





Star of the Show

Taking the dog and pony show on the road.

WRITTEN BY *BERNICE ENDE*

PHOTOS BY *JOHN CRANDELL*

IT WAS NEVER A DREAM OF MINE TO GO RIDING OFF INTO THE SUNSET on my beloved horse with my devoted Claire dog. It was not until I was well into my first 2000-mile ride way back in 2005 that I found out what a “long ride” was. Now at the end of eight years and over 18,000 miles, the long ride has become a way of life for me. That elusive unattainable horizon continues to call out to me. Pull and tug at me until I step back into the saddle. Until I feel the ground loosen from my feet replaced by a horse’s eager stride and Claire’s anxious barks and dance, her wild enthusiasm, our fearless leader declaring us ‘back on the road.’





As defined by the International Long Riders Guild, of which I am a member, a "Long Ride" is a 1000-mile horseback journey. There are over 200 members spread across the world but only a few travel with dog companions and I'd lay a bet that my dear Claire dog is the only one that travels with her own doggy box carrier.

When I first began these long rides, I traveled with one horse only. That meant Claire and I had to walk. Claire walked nearly 7000 miles in the first three-years. I made her doggy booties from moose hide that lace up and have padded soles. Now she rides most of the day and her feet rarely need cov-

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ering unless she has a cut or a stone bruise. She is truly the star of the show. The horses are a major attraction, their ears all forward and bright. But it is Claire dog, the dog and pony act. The fact that a dog is riding in to town on a horse that causes people to stop...and smile and watch the parade stroll by. Such an unusual looking dog, a rare breed of unknown origin. She has an exotic look with the one ear up and one ear down, a raccoon face and calico colored, thickly layered winter coat she now sports. I found Claire in a ditch near my Montana mountain cabin. She couldn't have been much more than three months old. Her brother lay dead next to her, the little body frozen in the snow. I was riding my old mare Babe (now deceased). There she was, this tiny starving puppy with her "weird" blue and brown eyes looking up at me, growling, as I reached down to pick her up.

And so began Claire's first ride. Claire now has her own horse, Essie Pearl. I ask you "how many dogs have their own horse?" Essie's patience with Claire is infinite. When Claire is riding in her doggy box and needs to get down, she simply reaches long with her front paw and bats at Essie's black and white mane. Essie slows down; pulls on the lead rope, telling me Claire must get down.

Back country roads, dirt roads, gravel roads, small, quiet paved roads are for the most part how

I find my way across the country. When Claire runs out front, (unless we are in rattle snake country), she does not run off, she stays very close and will walk the white line if there is one. Why you might ask? Because it has a smooth coating from the paint. I once had a sheriff stop me, just to find out who and what and where I was going. We laughed because he said he "sure won't have to give that dog a sobriety test, she walks a straight line."

She sleeps with me in the tent; I consider her part of the heating system. Claire eats what I eat: rice and beans, wild foods like cooked dandelion greens and lambs-quarters and nettles. I add raw meat when we stop at towns. She rarely eats dog food, as it is impossible to keep her hydrated. She is having doggy dreams as I write. Must be after something, her feet are running. My faithful companion Claire, eleven years old this year. She can no longer jump into the doggy box from the ground as she once did, she needs help getting up. But once loaded, she is all smiles. We both continue to share the love and longing of the ride. Faithful companions one and all.

Happy Trails to all of you dog lovers. 🐾



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JUST THE FACTS

Bernice claims her love of the horse was infused in her before she came into this world. Her mother, Cornelia, loved horses and rode often on the small Minnesota dairy farm that Bernice grew up on. "I am sure I was snuggled in her womb riding with her at some point, I came into this world with a love of horses," says Bernice. As an infant her older sisters had her on old Spot, a crippled Welsh pony of nearly 40 years that adorned the front lawn, Spot was more or less a baby sitter, as was Butchy, the old golden Lab, one of many family farm dogs.

She trained her first horse at the age of eight and went on to study dressage, train horses and teach riding lessons for a living. Bernice does not consider herself an accomplished horsewoman, "only now after living with my horses and my dog as I do, have I come to understand the true nature and gifts of these precious animals, they are my teachers."

It was the horse and study of dressage that inspired Bernice to dance and enter into the world of Ballet. She studied at the Royal Academy of Dance with Susan Higgins in Portland, Oregon and taught in San Francisco, Minneapolis, Portland and finally opened a small studio in Trego, Montana.

She also has a degree in Fitness from the Lake Washington Voc-Tech in Bellevue, Washington. All of which has been instrumental in her ability to continue with such an arduous life as a Long Rider.

When not long riding, Bernice lives with her animals in a log cabin in the North West corner of Montana.



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