

This is just a guideline,  
Only you know your horse.

## Conditioning for a Novice Ride

I'm often asked the question, "Where do I begin?"

This is my humble answer, though there is no right way or one answer,  
this is just what I have done with Grace as a starting point.

Written by Christina Hyke

If you are reading this, it is likely that one of two things is true, you either are interested in how to begin in distance riding and looking for some kind of outline or you are experienced and wondering what the heck I am going to say! Well let me say that there are a MILLION ways to go about conditioning a horse and this is just one of them and by no means the 'right' one. It is just one, just my little opinion and how I started Grace for 2019 ride season. Grace had very light riding and had the winter off, so as I am suggesting to you- I did not start this program until she was able to do these 3 things, so do **NOT** start this program **until your horse can do these three things:**

- 3 miles or one hour of riding at mostly walk on a trail that has variety of terrain (though an easier trail, not a rough trail)
- that your horse is sound and healthy at the end of that time or 3 miles
- that your horse was ready to keep going at the end of that hour or 3 miles

\*this initial assessment riding is at mostly a walk, very little trot. Consider this base of 'legging' up your horse. If your horse cannot do this 3 miles or one hour

of riding and finish feeling happy, healthy and sound- no huffing and puffing. Then do not start this program. Go back and work your horse up to being healthy, happy and sound at 30 minutes of light riding, and then add increments of 15 minutes progressively until you reach a week when your horse is happy, healthy and sound after 1 hour or 3 miles of light riding. You don't have to wait for spring to do this, if you can ride in the winter, even in an indoor- you can start this now- or maybe you know that your horse is already doing easily an hour of work. If that is the case, and your horse is ready- then here is the outline to help you get your horse through it's first novice ride. I am not a vet, or even a trainer- I'm a mom & a rider- and have had the question often enough of "Where do I begin" that I thought it easier to answer that question if I typed it out. I hope this helps, or in the very least helps you see that conditioning for a ride is something that can be done. Listen to your horse, don't push them too hard, the loftiest goal in distance riding (endurance) is your long term, lifetime miles. The American Endurance Ride Conference motto sums it all up, " To finish is to win."

Now that you have established a baseline & that your horse can easily go out for 3 miles or one hour on various terrain and is happy, healthy and sound when done, you are ready to move on to conditioning. What I did was literally write it on the calendar. It is an appointment to keep with your horse. In my humble opinion, if I couldn't keep those appointments with my horse, then I had no business asking her to do a distance ride with me. Just like I wouldn't skip training for a 5k run, and then risk hurting myself, I wouldn't ask her to compete without taking the time to condition her. Whatever program you follow, stick with it for your horse. You will find your relationship with your horse grows exponentially over the weeks with each ride and the relationship I have now with Grace is due to all the hours of commitment to get her conditioned. All the trailering, grooming,

cooling out and riding compounds into something greater and more beautiful than simply a fit horse, it becomes a much stronger relationship.

First off, I train using intervals. You don't need to use timed ratios; and most riders don't, though it has worked for me. If you use a 2:1 ratio you will finish your ride in time. All rides have a max time limit. Novice rides are ran per the rules of Competitive Trail, and they have an "ideal" time that they will tell you at the ride for THAT specific day. For a novice ride it will likely be something like 2 hours 15 minutes.

What is a ratio? It is a term that runners use. A ratio is a planned set of time that you use to time sets during your workout. A 2:1 ratio for Grace looks like, two minutes of trotting at a regular/not rushed gait for 2 minutes. Followed by a walk break of 1 minute. I set a timer for two minutes and we move out at a nice, regular trot that is not rushed, my timer on my watch beeps and we walk for 1 minute, the other half of the ratio. And it repeats. I admit that at first I did not think I would enjoy riding to ratios, though I now love riding to ratios because of what it does for my horse. It has had a calming effect on them, most horses learn routines quickly and it seems to calm them knowing that set ratio is what we are doing. When they start moving along they know it will be for x amount of time and then walk. Repeat. Within just 2 or 3 workouts ridden this way, my horses have picked up on the time to walk or trot within a few seconds of the timer going off. The other thing it does for them is that we finish strong, having trained a set way, not ever over taxing them, only building them up slowly, pays off. I have seen her get stronger and stronger with each ride. There are many reasons behind this, though you are never fully taxing the muscles to the point of building up lactic acid.

Now a question I often get is what if mud/bad terrain etc, then don't trot there. Just wait and use your judgment. This article is about getting a solid base on your horse. After your horse is legged up and has a starting base on it, there are more types of workouts to add in, including adding hills, more challenging terrain etc, though that is information for a different time. For now, we will focus on getting a rider who has never done a distance ride to condition for their first novice ride. Long distance riding is for those who love aiming for longer term goals, you get rewarded over your distance career by setting goals for yourself and meeting those life time milestones. Let's get working on those first goals.

The length of the Novice ride will vary. At the ride I am managing we will be offering a novice ride of 10 miles on both days. At other rides it might be 10 miles, 12.5 miles or 15 miles. While the distance will be listed on the ride flyer (similar to a show bill) you will not likely find out the ride **time** given for the distance until the day of your ride. The weather and terrain will be factors in deciding the time. In distance riding there are different things offered, there is Competitive Trail that is usually referred to as 'Comp' or CTR. There is Limited Distance (LD) , Endurance, Distance Driving, Pioneer rides and Ride & Tie. For this conditioning outline, I am just focusing on getting your horse ready for a ten mile novice ride. Just know that you will have an 'ideal' ride time set by your vets, and that you are judged by points given on how close to that ride time you are, not faster, not slower and also on how healthy your horse is at the finish. Horse with highest points at the CTR wins. It is not a race.

LD and Endurance are judged by who finishes first over the line, with a healthy sound horse and within the max time. I do not suggest racing. I advocate the miles, taking care of your horse and conditioning and having a good time. I do absolutely advocate starting out in Novice Comp rides. It will help you and your

horse become familiar with the sport, do one or several novice rides. There are awards for highpoint Novice at the end of the year, so that is a goal to aim for! If you are aiming for the goal of year end awards be sure to join the organizations that give out the awards ahead of time so your points count.

The Distance Riding Association of Wisconsin (DRAW) gives awards to novice riders. You can join DRAW by following this link:

[DRAW Membership form](#)

You can learn more about DRAW by following this link:

[Distance Riding Association of Wisconsin](#)

There are several rides throughout the state of Wisconsin that offer novice rides, sometimes called an intro ride, I would suggest that if you are just starting out to try to make it to those rides and you will likely find what I have, that this can be one of the most amazing adventures to have with your horse(s).

So, you are looking for some real numbers and training to pencil in on your calendar? Feel free to change the days of the week, though always include the rest days.

Here we go, now that your horse is more than happy after three miles, this is where I would begin:

### **Week 1\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 3 miles of 2:1 intervals followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles. This day you should have easily 5 miles in which is about half the distance of a novice ride.

Sunday/Monday Rest

### **Week 2\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 4 miles of 2:1 intervals followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles.

Sunday/Monday Rest

### **Week 3\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 5 miles of 2:1 intervals followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles.

Sunday/Monday Rest

### **Week 4\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 2.5 miles of 2:1 intervals

This is the first day you will be asking your horse to pick up the pace a bit and maybe add some canter into your 2 minute moving along interval if you are comfortable cantering your horse. Move out a bit faster, though only if your horse can recover during the 1 minute walk breaks. Stick to the intervals.

Sunday/Monday Rest

### **Week 5\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 6 miles of 2:1 intervals followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles.

Sunday/Monday Rest

## **Week 6\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 3 miles of 2:1 intervals followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles.

Sunday/Monday Rest

**Be patient, yes your horse is getting the hang of this and getting stronger, though we also want to ensure to keep them strong & sound building a good foundation so that when you finish your competition, your horse will finish healthy, happy and strong. Feeling as if they could go back out and do it all again. If your horse is finishing strong, you are doing it right. Have patience, don't be tempted to push it.**

## **Week 7\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 7.5 miles of 2:1 intervals

followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles.

Sunday/Monday Rest

### **Week 8\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 3 miles of 2:1 intervals This is another week when you are going to ask your horse to move out a bit quicker during those 2 minute intervals, only if they are handling it well and recovering during their 1 minute walk. It is not a race, just a breezy canter mixed in for a few strides during the trot phase, it doesn't mean to canter two minutes, just mix a few strides of canter into the trot phase.

Again, followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles.

Sunday/Monday Rest

**Always put your horse's health first, be sure to cool them out and care for them post workout. Provide water, grooming and hosing off legs if weather is appropriate.**

### **Week 9\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 9 miles of 2:1 intervals followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles. Reminder to take it easy, it is the miles at this point not the speed that matters. If you need to add more walking do so, it really is the miles that matter, not the speed. Slow down, use a shorter stride and choose your pace according to the footing. Don't push it.

Sunday/Monday Rest

### **Week 10\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 4 miles of 2:1 intervals followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles.

Sunday/Monday Rest

REST and easy weeks are important to prevent injury and give your horse's body time to build muscle and strengthen. Backing off on some weeks really

does build your horse up stronger. Take it easy. Be patient.

### **Week 11\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by 10.5 miles of 2:1 intervals followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles.

Sunday/Monday Rest

### **Week 12\***

Tues 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes followed by 1 mile cool down

Weds rest

Thursday: 1 mile or more of walk warm up followed by 30 minutes of 2:1 intervals for 30 minutes -followed by 1 mile cool down

Friday easy walking or rest

Saturday 1 mile of walking warm up followed by easy 4 miles of 2:1 intervals followed by cool down of mile or 1.5 miles.

Sunday/Monday Rest

### **Week 13\***

You've made it, it is the week before your Novice ride! Take it easy, do light riding, not much hard work and just taper down to ride day. You have done

all of the hard work, your horse should be ready to compete!

Be sure to check your ride flyer- likely you will want to reserve a camping site or you can haul in for the day- just be prepared, know your start time, be very early so that you can settle your horse in, have your paperwork in order:

- Original Coggins test and a copy for the Ride Manager's records
- Pre filled out ride entry form if needed.
- If you are hoping to ride for year end awards with DRAW or UMECRA be sure to join them ahead of time.
- Bring extra buckets, blankets coolers, spare tack, plenty of hydration & food for yourself.
- There is always a potluck on Saturday night and awards. Everyone gets a completion award! Bring a dish to pass and a camping chair and buddy!

\* if your horse is huffing/puffing having a hard time do not push it. Go back to walking until they are breathing normally. Shorter stride is less likely to cause injury to your horse, ride conservatively.

Well, these bullet points is getting long- and I think that calls for a follow up this little guide with a 'What to expect' at your first novice ride. For now, find your pencil, and your calendar to pencil out your condition schedule! WARHORSE Endurance ride will be held July 25 & July 26th 2020 at Horseman's Park in Palmyra, WI and will be offering a 10 mile ride on both days. If you start this training plan in early April 2020 you should be perfectly finishing it up in time to ride at WARHORSE. I promise you there will be cool t Shirts as completion awards and an awesome potluck! Bring a friend and RIDE! You are welcome join us there! Whether it is this one or another one, you owe it to yourself & your horse

to have a plan! Join more distance riders over at Wisconsin Endurance, a facebook group for posting events & finding riding buddies:

Wisconsin Endurance on FB

Ride far, ride well, ride often.

And if you'd like to be inspired by some other riders;

Take a listen to Endurance Horse Podcast on Podbean or Apple Podcasts- it is available on a variety of podcast apps.

<https://endurancehorsepodcast.podbean.com>

Written by Christina Hyke

Only you know your horse, this is just a guide to give you an idea on what a conditioning plan can look like. If you think you would like to ride for the Distance Riding Association's (DRAW) Novice Year end awards, please join DRAW. They do give out very nice year end awards. Here is a link [to join DRAW](#).

DRAW sponsors 4 rides in the year 2020:

**WARHORSE Endurance Ride** - July 25 & 26, 2020

Southern Kettle Moraine Trails at Horseman's Park Palmyra, WI

**NORTHERN HIGHLAND Endurance Ride**

Conover, WI late August 2020

**COLORAMA Endurance Ride** September 2020

Northern Kettle Moraine Trails at Horse Riders Camp New Prospect, WI

**SPIRIT HORSE Endurance Ride** October 2020

Southern Kettle Moraine Trails at Horseman's Park Palmyra, WI