

The Tevis Cup

The Western States Trail Ride, commonly called the Tevis Cup Ride, is the oldest modern-day endurance ride.

By Katie Olean

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Stories of settling the West are filled with images of resilient horses crossing the desert plains. It was these legends that began to spur discussion among 59-year-old Wendell Robie and some friends. In the 1950s, few people believed that modern-day horses still had the kind of endurance it took to cover 100 miles in a single day. Wendell and his friends decided they would put that doubt to rest.

On Aug. 7, 1955, Wendell and four friends set out from Lake Tahoe, near the northern California-Nevada border. In less than 24 hours, Wendell and his Arabian stallion, Bandos, reached the 100-mile destination of Auburn, Calif. Three of his friends followed and a tradition was born. Twenty riders participated in the second-annual Western States Trail Ride, with 15 finishers. Wendell went on to be the first finisher four years in a row.

By 1959, the Western States Trail Ride caught the attention of California businessman, Will Tevis. Intrigued by the event, Will donated a trophy cup to be awarded to the person who completed the one-day endurance ride in the shortest amount of time and whose horse was in sound condition and "fit to continue." The cup was titled the Tevis Cup in honor of Will's late grandfather, Lloyd Tevis.

To this day the Western States Trail Ride, commonly called the Tevis Cup Ride, remains the oldest modern-day endurance ride and caps off at 250 participants each year. It is generally scheduled the July weekend closest to the full moon. As part of the Tevis Cup Ride regulation, all horses must be vet-checked at regular intervals throughout the ride. Any horse showing signs of compromised health is not allowed to continue on the trail.

It was this vet-check regulation that inspired H. Gordy Ainsleigh to take action. In 1973, Gordy was attempting his third Tevis Cup finish when his horse was pulled at the 29-mile checkpoint for lameness. The next year, Gordy decided to forgo the horse and instead run the entire 100 miles on foot. With eight minutes left in the day, Gordy crossed the finish line and became the first of many to complete the trail without a horse.

The fastest win at the Western States Trail Ride was 10 hours and 46 minutes. The slowest win took 16 hours and 23 minutes, and the average win time is 13 hours and 36 minutes, or a rate of 7.48 miles per hour.

The Tevis Cup Ride is unarguably challenging, but 1990 marked the toughest ride in the event's history. Route changes that year left many unknowns and the temperatures were the hottest ever recorded for the ride. It took 15 hours and 56 minutes for the first rider to cross the finish line.

While many new riders have swept in to steal records over the years, the pioneers of the Western States Trail Ride, Wendell Robie and his horse Bandos, still remain record holders. At the age of 74, Wendell was the oldest rider to ever finish. At 16 years old, his horse Bandos became the oldest horse to win the cup.



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