

Cross-country rider's trek made to help rain forests

By Tina Skinner
Times-Mirror Staff Writer

Last week a man named Lucian Spataro made his way quietly through Loudoun County. He was mounted on a white Arabian, working his way down Rte. 50, enroute on a record-breaking cross-country trip.

Thursday he revisited the county, enroute from a campsite in Maryland to the spot where he left off the day before. And this time he didn't make it through so easily.

His truck broke down in front of Bill Pollard's historic Old Saffer Place on Rte. 50, just west of Rte. 15. And the trip was delayed for seven hours while the rider sought out a new catalytic converter for the truck.

Sunday, Spataro completed his five-month ride from Los Angeles, Calif., to Chesapeake City, Md. Originally, he planned to go all the way to New York, but after five months on the road, he decided to cut the trip a little shorter.

But he met his other goals, one of which was to set his second Guinness World Record — this one for the most miles traveled for one man and one horse. His first mount, Al-Marrah's Sweet William, carried him to the border of Texas and Oklahoma, 1,600 miles. Then two horses took

over to work as relays for Spataro's trip.

Like his first Guinness record — Spataro, 32, joined several other scuba divers for a 60-hour, 64.96-mile tricycle trek across the bottom of a swimming pool — the man carried with him a message and reaped money for charity.

When he was scuba cycling, his cause was battered children. For the ride, Spataro chose an environmental concern — the rain forests.

"I was more of an environmentalist than a rider," Spataro says of himself before he started the trip. "I rode on the weekends, mostly trail rides."

Back in Tucson, Ariz., Spataro is president of L.S. Systems Inc., a manufacturing firm. A board of directors has been managing things during his absence, and they're eager to see him come back home, he says.

Since he started the trip, though, Spataro spent five months in the saddle, riding for eight to 11 hours a day. At a walk, sometimes getting off to lead the horse, Spataro made up to 25 miles a day, riding alone. He carried a walkie talkie to communicate with his backup crew, always nearby with the camper and horse trailer.

Spataro says he's had a lot of close calls on the country's highways. Trucks and cars, he says, have roared past leaving less than a foot of clearance — "They just don't have a clue," he says.

For the trip, he says, he had to obtain 36 permits to use the highways. They were mostly just to be official, he says, because with the exception of interstates, horses have the right of way on roads.

The trip through Fairfax, Spataro says, was humorous after crossing the great arid expanses of western states like Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma.

"I rode through Fairfax during rush hour, and I was going faster than the cars," he says.

The ride has raised about \$80,000, which the Rainforest Action Network will use to help publicize and prevent the depletion of the world's rain forests. But more important, Spataro estimates he reached thousands of people along the way by talking to newspapers and the media and attending fundraisers set up in 10 major cities and townships along the way. Saturday he met with President Bush in Washington, D.C.

"The object wasn't so much to raise money as to talk to people," he says.

Actor Ted Danson helped publicize the ride. The star of television show "Cheers" was on hand to announce the Ride Across America and to speak about the depletion of the rain forest, the ozone layer and global warming.

For those who wish to pledge



Times-Mirror Staff Photo/Victoria Bell

Lucian Spataro and mount make their way down Rte. 50.

support for Spataro's ride, or to learn more about the plight and importance of the rain forests, contact

the Rainforest Action Network, Broadway, San Francisco, Ca 94133.