

Maxine Bernsdorf

by Nicole Herrmann

All of us have met a person who has impressed us. You know the one. He or she has done remarkable things, doesn't complain, has nothing to say but positive comments, and has the never-ending stamina of the Energizer bunny. They have a heart of gold, and an even bigger appetite to live life to the fullest.

Maxine Bernsdorf has been competing in distance riding for over 20 years. She started out on an Appaloosa stallion. "The horse never got tired no matter how long or how far I rode him. I was looking for a "job" for him to do," she stated. Eyeing an ad for a distance ride sponsored by some App folks in the Northern Kettles, she headed out to attempt the novice ride offered. Planning to do a 12 mile ride, she was quite surprised to arrive and have it cancelled. Max then decided to try the 25 mile ride. "I finished, and haven't stopped since! Time flies when you're having fun!"



She starts conditioning/training a new horse Jan. 1st. "My resolution is to always ride on New Years Day," exclaims Bernsdorf. Veteran horses go back to work a couple months before their first competition, after getting a couple months vacation time off to rest during the winter. All her horses ride with a different bit and bridle for each individual. They also have their own pad that fits them well. She likes to ride in a treeless endurance saddle, and beta tack. She also never rides without a helmet. "It's a MUST!" Max shares. She rides in all divisions, but says, "I enjoy competing in all divisions based on the ability of the horse I'm riding."

While she can be found riding in Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, her favorite ride is called "Pine Martin Run." It is located in the UP and held in October. She tells me "The leaves are in full color and you ride woods, and hills between lakes. The scenery is spectacular! Ride management is so helpful, and the riders extremely friendly. Saturday night dinner features traditional UP pasties made locally. I look forward to going there each year!"

When asked about her proudest moments, she stated she cherishes all the small victories. "It might be taking a horse on it's first 50 mile ride, finally getting a horse to cross that river, sponsoring a junior rider, or helping someone through through their first competition," says Max. Her sense of pride truly shows through her "recycled horses". "Most of all, I enjoy recycling "throw away" horses into a useful mount," she proudly states.

"My goal for the future is to ride a new ride. I want to do "Shore to Shore." It is a seven day ride in Michigan that goes from Lake Huron across the state to Lake Michigan, and I'd like to do it before I am 80!" she explains. After riding three days of the ride in '09, she is again planning on her seven day attempt this August.

Her advice for new distance riders? Max says, "Follow your dream. If you ever had a thought of doing distance riding. . .GO FOR IT! You are neither too young, or too old. You CAN do it on any well conditioned horse with the equipment you now ride in. Be prepared! Bring everything you will possibly need for rain, cold, sleet, snow, sun, or hot weather. Don't forget food, clothing, water, and equipment for the comfort of the horse. If you have enough room left over, then bring the same for

yourself! Don't be shy!! Talk and question any of us distance riders! We are proud of what we do, and would love to share it with you!!"

When 71 year old Max isn't riding, she is a licensed customer service rep for American Family Insurance. "I work to support my riding habit," she says with a smile and a chuckle. Anyone can see the pleasure in her eyes when she talks about all of the miles she has covered thus far. Distance riding is an intricate part of her life. . . .the life of a special lady, who has a heart of gold, and a bigger appetite to live life to the fullest with her horses.