but I can now laugh about it because really was all part of the learning experience.

Fast forward a few years, my endurance journey really took off when Cash came into my life. We’ve absolutely had our share of up’s and downs: we’ve been pulled for different reasons and dealt with injuries, but we’ve also come in 1st, received a BC, and completed three 100 mile rides together. Neither of us had competed in a 100 mile ride before, and it was something that really solidified our partnership as we worked towards accomplishing that goal. We competed and completed two different 100 mile rides in 2023, and we threw in another one for good measure this past spring. I’m hoping that Mor will follow in Cash’s footsteps and add a few 100’s to her record in the years to come.

I’ve been fortunate to be a participant in the boot camp as well as be a mentor the last two years. The boot camp really does emulate the entirety of what an endurance ride is like, from the ride camp experience all the way to the vet checks and everything in between. Loose horses, missing a ribbon/turn on the trail, or even not passing a vet check are all par for the course with endurance riding, but experiencing them in a small and safe environment first can really make a difference for someone who is brand new.

Hi, I’m **Jeff Tryens** living in Oregon, off and on, for the past 28 years. Raised on the East Coast. Horses, horses, horses as a kid working for my horse/pony dealer grandfather and then no horse involvement until we moved to Central Oregon nine years ago.

What caught my interest about trying endurance riding was PNER member Rachel Webb's enthusiasm for the sport when I was looking around for ideas of how to get back into horses, post-retirement.

After I got hooked on endurance, a colleague, named Ed Helton, asked me how he might get involved in the sport. Hmm, besides introductory rides at events, I couldn't find a clinic so I decided to do one myself - with the help of many experienced endurance riders that I had met. Sadly, Ed passed away, quite suddenly, between then and the boot camp. (His former partner sponsors a "Take the Plunge" scholarship for newbies in Ed's name at every ride.

What I’ve learned about how to change/improve our format since my first experience with putting on this event: Partners, partners, partners! Endurance riders Forrest Tancer and Tally Wren now co-manage boot camp and a great crew of regulars including Marlene and Stace Moss, Betsy Adamson, Darcy Bean Hollander, and Bianca Chevalier make it a smooth-running event.

I also strongly urge participants, in the months leading up to boot camp, to practice overnight camping, subjecting their critters to being examined by others and mounting/dismounting in unusual circumstances after a near train-wreck at one of the first boot camps. We now require participants to demonstrate that they can safely mount and dismount from their equines before they can do the Sunday mock ride.The road to successful participation in endurance is rarely straight or smooth. Sisters Boot Camp is a good way for interested equestrians to anticipate issues before they become obstacles.

*\*The two-day boot camp format - Day One: After participants and their horses set up their camps at the Rodeo Grounds, Saturday afternoon is devoted to endurance seminar presentations given by volunteer PNER members covering a broad range of topics including horse health, nutrition, rider gear, tack, hoof protection and tech (apps etc.). Participants receive their ride cards, go through a pre-ride vet check-in with an experienced endurance vet and demonstrate their mounting/dismounting skills before enjoying a group dinner followed by the standard pre-ride meeting.*

*Day Two: Participants have the opportunity to ride in a mock endurance ride on a flagged course of twelve miles with opportunities for riders to opt out at four and eight miles.Experienced endurance riders are available as ride mentors for anyone who would like to accompanied. (Highly recommended.) The ride is followed by a post-ride vet checkand a group debriefing session.*

Jeff, Tally and Forrest invite aspiring endurance riders to join them this year around about mid-May.