

## Endless

*by Suzy Hopkins*

Most days being a California State Park mounted ranger is a thankless and frustrating job: sly underage teenagers drinking on the property, innocent looking people fishing without a license, drunken brawls on the main beaches (a ranger on a horse can break up a brawl quicker than 4 rangers on the ground), mean dogs off leashes, fire hazardous charcoal grills by the water's edge, and obnoxiously loud jet skis being used in the wrong area with many of the *same* people violating the rules *every* week.

The true value of being a ranger on horseback is the ability to surprise people who think they will never be found by a ranger. A horse can go where a jeep cannot. I found numerous people residing in the park including AWOL marines, took into custody a man who had his little girl tied to a tree, recovered a headless female body, caught teenage runaways and corralled loose pit bulls. One time a pit bull knocked over my horse by attacking the belly and hanging on. Then it attacked me at the direction of the pit bull's owner.

The most satisfying part of being a mounted ranger was riding the annual American River 50 mile Endurance Run as drag rider. This run is brutal because the last 25 miles are through the woods and UP HILL. You ride beside the runners with power bars and water to help them make it to the next checkpoint. Only the doctors at the checkpoints can pull a runner from the race. It's also the job of the rider to provide medical help on the trail if the runners can't go on. Sometimes their legs cramp up or they have chest pains and you have to take them to the next checkpoint on your horse. One time I was riding beside a skinny old guy who was shuffling, not running. Tied to my saddle I had two gallons of water. From the saddle, while my horse walked beside him, I poured water over him every few miles to prevent him overheating. At every checkpoint I refilled the jugs with water, he had some Gatorade and a power bar and off we went shuffling up the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. We didn't arrive at the finish line until after dark. That was a long but rewarding day.

The tedious work of law enforcement was made sweeter by being able to use my strong, amiable, brave and well-trained horse to accomplish a job which is truly endless.