

HIT THE TRAILS ON YOUR STANDARDBRED

Do you enjoy riding or driving your horse through the woods and fields? Would you like to join a friendly group of people, visit new places, and participate in a non-competitive sport that still allows you to set and reach goals and receive recognition for your accomplishments?

If your answer is YES, then you should check out the New England Horse and Trail Association. NEHT is an organization that promotes pleasure trail riding in the six New England states. Riding clubs all over New England can affiliate their rides with NEHT. Twice yearly, in April and August, a list of the affiliated rides is published in a booklet that is sent to all NEHT members. The rides are also posted on the NEHT website. (www.nehorseandtrail.com)

Here's how it works ----- When you go to a ride, there will be a signup sheet for NEHT members. You enter your name and membership number, and that of your horse, and the distance you are riding that day. These sheets are returned to NEHT, and hardworking Jan Collins keeps track of everyone's mileage.

Horses are given awards each 250 miles; at 250 you get a plaque and a mileage plate, and another mileage plate to add to the plaque at 500, 750, etc. At 1,000 miles your horse gets a 1,000-mile sheet. The mileage is cumulative, so you can take as many years as you need to reach that magic 1,000 mark.

The rider receives a plaque at 500 miles, with additional mileage plate in 500-mile increments, with special awards as they get into mileage in the multiple thousands. Many breed associations also offer an award each year to the horse of their breed that has accumulated the most miles during the calendar year. Now --- here's the good news --- the SPHO sponsors an award for the high-mileage Standardbred horse. The BAD news is that last year only TWO Standardbreds nominated for NEHT mileage logged any miles in 2008. Standardbreds generally make calm, sensible trail horses and are well-suited for rides at all distances.

This is a great opportunity to promote your breed and earn recognition for your accomplishments. For the most part, these rides are unjudged --- you can ride at your own pace and are following a marked trail and/or are given a route sheet to follow. Most rides provide coffee and breakfast snacks before the ride, sometimes a snack on-trail, and a meal after the ride. The majority of rides offer multiple distances, with most rides maxing out at 20 miles with shorter loops of as little as 5 or 10 miles, so you don't have to worry about trying to condition for the Vermont 3-day 100! Any horse, even a "weekend warrior", can do a 5 - 10 mile ride at a slow pace with minimal conditioning. As you and your horse become fitter, you can move up to longer distances if you wish. A few rides also offer a route for drivers, if your horse is trained to a cart, as most Standardbreds are.

Best of all, pleasure trail riding is probably the least expensive of all the ways you can enjoy your horse and still participate in a organized sport. Entry fees usually run \$20 - \$30 per day, and that includes your meals. Try to do that at a horse show! For more information about NEHT, and to download a membership form and a schedule of rides, log onto their website, www.nehorseandtrail.com or write to Jan Collins, 105 Ninth District Rd, Somers, CT 06071. Dues are \$10.00 for you, and \$5.00 per horse. Happy Trails!

Judy Lorimer, NEHT Awards & Publicity Chairperson