

**Interval  
Training for  
Endurance  
Horses &  
Why Mileage  
Horses Need  
Breaks**



The basic idea behind interval training is to enable the horse to experience more intense work over several short periods of activity than would be possible if the work was carried out in one block. So the horse is given periods of activity interspaced with rest periods, and each period of activity can vary from easy aerobic exercise to high-intensity, mostly anaerobic exercise.

The easiest way to understand the principle behind interval training is to consider what you would do if you were required to run a mile faster than at four minute mile speed. A small number of athletes could do it, but most people can't. However, most of us could run two hundred yards at that speed — so put nine blocks of two hundred yards together separated by intervals of rest, and we have run a mile. That is how interval training works. It increases the amount of high intensity work that can be carried out while avoiding fatigue and the risks of injury associated with it.

There are a ton of articles on the net with information on interval training. Here are some links:

Leading Horses for Fitness Training by the Kikkuli Method I found this part particularly interesting, having spent a lot of time ponying my younger horses and also free-longing them in groups. "Kikkuli used Interval training based on several principles. Once of these techniques was that whatever he intended to do under saddle, he did first by leading the horse (not in the same day – this is as a principle). That means that if the horse is to be trotted under saddle, the horse should be led at the trot (from a vehicle or other horse) for a set period of time (that is, over days or weeks) prior to this. If the horse is to be cantered under saddle, the horse should be led at the canter (from a vehicle or other horse) for a set period of time (that is, over days or weeks) prior to this (and so on). Kikkuli even led horses at the gallop. This way the horse's system will adjust to the work without the stress of weight and without the psychological stress of dealing with a rider. By following this Kikkuli Principle there will be no weight-bearing stress on the horse in the initial training."

**Basic Conditioning of the Equine Athlete** Just some basic info here.

**Interval Training** One person's perspective and experience using IT on their horses.

Books: (see my widget in the left hand column to click and go directly to the page about that book)

The Complete Performance Horse, Colin Vogel.

The Fit Racehorse II, Tom Ivers. This is a great book and one of my most favorite equine related books that I own. If you really want to learn about interval training, this is the book to get.

An article at [thehorse.com](http://thehorse.com) on interval training states the following: *"The take-home message, as far as pelvic and tibial stress fractures are concerned, is that too much slow speed exercise is not good. This does*

*make sense because we know that stress injuries are repetitive loading injuries. If you keep doing the same thing again and again, you risk injury.*

*"We compare it to a paper clip," she continues. "If you bend it and bend it, it will break. It's material fatigue. Interval training (involving alternate periods of hard exertion and short rest) is probably a better option because high-speed exercise is not as bad as previously thought. It actually stimulates bone to respond, because bone is a living tissue and is constantly remodeling.*

This is why it is common to see an endurance horse perform very well for a certain period of time before having any problems. You can't just keep pounding away the miles even slowly without giving them a break or time off that is adequate for their workload without running into a problem at some point. I have seen so many horses that did great for three or four seasons. It doesn't matter if you are doing a lot of miles slow or racing fast – there is a limit for every horse and it is often such a fine line that you don't know you've crossed it until it's too late. Sometimes, if you are lucky you can stand on the edge and look over and get a break before falling off. If you are really lucky you may be able to back up.

I have learned a lot about this over the years from competing a lot of miles in a year on the same horses.

It's why I feel it important to give a horse a break from time to time. Even if they are performing beautifully I don't believe that it is in their best interest to continue to just go-go-go simply because they can. When I do complete a lot of rides on the same horse in a year I try to give as much time off between competitions as possible.

Ride History for Granite Chief +/- (AERC#H0042)

season	Overall			LD		100s		points	
	miles	rides	comps	BCs	miles	starts	comps	overall	division
2002	100	3	2	0	0	0	0	300	110
2003	355	8	7	0	0	0	0	355	428
2004	2135	41	41	1	0	1	1	2305	3181
2005	2250	44	44	0	0	0	0	2260	2969
2006	900	17	17	0	0	0	0	975	1358
2007	1370	27	27	0	0	0	0	1430	1964
2008	600	13	13	0	0	0	0	660	850
2009	405	8	8	0	0	0	0	455	761
Recorded	8175	161	159	1	0	1	1		

see note on data quality and sourcing below

Chief has done a couple of pretty high mileage (over 2,000 miles) seasons in a row. The following year I really backed off with him and did less than half the mileage and since then have been going back and forth but still have not been competing him at nearly the frequency as he did in 2004 and 2005. Even as the 2005 season came to an end I started to back off a bit.

Chief had several months off last season while I was sick and that didn't hurt him a bit.

I brought Chief back into condition slowly and carefully which was easy because I was getting myself back into shape. This year I've also been somewhat conservative with him by alternating him on the rides with Bo so he hasn't done any complete multadays by himself – just a couple of rides where he did two days in a row. This way Chief is getting more breaks and I'm still also riding fairly conservatively though not as slow as I did when he was doing the high mileage seasons. My goal for Chief now is to keep him sound and healthy and to be able to keep riding him for a few more years. He's in his 8th ride season now. Who knows, maybe he'll make it onto the **AERC Decade Teams** someday! 😊