

# Appaloosas

# Dominate

Distance  
Horse  
Nationals



By Kerri Lowery and Julie Figg

Photos by Remuda Photography, John Nowell

**T**he weekend of October 27, 2019, four of the best endurance Appaloosas in the United States were in Vinita, Oklahoma, to decide the title in the Appaloosa National Champion Endurance Ride (ANCER), held concurrently with Arabian Horse Association Distance Nationals, and something very special happened.

Small in number but loaded with talent, riders had come from coast to coast to compete in the Distance Horse Nationals, with the Appaloosas hailing from Pennsylvania, Colorado, Louisiana, and Missouri. The ride was hosted by Gunner and Alana Frank at their Iron Viking Ranch in northeast Oklahoma which offered 50 miles of beautiful single and double track. Track that had been meticulously groomed and marked for the national event, trail that riders were not going to see even a mile of.

Beginning a day and a half prior to the Nationals 50-mile event it had begun to rain. And rain. And rain. The constant three days of downpour would continue throughout the two Appaloosa Championship rides on Friday and Saturday. Over an inch of rain fell on Thursday alone on already saturated soil, making the well planned

course virtually unusable. The Franks had to change the course at the last minute to mostly road. "I have never seen a bulldozer used to pull rigs both into and out of an event!" stated Julie Figg in amazement. But that is exactly what ride management had to resort to.

The first of the competitions was the 50-mile ANCER. Riders Kerry Lowrey on Kodi, Jeff Hartman on Ghazi, and Julie Figg on Pizzaz were entered. Fourteen other horses of different breeds (Morgans, Arabians, Paso Fino's, etc) were also represented making a total of seventeen in the championship 50-mile event. The smaller-than-usual field was due to some riders opting not to ride in the monsoon weather.

The morning of the championship the weather was less than ideal, 40 degrees and spitting rain. Julie Figg said, "I had on four layers of clothes but Kerry Lowrey outdid me with five! She was also nauseated and not feeling well. In fact, she had curled up in a ball at 5:45 a.m. in my LQ trailer and told me she did not think she could ride. Her gelding, Kodi, had spent the night in his trailer trying to keep warm and dry, and he hadn't eaten or drunk well. I gave her all the encouragement I could and we both pushed ourselves out into the dark, rainy, cold morning. Despite the less-than-ideal circumstances that Kerri and Kodi were having I knew she would take care of him and pull if he was not right, and at 06:30 we were off!"

A fast paced group of five riders broke away from the main pack that included all three of the Appaloosas. Two and a half miles down the road Jeff and Julie had pulled into the lead but at



Kerry Lowrey riding Westwinds Wild Fancy (Takoda)



Jeffrey Hartman riding Bombay Ghazi Kahn and Julie Figg on Bask In My Pizazz



Julie Figg and Bask In My Pizazz



Kerry Lowrey



Jeffery Hartman



Julie Figg

an intersection there were no trail markings to be seen. The single white ribbon marking the turn had become plastered with rain and was sticking to a white stripe on a road closed sign. The pursuing group including Kerry soon caught up, the white ribbon marking the turn was spotted by one of the riders, and off they all went again.

For the next three plus miles the pace was very fast, hitting upwards of 16 miles an hour. The mud was flying, and the lead switched on and off between all five in the group. The road eventually turned into a normally dry and sandy dirt road. But this was not normal weather. The footing went from simply wet and muddy to an absolute quagmire. Patches of rock were mixed into this muddy soup so care had to be taken to navigate this stretch. Thankfully it only lasted about half a mile and the footing soon switched to grassy, but boggy, single and double track.

For the next five miles Julie and Jeff worked up a pretty decent lead on the group. Despite an unplanned dismount by Jeff into a gate at a turn in the double track, the pair was able to keep out of sight from everyone. At this point Kerry was about a half mile behind, out of sight, but riding strong and steady. They finished the off-road loop and then turned and headed back on the road. Unfortunately, at the bottom of a small hill, Julie and Jeff both missed seeing the lone turn marker. Long story made short, the pair rode an extra two plus miles.

This mistake put Kerry, and another rider on a Shagya Arabian in the lead of the whole ride. Coming into the first hold Kerry thought she was in third. "I simply dismounted, checked Kodi's pulse, and as we were well under I walked over to the vet. When the vet stated that we were the first to arrive I immediately said that couldn't be right. I was behind Jeff and Julie!" Kerry said. Confusion ensued until Julie and Jeff pulled into Vet Check One, now in third and fourth overall and about 12 or 13 minutes behind the leader. All three Appaloosas pulsed down quickly and were vetted through with flying colors. The 45-minute hold flew by and Kerry was out first with the second place Shagya in hot pursuit, then followed by Jeff and Julie. All four riders were now well ahead in the ride, having a twenty plus minute lead on the rest of the pack.

"Five miles into the second loop I noticed out of the corner of my eye Jeff pulling up," Julie said. "Jeff said he had noticed a slight bobble in Ghazi's gait. Getting off and inspecting a front boot he

noticed plenty of gravel had worked into the back of the gaiter. We both hoped that the bit of gravel had caused the discomfort that Jeff noticed. I moved ahead and alone now, without Jeff. His pace had slowed in concern for his horse's welfare. With a little more than 25 miles to go I was on my own to reel in Kerry."

The good news at this point was that Appaloosas were all riding first, second, and third. All distance horses are different. Some ride better alone and others prefer some company or they get bored, and some always need something in front of them to chase. "Pizazz showed me that he needs a rabbit," said Julie. "Riding alone for the next mile or so we saw our chance and passed the second place Shagya. Little did I realize that Kodi can become a bit unfocused as well and at times rides stronger in company. I'd made up time on Kerry and at one point saw her about a half mile in front of me. The single track was playing well with Pizzaz and his pace remained steady and focused. Kerry had also found the pace she needed to stay in the lead and was skillfully maintaining a gap on us. The good news was we were running first and second in the whole ride. Bad news was I was checking behind me and no Jeff and Ghazi to be seen. The muddy quagmire of road loomed. Pizzaz sank to well over his fetlocks and I did not want to push hard over this stretch. I backed down to a walk in concern for his soundness. The mud was really deep and loose from all the previous horse traffic. At this point Kerry was out of my sight but I knew I had to stay focused and push on!"

At Vet Check Two Julie and Pizzaz pulled in about 11 minutes behind Kerry, and about 10 minutes in front of Jeff. But something was not right with Ghazi. As he trotted out for the vets, his horse was off in the front. He was pulled from the competition after finishing 40 miles of trail. There is a saying that all endurance riders know, "There's always a rock out on the trail with your name on it." It was very unfortunate that Ghazi found his rock that day.

Julie shared, "I was heartbroken for him but at an endurance ride it can happen to anyone at any time. I found out later that Kerry carries her rock in her saddle pack, with her name written on it!"

"It's a habit I picked up at Tevis," stated Kerry with a chuckle. "I took a rock, wrote my name on one side, and Kodi's name on the other, and we carry it along so we can say that we have already found that rock with our name on it!"

With 10 miles to go after the second and last hold Kerry and

Kodi were looking great. "I told Kodi as we left this time that this loop was for all the marbles. I'm not normally a fast rider per say, but I asked Kodi for everything he had and he gave it to me, and then some! I was so proud of my pony," said Kerry.

She pulled out of ride camp at a trot but 10 minutes later Julie and Pizzaz started a pursuit to try and catch them. Both riders knew that it wasn't over until you cross the finish line. Kerry was fortunate enough to hook up with a couple of 25-mile competitors on the same trail which helped her horse focus on a strong pace. Pizzaz was behind her but simply could not make up the gap that remained. The 50-mile championship was won by Kerry and Kodi in a sizzling time of 5 hours flat! Next in was Julie and Pizzaz in 5:12. Both Appaloosas had smoked the rest of the field of various breeds, and stood for Best Condition after the required wait of an hour.

At the awards ceremony that evening Kerry was awarded the Appaloosa National Champion Endurance Horse trophy. She was also awarded the George Hatley trophy for Best Condition Appaloosa. On top of that, Kodi also took home the Half Arabian Championship, and the Half Arab Best Condition. And then, to top it all off they were awarded Best Condition overall for the entire ride! Pizzaz was second place Appaloosa, and second over all breeds, and was awarded the Reserve Champion Half Arabian trophy. After receiving the trophy Julie walked straight over to Jeff Hartman and gave it to him to take home as he had bred, raised, and currently owns Pizzaz. Both riders needed an extra trailer to take home all the awards at the end.

Kerry summed it up well. "I have just one thing to say to all those Appaloosa owners out there — Our breed so totally rocks! And our sport is one of the coolest on the planet. You guys really need to get your pony and come try it out for yourself. I can guarantee you will fall in love with the sport, and our faithful Appaloosas love it!"

And Lucie concluded, "The really special thing is that the two horses that finished Champion and Reserve in the ANCER also finished Champion and Reserve in the AHA 1/2 Arab Championship, which has never happened since we partnered with the AHA Distance Championship in 2016. We really showed the Arab folks what our 1/2 Arab Appaloosas can do." 🐾



ANCER Awards



## A Special Thank You

The ride would not be possible without the support of the ApHC and Lucie Hess. Lucie has supported this ride from its inception and her unwavering volunteering is much appreciated.

