



Open Horse Show Association

... show locally, achieve nationally

Horse Show Rulebook 2026

PO Box 601

Titusville, FL 32781

321-863-0456

<http://www.showohsa.com>

info@showohsa.com

Contents

Introduction	5
Key Objectives of the OHS A Show Rules:.....	6
Classes and Eligibility	6
Class Modifications and Updates.....	7
Use of External Rulebooks	7
Judging and Evaluation:	7
Good Sportsmanship	10
Animal Welfare and Abuse Policy:.....	11
New to Showing?	12
General Show Rules	13
Eligibility and Registration	14
Show Entry and Fees:.....	14
Judging and Show Feedback:	15
Exhibition Rules:.....	15
Appearance and Equipment Requirements:.....	16
Class Placings and Ties:	17
Virtual Show Rules	17
Exhibitor and Horse Participation:.....	17
Video and Photography Requirements:.....	18
Video Submission Rules:	19
Attire and Tack	20
General Attire Guidelines:	21
Proper Attire	21
Discipline-Specific Attire	22
Dress Down Shows.....	23
Tack.....	24
General Tack Rules:.....	24
Discipline-Specific Tack Rules:	24
Judging and Class Procedures	27
Conformation (Halter) Classes	30
*Showmanship.....	33
Color Class.....	36

Lunge Line	38
In Hand Over Fences	39
In Hand Trail	40
Western Pleasure (2 and 3 gait).....	43
*Western Horsemanship Pattern (2 and 3 gait)	45
Horsemanship and Equitation on the Rail – all seats, 2 or 3 gaits.....	49
*Reining – all classes.....	50
*Western Riding.....	53
Hunter Under Saddle (2 and 3 gait)	56
Hunt Seat Pleasure (2 and 3 gait)	58
*Hunt Seat Equitation Pattern (2 or 3 gait)	60
Ground Poles (2 and 3 gait)	63
Hunter Hack (2 and 3 gait)	65
*Hunter Over Fences (2 and 3 gait)	66
*Hunt Seat Equitation Over Fences (2 and 3 gait).....	69
*Jumping (2 or 3 gait)	71
*Dressage (all seats and 2 or 3 gait)	73
Dressage Suitability (all seats and 2 or 3 gait)	75
*Dressage Equitation (all seats and 2 or 3 gait).....	77
Saddle Seat Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)	80
Saddle Seat Road Hack (2 or 3 gait).....	82
Saddle Seat Country Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)	84
*Saddle Seat Pattern Equitation (2 or 3 gait)	86
Gaited Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)	89
Purpose of the Class.....	89
Gaited Country Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)	90
Gaited Show Pleasure (2 or 3 gait).....	91
*Gaited Equitation Pattern (2 and 3 gait).....	92
*Trail (all seats and 2 or 3 gaits except Ranch).....	95
Pleasure Driving	97
Reinsmanship.....	98
Driven Obstacles	100
Driven Cones	102

*Ground Handling.....	103
Ranch Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)	105
*Ranch Riding (2 or 3 gait)	106
*Ranch Reining.....	108
*Ranchmanship (2 or 3 gait)	109
Ranch Horsemanship (2 or 3 gait).....	111
*Ranch Trail (2 or 3 gait)	113
Side Saddle - All.....	116
Timed Events - all.....	116
Unbridled Classes – all	117
Walk	117
Leadline	117
Conclusion.....	118

Introduction

Welcome to the Open Horse Show Association (OHSA) Show Rules. Whether you are preparing for your very first class or you've spent years in the show ring, this rulebook is designed to support you with clear, consistent, and exhibitor-friendly guidance.

OHSA hosts both live and virtual shows, including the OHSA World Show, and these rules apply to all OHSA-hosted events. They work alongside the OHSA Member Rulebook to ensure that every exhibitor—regardless of discipline, breed, or experience level—has a fair and enjoyable showing experience.

This rulebook includes information on the various OHSA classes and their procedures. The procedures included may include instructions for those that walk, jog/trot, and lope/canter. If you only walk and jog/trot you should follow the instructions but understand that any specific lope/canter instructions may not be required for your walk/trot/jog classes.

Our goal is to create a show environment that is:

- **Fair** - Judging standards and class procedures are consistent across all OHSA events.
- **Educational** - Rules are written to help exhibitors understand *why* certain standards exist, not just what they are.
- **Inclusive** - We welcome riders and handlers of all backgrounds, disciplines, and experience levels.
- **Adaptable** - Non-OHSA shows may adopt these rules in full or in part, allowing for consistency across events while still giving show managers flexibility to meet local needs.
- **Evolving** - OHSA reviews and updates classes and rules annually to reflect exhibitor feedback, industry standards, and the needs of our growing community.

Whether you show for personal growth, competitive goals, or simply the joy of spending time with your horse, we're glad you're here. Let's get started.



New to Showing?

If you're new to showing, don't worry—this rulebook is designed to guide you step-by-step. Look for “New to Showing?” callouts throughout the document for extra help.



Judge's Tip Judges rely on clear, consistent rules to evaluate every exhibitor fairly. Understanding the “why” behind the rules can help you show with confidence and purpose

Key Objectives of the OHSA Show Rules:

The OHSA Show Rules are designed to create a fair, consistent, and enjoyable showing experience for exhibitors of all backgrounds. These objectives guide how classes are structured, how judging is conducted, and how exhibitors prepare for competition.

1. **Consistency Across All OHSA Events** - OHSA strives to maintain uniform standards for judging, attire, tack, and class procedures. Whether you are showing in a monthly virtual show or at the OHSA World Show, you can expect the same rules and expectations.
2. **Clear Pathways for Year-End Awards** - The rulebook outlines which classes qualify for year-end points and how those points are earned. This helps exhibitors plan their show season and understand how their results contribute to awards.
3. **Flexibility for Non-OHSA Shows** - Non-OHSA shows may adopt these rules in full or in part. This allows local shows, partner shows, and independent events to benefit from OHSA's structure while still adjusting for their unique needs. When using OHSA rules, show managers must acknowledge OHSA as the source.
4. **Annual Review and Updates** - The horse industry evolves, and so do exhibitor needs. OHSA reviews its rules each year and may add, remove, or adjust classes and procedures to improve fairness, safety, and clarity.
5. **Support for All Experience Levels** - These rules are written to help both seasoned competitors and newcomers understand what judges look for, how classes operate, and how to prepare for success.



New to Showing?

OHSA rules may feel detailed at first, but they're designed to help you understand exactly what judges expect. As you read, look for "Judge's Tips" and "Common Mistakes" to help you prepare with confidence

Classes and Eligibility

OHSA offers a wide variety of classes designed to support exhibitors of all disciplines, experience levels, and goals. These rules help clarify which classes count toward year-end awards, how classes may change over time, and how exhibitors can plan their show season. Year-End Award Eligibility

Classes listed in the OHSA Rulebook are eligible for the OHSA Year-End Awards Program. Exhibitors earn points based on their placings throughout the show year, and these points accumulate toward year-end recognition.

Some classes may be offered only at specific events—such as the OHSA World Show or monthly virtual shows—and may not count toward year-end points. Exhibitors should review each show's class list carefully to understand which classes qualify.



New to Showing?

Not every class you enter will count toward year-end awards. Always check the show's class list—especially for virtual shows or special events—to see which classes earn points.



Judge's Tip Consistency is one of the most important parts of fair judging. When you understand the rules, you help judges evaluate your performance accurately and fairly.

Class Modifications and Updates

To keep the program fresh, fair, and aligned with exhibitor needs, OHSA may add, remove, or adjust classes each year. This includes updating class descriptions, judging criteria, or eligibility requirements.

Any changes will be announced prior to the start of the show year so exhibitors can plan accordingly.

Use of External Rulebooks

When a situation arises that is not directly addressed in the OHSA rules, judges may refer to the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) or United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) rulebooks for guidance. This ensures that judging remains consistent, informed, and grounded in widely recognized industry standards.

Judging and Evaluation:

OHSA judges are committed to providing fair, consistent, and knowledgeable evaluations across all classes. To support this, judges follow the OHSA Show Rules as their primary guide. When a situation arises that is not directly addressed in this rulebook, judges may refer to the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) or United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) rulebooks for additional guidance.

COMMON MISTAKES

Many exhibitors focus only on the final placing. Instead, look at your maneuver scores — they tell the real story of your ride or pattern.

This ensures that judging remains grounded in widely recognized industry standards while still honoring the unique structure of OHSA events.



Judge's Tip When rules don't specify how to handle a unique situation, judges rely on AQHA or USEF guidelines. These organizations have long-established standards that help ensure fairness and consistency.

Judging Philosophy

OHSA judging is based on three core principles:

1. **Fairness** - Every exhibitor is evaluated against the same standards, regardless of breed, discipline, or experience level.
2. **Clarity** - Judges use established criteria for each class, allowing exhibitors to understand what is being evaluated and why.
3. **Education** - OHSA encourages judges to provide constructive feedback whenever

 **Judge's Tip** Judges aren't looking for perfection. They're looking for correctness, consistency, and a harmonious partnership between horse and exhibitor. A smooth, accurate performance often scores higher than a flashy but inconsistent one.

possible. Feedback helps exhibitors grow, refine their skills, and better understand how their performance aligns with class expectations.

Use of Scorecards

Classes marked with an asterisk (*) use OHSA scorecards. These scorecards break down the class into individual maneuvers or elements, each scored from 0 to 10.

The total score is then divided by the number of maneuvers to produce a final percentage.

Example:

- 10 maneuvers
- Maximum possible score: 100
- Exhibitor earns 80 points
- Final score = 80%

This system provides transparency and helps exhibitors see exactly where they excelled and where improvement is needed.

Usage of Rules by Other Shows

The OHSA Show Rules are designed to be clear, adaptable, and useful beyond OHSA-hosted events. Many local, regional,



New to Showing?

Scorecards are your friend. They show exactly how your performance was evaluated and help you understand what to practice next. Don't be afraid to compare your scores across shows — improvement over time is a huge part of the showing journey.

and independent shows choose to adopt OHSA rules because they provide a consistent, exhibitor-friendly framework that works across multiple disciplines and experience levels.

Use by Non-OHSA Shows

Non-OHSA shows—whether partnered with OHSA or operating independently—may use the OHSA Rulebook in full or in part. This helps create a familiar experience for exhibitors and ensures that judging standards remain consistent across events.

Show managers who choose to use OHSA rules must acknowledge OHSA as the source of the material. This protects the integrity of the rulebook and ensures that exhibitors understand which standards are being followed.



New to Showing?

If you attend a show that says it “uses OHSA rules,” you can expect the same general standards you’ll find in this rulebook. Still, always read the show’s specific class list and announcements — local shows may make small adjustments.

Flexibility for Local Needs

While OHSA encourages consistency, non-OHSA shows may adjust certain rules to fit their facility, class list, or exhibitor base. These adjustments should maintain the spirit of fairness, safety, and clarity that OHSA promotes.

Examples of acceptable adjustments include:

- Modifying class offerings
- Adjusting age divisions
- Changing entry procedures
- Adapting rules for local safety regulations

However, core principles—such as humane treatment of horses, sportsmanship expectations, and basic judging standards—should remain intact.

Benefits of Using OHSA Rules

- Exhibitors know what to expect
- Judges have clear, structured guidelines
- Shows can run more smoothly
- Newcomers benefit from consistent education
- Multi-discipline events gain a unified rule set
-

Conclusion - The OHSA Show Rules provide the foundation for fair, consistent, and enjoyable competition across all OHSA-hosted events. Whether you are participating in a live show, a

monthly virtual show, or the OHSA World Show, these rules ensure that every exhibitor understands what is expected and how classes are judged.

By following these guidelines, exhibitors help create a positive environment where sportsmanship, safety, and respect for horses and fellow competitors come first. OHSA is committed to supporting exhibitors of all experience levels, and this rulebook is designed to be both a reference and an educational tool.

As you continue through the following sections, you'll find detailed information on attire, tack,

 **Judge's Tip** When shows adopt OHSA rules, it helps judges apply consistent standards across different venues. This makes placings more predictable and fair for exhibitors

class procedures, judging criteria, and discipline-specific expectations. Use these resources to prepare confidently, show responsibly, and enjoy your time in the ring—whether you're stepping in for the first time or returning as a seasoned competitor.

Good Sportsmanship

OHSA is committed to creating a positive, respectful, and supportive environment for all exhibitors. Good sportsmanship is not simply encouraged — it is required. Exhibitors, family members, trainers, and anyone acting on behalf of an exhibitor are expected to uphold the values of fairness, kindness, and professionalism at all times.

These expectations apply to both live and virtual shows, including all interactions with judges, show staff, volunteers, and fellow exhibitors.

Sportsmanship and Respect

Expected Conduct

All exhibitors and associated persons must conduct themselves in a respectful and courteous manner. This includes:

- Treating fellow exhibitors, judges, and staff with kindness
- Accepting placings and feedback with professionalism



New to Showing?

It's normal to feel disappointed if a class doesn't go the way you hoped. Good sportsmanship means handling those moments with grace. Judges notice — and so do fellow exhibitors.

COMMON MISTAKES

Posting negative comments about judges, placings, or other exhibitors on social media can be considered poor sportsmanship and may result in disciplinary action

- Setting a positive example for newer exhibitors
- Communicating concerns calmly and appropriately

Disrespectful, hostile, or aggressive behavior — especially regarding placings, points, or results — undermines the integrity of the competition and will not be tolerated.

Consequences of Poor Sportsmanship

If an exhibitor or associated person behaves inappropriately toward show staff or other exhibitors, OHSA may take disciplinary action, including:

- **Forfeiture of all points and awards** earned during that show day or month
- **No refunds** for entry fees, past shows, or membership dues
- **Possible suspension or removal** from OHSA programs for repeated or severe offenses

These policies ensure that all participants can enjoy a safe, fair, and welcoming show environment.

Animal Welfare and Abuse Policy:



Commitment to Humane Treatment

OHSA maintains a zero-tolerance policy for the abuse or inhumane treatment of horses or other animals shown in OHSA events. Exhibitors are responsible for ensuring that their animals are handled with care, respect, and appropriate training methods.

If you're unsure whether a training method or piece of equipment is acceptable, choose the option that prioritizes your horse's comfort and safety. When in doubt, ask before you show.

Abuse is defined as any cruel, excessive, or inhumane treatment as determined by individuals experienced in accepted equine training and handling practices.

Judge's Tip Exhibitors who demonstrate kindness, patience, and professionalism contribute to a positive show atmosphere. Judges appreciate exhibitors who treat their horses and fellow competitors with respect.

Disciplinary Action for Abuse

Exhibitors or associated persons found to have abused an animal may face serious consequences, including:

- Immediate disqualification
- Loss of points or awards
- Suspension or revocation of OHSA membership

OHSA's priority is the safety and well-being of all animals participating in its events.

Summary:

OHSA's rules on sportsmanship, respectful conduct, and animal welfare are designed to uphold the integrity of the association and ensure that every participant, human and animal alike, is treated fairly and with respect.

- **Good sportsmanship** and **ethical behavior** are essential, with the consequence of forfeiting awards or points for inappropriate conduct.
- **Inhumane treatment of horses** is strictly prohibited, and violators may face severe disciplinary actions, including membership revocation.

These policies help maintain a positive, fair, and humane environment at OHSA events, encouraging a community of respect and professionalism.

 **Judge's Tip** Judges appreciate exhibitors who show good horsemanship, even if everything isn't perfect. A calm, confident, and safe performance always stands out.

New to Showing?

Welcome! If you're new to horse showing, you're in the right place. OHSA is designed to be an inclusive, supportive environment where exhibitors of all experience levels can learn, grow, and enjoy the process of showing their horses.

Horse shows come with their own vocabulary, traditions, and expectations — and it's completely normal to feel unsure at first. This rulebook is here to guide you step-by-step, and you'll find helpful notes throughout the document to explain common terms, clarify procedures, and offer tips for success.

A full glossary of horse show terms will be available soon to help you understand the language of the show ring. Until then, don't hesitate to ask questions, learn from fellow exhibitors, and take your time exploring the classes that interest you most.

Showing is a journey, and we're glad you're starting it with OHSA.

Beginner-Friendly Classes to Consider

- **Showmanship** (great for learning patterns and ring etiquette)
- **Halter/Conformation** (no riding required)
- **Walk/Trot or Walk/Jog classes**
- **In-Hand Trail**
- **Ground Poles**

These classes help you learn the basics without the pressure of faster gaits or advanced maneuvers.

Common Newcomer Questions

“What should I wear?”

Check the Attire section — OHSA allows flexibility, especially in dress-down shows.

“What tack do I need?”

The Tack section outlines what’s required for each discipline.

“How do I know which classes I can enter?”

Start with your horse’s training level and your comfort level. You can always add more classes as you gain experience.



Virtual Exhibitor Tip

If you’re showing virtually, practice filming a few times before recording your final video. Good camera placement makes a big difference in how clearly the judge can evaluate your performance.

General Show Rules

The following rules apply to all OHSA Hosted Shows, including live and virtual events. These guidelines ensure fairness, safety, and consistency for every exhibitor and horse participating in OHSA programs.

Liability Disclaimer

OHSA, its committees, partners, and team members are not responsible for any loss, injury, damage, or debts incurred in connection with any show or event. Exhibitors participate at their own risk and are responsible for the safety and conduct of themselves, their horses, and anyone assisting them.

Eligibility and Registration

Membership Requirement

All exhibitors must be current OHSA members in good standing to participate in OHSA Hosted Shows or earn year-end awards.

Horse Participation Number

Every horse must have an OHSA Horse Participation Number before entering any OHSA Hosted Show. This number helps track points, entries, and results accurately.

Breed Registration

Horses do **not** need breed registration to compete.

However, if a horse *is* registered with a breed association, it must be shown under its registered name.

Non-Equine Division

Many OHSA members have animals other than equines and want to show them off too! OHSA proudly includes divisions for non-equine species such as:

- Cows
- Sheep
- Goats
- Dogs
- Other animals

These divisions follow similar rules for eligibility and conduct.

Show Entry and Fees:

Payment at Entry

All class fees must be paid at the time of entry.

Virtual Show Timeline

Virtual shows typically run from the first to the last day of the show month. Exhibitors should always confirm dates for each show, as timelines may vary.

Refund Policy

- No refunds are issued for missed deadlines or late submissions.
- Refunds may be considered only for documented veterinary or human medical emergencies.
- Once judging begins, no refunds will be granted for any reason.

COMMON MISTAKES

Submitting a video filmed outside the show month is one of the most common reasons entries are disqualified. Always double-check your date stamp before uploading.

Judging and Show Feedback:

Carded Judges

All OHSa Hosted Shows use OHSa-carded judges. These judges are trained to evaluate performances consistently and professionally.

Feedback

- Judges provide feedback or scorecards for each class or video.
- The OHSa World Show requires scorecards but does **not** require written feedback.
- Feedback is intended to be constructive and educational.

Exhibition Rules:

Stallions

Stallions may be shown by exhibitors of any age, including youth, unless prohibited by local laws or facility rules.

Age Restrictions for Horses

Horses under age 2 (born on or after January 1, 2023) may **not** compete in ridden performance classes before July 1 of their two-year-old year.

They *may* compete in in-hand classes such as:

- Halter
- Showmanship
- Grooming & Conditioning



New to Showing?

Don't worry if this feels like a lot of information. Most exhibitors learn these rules gradually. Start with the basics — membership, horse number, and class deadlines — and build from there.

- Color
- In-Hand Trail
- Lunge Line
- Ground Driving
- Driving

These rules protect young horses from excessive physical stress.

 **Judge's Tip** A clean, neat presentation goes a long way. Judges appreciate exhibitors who take pride in turnout, even when clipping or show-level polish isn't required.

Appearance and Equipment Requirements:

Markers

Markers are required for all pattern classes.

- Cones are preferred.
- Any safe, clearly visible marker is acceptable for virtual submissions.

Clipping

Clipping is optional. Horses should be:

- Clean
- Neat
- Presentable

Judges may consider overall appearance, but lack of clipping does **not** result in point deductions.

Poles and Fences

- Wooden poles are preferred; PVC poles are allowed.
- Minimum fence heights:
 - **Miniature horses:** 12 inches
 - **All other horses:** 18 inches
- Fences may be homemade if they are safe and sturdy.

Class Placings and Ties:

Placings

All classes are placed through **sixth place**, regardless of the number of entries.

Ties

If a tie occurs:

- Tied exhibitors receive the **same points**.
- The next placing is skipped accordingly.

Example:

6 entries and there is a tie for 3rd place

- Both exhibitors receive 4 points
- Next placing awarded is 5th place (2 points)

Virtual Show Rules

Virtual showing allows exhibitors from all over the world to participate in OHSA events without needing to travel. To ensure fairness and consistency, all virtual entries must follow the rules below. These guidelines help judges evaluate performances accurately and give exhibitors the best chance to present their horses clearly.

Exhibitor and Horse Participation:

Multiple Horses

Exhibitors may show as many horses as they wish in any class, provided each horse:

- Has an OHSA Horse Participation Number
- Is correctly attached to the exhibitor's membership

There is no limit to the number of horses an exhibitor may enter.



New to Showing Virtually?

Practice filming a few times before recording your final entry. This helps you find the best camera angle and ensures your horse stays fully in frame.

Rider Limitations

A rider may show the **same horse only once per class**, except in the following situations:

Dressage Classes

A horse/rider combination may enter multiple times **as long as each entry is a different test**.

Different Seats or Levels

If a class allows multiple seats or levels, exhibitors may enter more than once using:

- Different seats (Western, Hunt Seat, Saddle Seat, etc.)
- Different levels (Walk/Trot vs. Walk/Trot/Canter)

Example: An exhibitor may enter Trail (Western) and Trail (Hunt Seat) with the same horse, but may not enter Trail (Western) twice at the same level.

Video and Photography Requirements:

No Still Photos

Still photos are not accepted unless a specific class list explicitly allows them. All judged classes require video submissions except for fun costume classes.

Camera Placement

Proper camera placement is essential for accurate judging. The judge must be able to see the **entire horse and exhibitor** at all times.

Recommended placement:

- **Rail Classes:**
Place the camera at the **middle of the arena**, far enough back to capture the entire rail.
- **Pattern Classes:**
Place the camera along the **long side** of the arena, centered if possible.
- **Dressage Tests:**
Place the camera at **C**, directly behind the judge's position in a traditional dressage arena.

Framing the Horse

- The horse and rider/handler should fill as much of the frame as possible.
- Avoid filming from too far away — judges cannot score what they cannot see.
- Avoid filming too close — judges need to see the full movement

Obstructions

The camera must not be blocked by:

- Arena rails
- Posts
- People
- Vehicles
- Shadows or glare

COMMON MISTAKES

Forgetting to include the date at the beginning of the video is one of the most frequent reasons entries are disqualified. Always double-check before submitting.

If the judge cannot see a maneuver clearly, they cannot score it.

 **Judge's Tip** If the judge can't clearly see a maneuver, they must score it as performed — even if the horse did it correctly. Clear video quality directly affects your score.

Filming Tips for Best Results

- Film in **landscape (horizontal)** orientation
- Avoid filming into direct sunlight
- Keep the camera steady — use a tripod if possible
- Make sure wind noise doesn't overpower your audio
- Clean your camera lens before filming

Video Submission Rules:

Timeliness

All videos must be:

- **Filmed within the show month**
- **Submitted within the show month**

Videos filmed outside the designated month will not be accepted.

Date Verification

Each video must include one of the following:

- A visible **time/date stamp** from the recording device
- A **written or typed paper** held up at the beginning of the video showing the date
- A **verbal announcement** of the date at the start of the video

Late or Incorrect Submissions

- Late entries will not be judged.
- Incorrectly submitted videos (wrong date, missing date, wrong class, etc.) will not be accepted.
- **No refunds** will be issued for late or incorrect submissions.

Fairness Reminder

Proper video submission ensures that:

- All exhibitors compete on equal footing
- Judges evaluate performances accurately
- The integrity of the show is maintained

Attire and Tack

OHSA's attire rules are designed to promote safety, clarity, and discipline-appropriate presentation while still allowing exhibitors flexibility. Whether you are showing in a formal class, a dress-down event, or a virtual show, your attire should be neat, clean, and appropriate for the discipline you are riding or handling.

These guidelines help ensure that judges can evaluate your performance without distraction and that exhibitors present themselves professionally.



New to Showing?

You don't need expensive show clothes to get started. Clean, well-fitted, discipline-appropriate attire is what matters most.

General Attire Guidelines:

Neatness and Cleanliness

All exhibitors must wear clothing and tack that is:

- Clean
- Neat
- Well-fitted
- Appropriate for the discipline

COMMON MISTAKES

Wearing a short-sleeve shirt in a non-dress-down show can result in a penalty. Always check the show's attire requirements.

You do not need expensive or brand-name attire — simply present yourself in a way that reflects pride and respect for the sport.

Torso Coverage

The torso must be fully covered at all times. Bare midriffs are not permitted in any class.

Helmets

- Helmets may be worn in **any** class without penalty.
- Helmets are **required** in all over-fences classes.
- Helmets are required in any state or region where helmet use is mandated by law.

Footwear

Riders must wear boots or shoes with a heel:

- **At least:** ½ inch
- **No more than:** 2 inches

Proper footwear is essential for safety and stability.

Stirrups

- Stirrups may **not** be tied together.
- Riders may **not** tie their legs to the stirrups in any way, including with rubber bands.

Proper Attire

Failure to wear proper attire may result in a **penalty**, but it will **not** result in disqualification.

Weather Considerations

- Rain gear is permitted in wet conditions.
- Vests, jackets, and coats may be worn in cold weather.

Special Exceptions

OHSA will consider attire exceptions for religious reasons or physical disabilities. Please request accommodation prior to the show so the judge can be informed.

Discipline-Specific Attire

Discipline	Required Attire	Optional Attire	Prohibited/Notes
In Hand	Attire appropriate to the horse's style: Western, Hunt Seat, Saddle Seat, or Gaited. Footwear and headwear must match the discipline.	Gloves	Crops or bats except for a lunge whip in the lunge line class
Western	Long sleeve collared shirt; Long pants or jeans; Boots; Western hat or helmet	Gloves; Chaps	Crops or bats
Hunt Seat	Coats: Any color except red or maroon (traditional: navy, dark green, black, brown, gray). Breeches/Jodhpurs: Any color. Boots: Tall or paddock boots, any color. Shirts: Long/short sleeve with tie or choker; polo shirts permitted. Helmet: Strongly recommended; required in all over fences classes. Hair: Neat and contained.	Gloves, Unrowelled spurs; Chaps or half chaps; Crops/bats.	Rowelled spurs

Saddle Seat	Formal attire (after 6 pm): Jacket, conservative colors. Informal attire: Jacket, jodhpurs, derby or soft hat (or helmet), jodhpur boots. Academy attire: Long sleeve shirt with vest, no jacket.	Gloves, Unrowelled spurs; half chaps; crops/bats.	OHSA allows any color, even in traditionally conservative classes. Rowelled spurs are prohibited
Gaited	Boots; Attire appropriate for Western, Hunt Seat, Saddle Seat, or breed-specific native dress.	Gloves; spurs; chaps or half chaps; crops/bats	
Driving	Coat; tie; hat of choice		Legs may be exposed below the knee
Dressage	Attire must match the seat being ridden. Dressage saddle or hunt seat saddle permitted in classic dressage. Western riders may use leather or synthetic saddles.	Follow optional items from corresponding discipline	Rowelled spurs

Dress Down Shows

If a show is advertised as **dress down**, exhibitors may wear:

- T-shirts
- Short-sleeve shirts
- Ball caps, soft caps, western hats, or helmets
- Boots or shoes with a heel between ½" and 2" are required

Tack

Tack plays a major role in safety, fairness, and discipline integrity. OHSA's tack rules ensure that exhibitors present their horses in equipment appropriate for the class, while also protecting the welfare of the horse. These rules apply to all OHSA Hosted Shows, including live and virtual events.

General Tack Rules:

Applies to All Shows

Whether a show requires full attire or is designated as "dress down," exhibitors must still follow the correct tack rules for their discipline.

Prohibited Equipment (All Classes)

The following items are **not allowed** in any judged class:

- Draw reins
- Training forks
- Caustic chemicals (mustard oil, ginger, kerosene, etc.)
- Weighted shoes, boots, or wraps
- Any metal that touches the horse under a halter or bridle (tacks, pins, wire, barbed wire)
- Live animals used as obstacles or maneuvers

These rules protect the horse's comfort and ensure a level playing field.

Discipline-Specific Tack Rules:

In-Hand Classes

- **Spurs and whips:** Not allowed, except:
 - Lunge line classes → lunge whip permitted
 - Ground driving → driving whip permitted
- **Halters:** Leather (with or without silver), nylon, or rope
- **Lead ropes with chains:** Allowed under the chin or over the nose only
- **Bridles:** Permitted for hunter and saddle-type horses
- **Lunge line length:** Maximum 30 feet



New to Showing?

If you're unsure whether a piece of tack is allowed, choose the simplest, most traditional option for your discipline. Judges reward correctness and safety over flash

Western Tack

- **Bridle:** No cavesson or noseband
- **Bits:**
 - Any standard western bit allowed
 - Snaffles and bosals permitted for any age horse
 - Bitless bridles (side pulls, bosals with mecate) allowed
- **Hands:**
 - One or two hands with snaffles or bosals
 - One hand with leverage (shanked) bits
- **Reins:**
 - Split reins or romals required in judged classes
 - Single roping/barrel reins allowed only in timed events
- **Curb chains/straps:**
 - Required with leverage bits; strongly recommended for snaffle bits
 - Must be at least ½ inch wide and lie flat
- **Not allowed in judged classes:**
 - Gag bits
 - Mechanical hackamores
 - Martingales
 - Draw reins
 - Tiedowns
 - Training forks
- **Allowed in timed events:**
 - Gag bits
 - Mechanical hackamores
 - Tiedowns
- **Saddle:**
 - Western saddle (leather or synthetic) required
- **Horse boots (bell, fetlock, knee and/or sports boots):**
 - Allowed only in Reining, Ranch, and timed events

COMMON MISTAKES

Using a mechanical hackamore or gag bit in a judged Western class is an automatic disqualification. These are allowed only in timed events.

Hunt Seat Tack

- **Bridle:**
 - Cavesson required (regular, flash, or figure-8)
- **Bits:**
 - Any standard hunt seat bit allowed
 - Pelham or double bridle permitted
- **Crop:**
 - Allowed
 - Must be used only on or behind the shoulder

- **Saddle:**
 - Forward seat, all-purpose, close contact, or jumping saddle
 - Dressage saddles allowed in flat classes
- **Saddle pads:**
 - Any color
 - Shaped, rounded, or square

Dressage Tack

- **Saddle:**
 - Dressage saddle
 - OR hunt seat saddle for classic dressage
 - Western riders may use leather or synthetic saddles
- **Hands:**
 - Two hands allowed on any permitted bit
- **Bits:**
 - Follow the rules of the seat being ridden

Saddle Seat Tack

- **Saddle:**
 - Flat cutback saddle required
 - Dressage or hunt seat saddles not allowed
- **Bridle:**
 - Full bridle, Pelham, or snaffle
- **Shoes:**
 - Barefoot, shod, or padded allowed
 - Weighted pads not allowed

Gaited Tack

- Follow tack rules for the riding style (Western, Hunt Seat, Saddle Seat)
- Breed-specific native tack allowed
- Two hands allowed on any permitted bit

Driving Tack

- **Whip:** Required and appropriate for the cart
- **Harness:**
 - Breast collar harness
 - Surcingle with shaft tie-downs and crupper
- **Bridle:**
 - Standard driving bridle
 - Overcheck or check reins allowed

- Blinders permitted
- **Bits:**
 - Traditional driving bits (half cheek, Liverpool, elbow bits)

Ranch Horse Tack

- Western tack as described in the Western section
- Silver should be minimal; excessive silver may be penalized

Optional Equipment:

- Horse boots such as Scoot Boots allowed in all classes
- Bell boots, skid boots, tendon boots, polo wraps, etc. allowed only where specified

Prohibited Equipment:

- Boots or wraps are prohibited in conformation, showmanship, pleasure, or flat equitation classes.
- Whips, crops only allowed in lunge line, hunt seat, saddle seat, gaited, and dressage classes.

These comprehensive tack rules help maintain consistency and fairness across disciplines and ensure the safety and well-being of both riders and horses. It's important for exhibitors to follow these rules to ensure a smooth, fair competition.

 **Judge's Tip** Clean, well-fitted tack always makes a better impression than overly decorative or ill-fitting equipment

Judging and Class Procedures

Overview

Judging at OHSA events is designed to be fair, consistent, and educational. Whether a class is rail-based, pattern-based, or scored maneuver-by-maneuver, judges follow OHSA rules first and may reference AQHA or USEF guidelines when needed. Exhibitors should understand how classes are run and how judges evaluate performances so they can prepare confidently.

General Class Procedures

Class Calls and Order of Go

- Exhibitors must be prepared to enter the ring or begin their pattern when called.
- In virtual shows, exhibitors must follow the posted class list and submit videos in the correct class category.
- Failure to follow the correct pattern or class instructions may result in penalties or disqualification.

Rail Classes (Flat Classes)

Rail classes are judged as a group. Exhibitors perform gaits or maneuvers as instructed by the announcer or judge.

Typical Rail Class Flow

1. Enter the ring and proceed in the designated direction
2. Perform requested gaits (walk, jog/trot, lope/canter)
3. Reverse direction when instructed
4. Line up or halt for final inspection

Judging Priorities

- Correctness and quality of gaits
- Consistency and rhythm
- Rider/handler position and effectiveness
- Horse's manners, responsiveness, and overall picture

Penalties

- Wrong lead
- Breaking gait
- Excessive speed or lack of control
- Poor manners (pinning ears, tail wringing, resistance)

Pattern Classes

Pattern classes require exhibitors to complete a predetermined sequence of maneuvers. Accuracy and execution are key.



New to Showing?

Rail classes test consistency. Pattern classes test accuracy. Scored classes show you exactly where you shine and where to focus your practice.

Pattern Requirements

- Exhibitors must follow the posted pattern exactly
- Markers must be clearly visible
- Maneuvers must be performed at the designated locations

Judging Priorities

- Precision and correctness
- Smoothness and flow
- Willingness and responsiveness
- Accuracy of transitions and maneuvers

Common Pattern Errors

- Off-pattern (may result in disqualification)
- Missed markers
- Performing maneuvers out of order
- Over- or under-turning

Scored Classes

Some classes use OHSA scorecards, where each maneuver is scored individually.

How Scoring Works

- Each maneuver receives a score from 0–10
- Total points are divided by the number of maneuvers
- Final score is expressed as a percentage

COMMON MISTAKES

Not practicing the pattern with markers. Judges expect you to hit the correct locations, not approximate them.

What Judges Look For

- Quality of each maneuver
- Consistency across the pattern
- Degree of difficulty (when applicable)
- Overall presentation

Why Scorecards Matter

Scorecards help exhibitors:

- Understand strengths and weaknesses
- Track improvement over time
- Compare performances across shows

Class Placings

All classes are placed through **sixth place**, regardless of the number of entries.

Ties

If two exhibitors tie:

- Both receive the same points
- The next placing is skipped

Example:

In a class with 6 entries and there is a tie for 2nd → both receive 5 points → next placing is 4th.

Conformation (Halter) Classes

Purpose of the Class

Halter evaluates the horse's conformation which includes, **balance, structural correctness, muscling, quality, type, and travel**. Exhibitors present their horses in hand, allowing judges to assess the horse's physical qualities without the influence of riding.

This class is about the **horse**, not the handler.

General Rules

- Horses must be shown in a halter or bridle appropriate for their type (Western, Hunt Seat, Saddle Seat, or breed-specific).
- Horses should be clean, well-groomed, and neatly presented.
- Clipping is optional and not required for a competitive placing.
- Exhibitors should stand their horse squarely and maintain control at all times.
- Excessive repositioning or fidgeting may be penalized



New to Showing?

Conformation is about how your horse is *built*, not how it performs. Focus on presenting your horse cleanly, standing square, and showing off its best angles.

Judging Criteria

1. Balance

- Proportionality of body parts
- Smooth topline
- Correct hip-shoulder-neck relationship

2. Structural Correctness

- Straightness of legs
- Correct angles
- Soundness indicators

3. Muscling

- Appropriate muscling for age, breed, and discipline
- Even development

4. Breed & Type

- Does the horse represent its type well?
- Does its build match its intended discipline?

5. Quality

- Refinement
- Well-defined features based on the breed type
- Free of faults

6. Travel

- Shown at walk and trot
- Balanced gaits
- Structural alignment and freedom of motion
- No lameness

 **Judge's Tip** A well-balanced horse with correct structure will always stand out. Even if your horse isn't perfect, clean presentation and confident handling make a big difference.

Penalties

- Poor manners (biting, striking, kicking)
- Excessive movement or inability to stand still
- Unsafe behavior
- Failure to show the horse properly (not exhibiting a trot or walk as required)

Challenges in Judging Open Conformation Classes:

- **Breed Variety:** In open horse shows, multiple breeds and grade horses (those of unknown or mixed heritage) may be shown in the same class. This presents a challenge for judges, as they must compare horses of different breeds and types. Despite this, judges typically focus on the fundamental principles of a well-made horse.
- **Ideal vs. Reality:** The judge must strive to compare each horse against the ideal for its breed while considering the differences in breed types. A "well-made" horse, regardless of breed, tends to have balanced proportions, correct structure, and an overall attractive and functional build.

Class Procedure

- The handler should begin by walking the horse **directly toward the judge or camera**, allowing the judge to clearly evaluate the horse's movement at the walk. As the handler passes the camera, they should transition smoothly into a **jog or trot**, continuing straight ahead for **up to 10 strides**.
- After the straight line, the handler should **turn left** and continue trotting for **up to 10 additional strides**. This allows the judge to view the horse's movement from **behind** and from the **side**, ensuring a complete assessment of the horse's travel.
- Once the movement portion is complete, the handler should position the horse for a conformation inspection. The judge or camera will then record **each side of the horse**—left, front, right, and back—for several seconds per view. This ensures the judge has adequate time to evaluate the horse's structure, balance, and overall presentation.
- The camera may either **move around the horse**, or—if using a Pivo or similar tracking device—the **handler may reposition the horse** to present each side clearly to the camera.

COMMON MISTAKES

Many handlers rush the setup. Take your time — a calm, deliberate setup shows confidence and helps your horse relax.

Helpful Strategy

Practice setting up from both sides. Judges may walk around your horse, and you should be able to adjust smoothly without stepping into their path.

Training Insight

Teach your horse to “self-square” by stepping into position with minimal correction. This creates a polished, professional look.

Presentation Tip

Keep your lead rope organized and avoid excessive movement. Quiet hands and a calm presence help your horse look its best.

*Showmanship

Purpose of the Class

Showmanship evaluates the **handler’s ability** to present the horse. Unlike Halter, this class is judged primarily on the **exhibitor’s skill**, not the horse’s conformation.

This is a precision class focused on:

- Pattern accuracy
- Handler’s body position
- Grooming and turnout
- Smoothness and confidence

General Rules

- Horses may be shown in a halter or bridle appropriate for their type.
- Exhibitors must follow the posted pattern exactly.
- The horse should be clean, well-groomed, and neatly presented.
- The handler should demonstrate control, awareness, and ring etiquette.



New to Showing?

Showmanship is about *you*, not your horse. Judges reward precision, confidence, and smooth execution of the pattern.

 **Judge’s Tip** Crisp turns, straight lines, and clean transitions between maneuvers separate top exhibitors from the rest.

Judging Criteria

1. Pattern Execution

- Accuracy
- Straight lines
- Clean transitions
- Correct spacing at markers

COMMON MISTAKES

Rushing the pattern. Smooth and accurate always beats fast and sloppy.

2. Handler Position

- Correct quartering method
- Awareness of judge's location
- Smooth, confident movement

3. Horse Presentation

- Grooming
- Responsiveness
- Manners

4. Overall Impression

- Professionalism
- Poise
- Execution
- Confidence

Class Procedure

Handlers must perform the **posted pattern**, or their own pattern if the class is designated as **freestyle**. Patterns may include any combination of the following maneuvers:

- Walk
- Trot or jog
- Turns of various degrees
- Stops
- Back-ups
- Setting up

- Visual inspection

During the inspection, handlers must use the standard quarter method. The exhibitor must maintain a position that is safe for both themselves and the judge at all times. The handler's position should never obstruct the judge's view of the horse and must allow the handler to remain aware of the judge's location throughout the inspection.

When moving around the horse, the handler should change sides in front of the horse, then assume the same position on the right side that they previously held on the left side.

Penalties

3-Point Penalties

- Break of gait up to 2 strides
- Over- or under-turning up to ¼ turn
- Hitting or knocking over a cone
- Lifting a pivot foot and replacing it

5-Point Penalties

- Not performing the required gait, or break of gait for more than 2 strides
- Splitting the cone (cone or marker passes between horse and handler)
- Horse stepping out of the set-up position and requiring a reset
- Horse stepping out or moving the hind end significantly during a turn

10-Point Penalties

- Touching the horse with hand or foot
- Using two hands on the lead shank, or losing the lead/loose horse
- Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling the handler)

Disqualification

- Illegal equipment
- Willful abuse
- Off-pattern (failing to perform or attempt a required maneuver)

Freestyle Maneuver Requirements

 **Judge's Tip** Smoothness matters. A handler who moves confidently and quietly often scores higher than one who rushes.

In freestyle classes, the handler must include **at least six maneuvers**, which must include:

- A **walk** of at least 10 feet **AND** a **jog** of at least 20 feet (straight, curved, square, or circle)
- A **pivot** of at least 180 degrees
- A **back-up** of at least 4 steps
- **Inspection**

For the sixth required maneuver, the handler may choose an additional:

- Pivot
- Back-up
- Walk
- Jog

Handlers may include **up to 10 total scored maneuvers** in a freestyle pattern.

Helpful Strategy

Break the pattern into segments and practice each piece until it's automatic. Muscle memory builds confidence.

Training Insight

Teach your horse to respond to subtle cues — a slight shift of your body should be enough to move them.

Presentation Tip

Keep your eyes up and look where you're going. Confident posture makes a strong impression.

[Color Class](#)

Purpose of the Class

Color classes are judged **solely on the horse's color, markings, and overall presentation**, not on conformation or performance. The goal is to showcase the horse's coat, markings, and grooming.

General Rules

- Horses may be shown in a halter or bridle appropriate to their type.
- Clipping is optional but neatness and cleanliness are important.
- Mane and tail may be natural or pulled/braided according to discipline or breed tradition.
- The horse should stand quietly and allow inspection.



New to Showing?

Color class is judged on appearance, not performance. Cleanliness and grooming matter more than movement.

Judging Criteria

- **Color quality:** richness, clarity, and evenness of coat
- **Markings:** distinctness, symmetry, and cleanliness
- **Grooming:** shine, cleanliness, stain removal, brushed mane/tail
- **Overall presentation:** how well the horse's color is showcased

Penalties

- Poor grooming (stains, dull coat, unbrushed mane/tail)
- Failure to present the horse so markings can be clearly seen
- Unsafe or disruptive behavior



Helpful Strategy

Bring a damp cloth or grooming wipe to touch up right before entering the ring.



Training Insight

Practice standing quietly — fidgeting can distract from your horse's appearance.



Presentation Tip

Keep your horse positioned in the best light and angle for the judge.

Lunge Line

Purpose of the Class

Lunge Line evaluates the **young horse's movement, manners, and way of going** at the walk, trot/jog, and canter/lope on a lunge line. It is often used for horses not yet ready for under-saddle classes.



New to Showing?

Lunge Line evaluates your horse's movement and manners, not how fast it can go. Rhythm and relaxation matter most.

General Rules

- Horse is shown on a lunge line, typically in a halter or bridle.
- A lunge whip is permitted but must be used quietly and appropriately.
- The horse should demonstrate all required gaits in both directions, if specified.
- Excessive chasing, whipping, or over-driving is not allowed.

Judging Criteria

- **Movement:** quality, rhythm, and correctness of gaits
- **Manners:** willingness, responsiveness, and attitude
- **Circle shape:** consistency and balance on the circle
- **Transitions:** smoothness and promptness

COMMON MISTAKES

Over-driving the horse, causing rushing or tension.

Helpful Strategy

Establish a consistent circle size and rhythm before asking for transitions.

Training Insight

Practice voice commands at home — clear, consistent cues help your horse stay focused.



Judge's Tip A relaxed, forward, and balanced young horse that listens to the handler will score higher than one that is over-pushed or frantic.

Presentation Tip

Keep your body language calm and your lunge line organized.



 **Judge's Tip** A relaxed, forward, and balanced young horse that listens to the handler will score higher than one that is over-pushed or frantic.

builds confidence over many

In Hand Over Fences

Purpose of the Class

In-Hand Over Fences evaluates the horse's **jumping form, willingness, and manners** while being led over a series of fences. This class is common for ponies, minis, and green horses.

General Rules

- Horse is shown in a halter or bridle appropriate to type.
- Handler leads the horse over a set course of fences.
- Fences must be safe, sturdy, and appropriate in height for the division.
- Handler should not jump the fences but may step over ground lines if needed for safety.

Judging Criteria

- **Jumping effort:** form, bascule, and use of body
- **Willingness:** approach, takeoff, and landing without refusal
- **Rhythm:** consistent pace between fences
- **Manners:** control, straightness, and behavior before and after fences

Helpful Strategy

Practice walking straight lines and maintaining rhythm before adding fences.

Training Insight

Teach your horse to stay beside you, not behind or ahead, when approaching obstacles.

Presentation Tip

COMMON MISTAKES

Rushing the approach or pulling on the lead over the jump.

Stay slightly ahead of your horse's shoulder and avoid looking back at the jump.

In Hand Trail

Purpose of the Class

In-Hand Trail evaluates the horse's ability to navigate obstacles calmly, willingly, and with correct form while being led by the handler. This class simulates real-world trail situations and emphasizes the horse's manners, confidence, and responsiveness.

Unlike Showmanship, where the handler is judged, **In-Hand Trail is judged primarily on the horse**, with the handler's effectiveness and safety playing a supporting role.

General Rules

- Horses must be shown in a halter or bridle appropriate for their type (Western, Hunt Seat, Saddle Seat, Gaited, or breed-specific).
- The handler leads the horse through a posted pattern of obstacles.
- The horse should move willingly and maintain a steady pace.
- The handler may not touch obstacles unless the pattern specifically allows it.
- The handler should remain on the left side of the horse unless the pattern requires otherwise.
- Excessive pulling, dragging, or pushing the horse is penalized.
- The handler may not jump obstacles but may step over ground poles if needed for safety.



New to Showing?

Practice obstacles one at a time before putting the full pattern together. Horses gain confidence when they understand each piece individually

Obstacle Guidelines

Obstacles must be safe, clearly visible, and appropriate for the horse's size and training level. Acceptable obstacles include:

- **Walk-overs:** poles, logs, or rails
- **Trot-overs:** spaced poles appropriate to stride
- **Back-throughs:** L-shaped, U-shaped, or straight
- **Sidepass:** over a pole or between poles
- **Gate:** rope or swing gate
- **Bridge or platform:** sturdy and non-slippery
- **Cones or markers:** for turns, circles, or maneuvers
- **Mailbox or object pick-up:** handler may open/close mailbox or pick up object
- **Box with turns:** 90°, 180°, or 270° turns

Obstacles should be arranged to allow smooth flow and safe navigation.

Judging Criteria

1. Willingness and Attitude

- Calm, confident approach to obstacles
- Minimal hesitation with no rushing, balking, or avoidance

2. Execution of Obstacles

- Correctness of foot placement
- Straightness and balance
- Smooth transitions between obstacles

3. Manners and Responsiveness

- Leading quietly
- Respecting the handler's space
- Standing quietly when required

4. Handler Effectiveness

- Clear cues
- Safe positioning
- Smooth, unobtrusive guidance

COMMON MISTAKES

Handlers often forget to pause and let the horse settle before beginning an obstacle. A moment of calm can improve your score.

Scoring

In-Hand Trail is scored obstacle-by-obstacle using OHSA scorecards.

- Each obstacle receives a score from **0–10**
- Total points are divided by the number of obstacles
- Final score is expressed as a **percentage**

Penalties

- ½ point:
 - Each tick of pole or obstacle
- 1 point:
 - Each step on a pole or obstacle
 - Break of gait for 2 strides or less
 - Failing to step into a required space
 - Failure to meet correct strides in trot overs
- 3 points:
 - Break of gait or not picking up correct gait

- Knocking down a pole or obstacle
- Stepping outside of an obstacle (such as stepping off a bridge)
- 5 points:
 - Letting go of gate or dropping rope gate
 - Touching horse with either hand
 - Dropping obstacle
 - 1st or 2nd refusal or evasion an obstacle
- 10 points:
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
 - Failure to complete an obstacle
- 0 Score or Disqualification;
 - Performing obstacles out of order
 - No attempt to perform an obstacle
 - 3rd refusal or evasion of obstacle
 - Willful abuse
 - Equipment failure
 - Failure to demonstrate correct gait

 **Judge's Tip** A horse that stays straight, calm, and attentive will outscore one that rushes or swings its hindquarters around obstacles.

Freestyle Obstacle Requirements – Handler must include, at a minimum, 6 obstacles including:

- Gate (standard or rope gate)
- Back through
- Walk over at least 3 poles
- Trot/jog over of at least 2 poles
- Bridge (actual wooden bridge, tarp, palm fronds, etc may be used)

The remaining mandatory obstacle may be chosen for the 6th required obstacle. Handler may also include any additional maneuvers up to a maximum of 10 scored maneuvers.

- Additional walk or trot/jog overs
- Raised walk or trot/jog overs to a maximum of 6" for walk or 8" for trot/jog
- Sidepass
- Water hazard
- Serpentine

- Turn in 6' box
- Pick up and drop off an item (mailbox, bucket on a barrel, put on/off slicker)

Helpful Strategy

Break obstacles into steps — pause, breath, and guide your horse through each part.

Training Insight

Practice obstacles at home using simple household items to build confidence.

Presentation Tip

Keep your body positioned to guide your horse without blocking the judge's view.

Western Pleasure (2 and 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

Western Pleasure evaluates the horse's **manners, movement, consistency, and overall suitability as a pleasurable Western riding horse**. Horses should appear relaxed, responsive, and willing, maintaining a steady cadence and correct gaits appropriate to Western style.



New to Showing?

Western Pleasure is not about going the slowest. Judges reward a horse that moves naturally, comfortably, and willingly. Think smooth, steady, and relaxed.

This class rewards a horse that is **soft, quiet, and pleasant to ride**, not one that is overly slow, artificial, or forced into frame.

General Rules

- Horses are shown on the rail at the **walk, jog, and lope** in both directions.
- Horses must maintain a **consistent cadence** and correct gait at all times.
- Transitions should be **smooth, prompt, and without resistance**.
- Excessively slow, "peanut-rolling," or four-beat lope movement may be penalized.
- Horses should carry their heads and necks in a **natural, relaxed position** appropriate for Western disciplines.
- Riders may be asked to **extend the jog, halt, or back up**.
- Tack and attire must follow Western rules.

Judging Criteria

1. Quality of Movement

- **Walk:** flat-footed, relaxed, forward

- **Jog:** smooth, two-beat gait with minimal knee action
- **Lope:** true three-beat gait, balanced, cadenced, and soft

2. Consistency

- Steady rhythm at all gaits
- Even pace around the arena
- No rushing, dragging, or breaking gait

3. Manners and Responsiveness

- Quiet mouth and tail
- Soft transitions
- Willingness to guide
- No pinning ears, wringing tail, or resistance

4. Overall Picture

- Relaxed, pleasant expression
- Natural head carriage
- Rider's quiet hands and seat
- Horse appears enjoyable and comfortable to ride

COMMON MISTAKES

Riders often try to “manufacture” a slow gait. Instead, focus on rhythm and relaxation — the correct speed will follow.

Penalties

Minor Faults

- Slight inconsistency in speed
- Mild head tossing
- Brief hesitation in transitions
- Slightly behind the vertical

Moderate Faults

- Breaking gait for 1–2 strides
- Excessive speed or lack of forward motion
- Four-beat lope
- Over-flexion (“peanut rolling”)

- Poor transitions

Major Faults

- Breaking gait for more than 2 strides
- Wrong lead
- 4-beat artificial lope
- Severe head tossing or resistance
- Obvious lameness (DQ)
- Unsafe behavior

Helpful Strategy

Focus on cadence. Count your horse's rhythm in your head to maintain consistency.

Training Insight

Practice transitions within the gait to build adjustability and balance.

Presentation Tip

Keep your hands quiet and your posture relaxed to enhance the horse's overall picture.

*Western Horsemanship Pattern (2 and 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

Western Horsemanship evaluates the **rider's position, effectiveness, and ability to communicate with the horse**, both on the rail and through a posted pattern. Unlike Western Pleasure, which focuses on the horse's movement,



New to Showing?

Horsemanship rewards correctness and control, not speed. Take your time and ride each maneuver with purpose.

 **Judge's Tip** A correct three-beat lope with a relaxed topline will outscore a slow, artificial four-beat lope every time.

Horsemanship is judged primarily on the **rider**, with the horse's performance serving as a reflection of the rider's skill.

The ideal Horsemanship rider demonstrates:

- Correct and functional Western position
- Quiet, effective cues
- Balance, control, and confidence
- Smooth, precise execution of the pattern

General Rules

- Riders must perform the **posted pattern**, which may include walk, jog, lope, stops, back-ups, turns, pivots, circles, and transitions.
- After the pattern, riders may be asked to work on the rail at the walk, jog, and lope.
- Riders should maintain a correct Western seat with:
 - Straight line from ear–shoulder–hip–heel
 - Quiet hands
 - Balanced posture
 - Subtle, effective cues
- Horses should respond willingly and maintain correct gaits, but the **rider's form and effectiveness** are the primary judging factors.
- Tack and attire must follow Western rules.

Judging Criteria

1. Rider Position

- Balanced, centered seat
- Proper leg, hand, and upper-body alignment
- Quiet, steady rein contact
- Functional posture that enhances the horse's performance

2. Pattern Execution

- Accuracy and precision
- Smooth transitions
- Correct gait placement
- Controlled, confident maneuver execution

3. Effectiveness of Aids

- Subtle, clear cues
- No overuse of hands, legs, or spurs
- Horse responds willingly and softly

COMMON MISTAKES

Riders often look down during transitions or turns. Keep your eyes up — it improves balance and shows confidence.

4. Overall Presentation

- Rider's confidence and poise
- Horse's responsiveness and manners
- Smoothness and flow of the pattern

Penalties

Horsemanship penalties reflect errors in execution, position, or control. Each maneuver is scored **0–10**, with penalties applied as follows:

3-Point Penalties

- Break of gait up to 2 strides
- Over- or under-turning up to $\frac{1}{4}$ turn
- Hitting or knocking over a cone
- Lifting a pivot foot and replacing it

5-Point Penalties

- Not performing the required gait, incorrect gait, or break of gait for more than 2 strides
- Incorrect lead
- Loss of stirrup
- Obviously looking down to check lead

10-Point Penalties

 **Judge's Tip** Smooth, accurate patterns with subtle cues stand out.

- Touching the horse with hand
- Use of hand or rein to instill fear
- Loss of rein contact or dropping the reins
- Holding saddle horn
- Spurring in front of cinch
- Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling the rider)

Disqualification

- Illegal equipment

- Willful abuse
- Illegal use of hands on reins (2 hands on shanked bit; more than 1 finger between reins)
- Off-pattern (failing to perform or attempt a required maneuver)
- fall of horse or rider

Freestyle Maneuver Requirements – Rider must include, at a minimum, 6 maneuvers including:

- Walk of at least 10 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, squared or circle
- Jog of at least 20 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, squared or circle
- For 3 gait (lope) riders only – Lope of at least 30 feet either straight curved, serpentine, squared, or circle
- Pivot of at least 180 degrees
- Back of at least 4 steps

Additional pivots, backs, walks, jogs, or lopes may be chosen for the 5th and/or 6th required maneuver or select from the below. Maneuvers may not exceed 10 scored maneuvers:

- Dropping stirrups
- Sidepass
- Turns on the Forehand
- Drop down lead change
- Flying lead change
- Counter Canter

Helpful Strategy

Break the pattern into segments and ride each piece with intention.

Training Insight

Practice riding without stirrups to improve balance and independence.

Presentation Tip

Keep your eyes up and ride with confidence — it shows.

Horsemanship and Equitation on the Rail – all seats, 2 or 3 gaits

Purpose of the Class

Horsemanship/Equitation on the Rail evaluates the **rider's position, control, and effectiveness of aids** while working as a group on the rail. Unlike Pleasure classes, which focus on the horse's movement and way of going, Rail Horsemanship/Equitation is judged primarily on the **rider**, with the horse's performance reflecting the rider's skill.



New to Showing?

Rail classes are about consistency. Keep your form steady from start to finish — judges notice riders who stay correct even when the horse gets distracted.

Riders should demonstrate:

- Correct and functional riding position
- Quiet, effective communication
- Balance, control, and confidence
- Smooth transitions and consistent form at all gaits

General Rules

- Riders enter the arena as a group and work on the rail at the **walk, jog/trot, and lope/canter** as directed by the judge.
- Riders may be asked to extend the gait, halt, or back up.
- Riders should maintain a correct seat appropriate to their discipline (Western or English).
- Hands, legs, and upper body should remain quiet, steady, and effective.
- Horses should respond willingly and maintain correct gaits, but the **rider's form and effectiveness** are the primary judging factors.
- Tack and attire must follow the rules for the discipline being shown.

Judging Criteria

1. Rider Position

- Balanced, centered seat



Judge's Tip A rider who maintains a balanced, quiet position throughout the pattern will outscore a rider who performs flashy maneuvers with poor form.

- Correct alignment for the discipline
- Quiet, steady hands
- Functional leg position and contact

2. Effectiveness of Aids

- Subtle, clear cues
- Smooth transitions
- Ability to maintain gait and direction
- Horse responds willingly and softly

3. Consistency and Control

- Rider maintains form throughout the class
- No excessive movement or over-cues
- Horse remains steady and responsive

4. Overall Presentation

- Confidence and poise
- Harmony between horse and rider
- Professional, polished appearance

Penalties

Penalties are similar to pattern horsemanship/equitation classes. Breaks of gaits, not performing required gait, touching the horse with your hand, holding saddle horn, loss of rein/dropping reins, using 2 hands on a shanked bit rein or more than 1 finger between the reins, illegal equipment, fall and willful abuse.

[*Reining – all classes](#)

Purpose of the Class

To rein a horse is not only to guide him, but to **control every movement with precision and authority**. The ideal reined horse is **willingly guided**, showing little to no resistance, and responds immediately and accurately to the rider's cues. Any movement performed without the rider's direction is considered a **loss of control** and must be penalized accordingly.

General Rules



New to Showing?

Reining is about control, not chaos. Start slow, build accuracy, and only add speed when your horse can stay correct and relaxed.



Judge's Tip Controlled speed is rewarded — but only when the horse stays on pattern, on line, and willingly guided. A fast but sloppy run will never beat a slower, precise one.

All deviations from the exact written pattern—whether minor or significant—represent a temporary or complete loss of control. These deviations must be marked down based on their **severity, impact on the maneuver, and overall effect on the pattern**. Judges award credit for:

- Smoothness and finesse
- Willing attitude
- Quickness and athleticism
- Authority and decisiveness in maneuvers
- Controlled speed that increases difficulty without sacrificing correctness

A high-scoring run demonstrates precision, willingness, and controlled power.

Judging Criteria

Riders perform the **posted pattern** (unless the class is designated as freestyle). Patterns may include:

- Jog
- Lope
- Spins
- Lead changes
- Sliding stops
- Rollbacks
- Back-ups

Each maneuver is scored from **0 to 10**, with penalties applied as listed below.

Penalties

½-Point Penalties

- Over- or under-spinning up to $\frac{1}{8}$ turn
- Starting a circle, exiting a rollback, or jogging **up to 2 strides**

1-Point Penalties

- Over- or under-spinning up to $\frac{1}{4}$ turn

- Out of lead: **1 point for each ¼ circle**, or any part of a ¼ circle

2-Point Penalties

- Jogging beyond 2 strides but less than ½ circle or ½ arena length
- Break of gait
- Freezing up in spins or rollbacks
- Scotching or initiating a stop before the designated marker

COMMON MISTAKES

Many riders rush into spins or stops before their horse is mentally prepared. A clean, correct maneuver always scores higher than a dramatic but inaccurate one.

5-Point Penalties

- Spurring in front of the cinch
- Using the hand or reins to instill fear
- Holding the saddle horn
- Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling the rider)

Score of 0

A score of zero is given for the following:

- More than one finger between the reins
- Using two hands on a shanked bit, or changing hands with a shanked bit
- Failure to complete the pattern as written, including adding maneuvers (e.g., backing more than 2 strides, turning more than 90 degrees)
- Equipment failure, including dropping a rein that touches the ground
- Running away or failing to guide to the point that pattern placement cannot be determined
- Jogging in excess of ½ arena length or ½ circle
- Over-spinning more than ¼ turn
- Fall of horse or rider

Disqualification

- Willful abuse
- Use of illegal equipment

Freestyle Maneuver Requirements

Freestyle patterns may be set to music. Riders must include **all** of the following maneuvers:

- One **large fast lope circle** in each direction
- One **small slow lope circle** in each direction

- **Minimum of 3 spins** each direction (more may be performed)
- Back-up of at least **10 feet**
- **Rollbacks** – at least one each direction
- **Stops** – sliding stops preferred, but correct non-sliding stops are acceptable and scored accordingly

Optional Additional Maneuvers (*Up to a maximum of 10 scored maneuvers total*)

- Sidepass
- Multiple lead changes (straight line or serpentine)
- Bridleless work (full pattern or partial)
- Bareback work
- Costumes

 Helpful Strategy

Focus on cadence in your circles — they set the tone for the entire pattern.

 Training Insight

Build stops gradually; don't chase speed before your horse is balanced.

 Presentation Tip

Stay centered and quiet in the saddle to help your horse stay straight.

***Western Riding**

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of a western riding class is to develop a partnership where the horse responds precisely and smoothly to subtle cues, demonstrating balanced movement, control, and confidence through specific patterns and maneuvers like lead changes, navigating obstacles (trail), or working cattle, all while the rider maintains a correct, effective, and poised seat.

Judging

Western Riding is judged on the **quality of the horse's gaits**, the **correctness and precision of flying lead changes**, and the horse's **manners, responsiveness, and overall disposition**. The horse should perform with **reasonable forward speed**, remain **sensible and well-mannered**, and move in a **free, easy, and natural** manner.

Judges place strong emphasis on:

- **Smoothness**
- **Even cadence** throughout the entire pattern
- **Willingness and attitude**
- **Precision and ease of flying lead changes**
- **Simultaneous front and hind lead changes** at the center point between markers

Simple or drop-down lead changes are permitted but will be scored accordingly in the maneuver score.

The horse must cross the pole at both the **jog** and the **lope** without breaking gait or making radical changes in stride.

Class Procedure

Riders perform the **posted pattern** (unless the class is designated as freestyle). Patterns include:

- Jog
- Lope
- Flying or simple lead changes
- Crossing the pole
- Back-ups



New to Showing?

Western Riding is all about rhythm and timing. Practice maintaining the same cadence from the first stride to the last — it makes your lead changes smoother and more predictable.

COMMON MISTAKES

Riders often rush the approach to the pole or the change. Let the horse stay relaxed and straight — tension almost always leads to late or uneven changes.

Each maneuver is scored from **0 to 10**, with penalties applied as listed below.

Penalties

½-Point Penalties

- Tick or light touch of the pole

1-Point Penalties

- Break of gait up to 2 strides at the walk or jog
- Hitting or rolling the pole
- Out of lead more than 1 stride either side of the center point between markers
- Splitting the pole (pole passes between two front or two hind feet) at the lope
- Non-simultaneous lead change when performing a flying change
- Riding more than 1 stride for a simple change

3-Point Penalties

- Break of gait up to 2 strides at the lope
- Break of gait more than 2 strides at the walk or jog
- Additional lead changes in the pattern (except when correcting)
- Riding more than 2 strides for a simple change

5-Point Penalties

- Out of lead beyond the next designated change area
- Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling the rider)
- Holding the saddle horn

Score of 0

- More than one finger between the reins
- Using two hands on a shanked bit, or changing hands with a shanked bit
- Failure to complete the pattern as written, including adding maneuvers (e.g., backing more than 2 strides, turning more than 90 degrees)
- Equipment failure, including dropping a rein that touches the ground
- Running away or failing to guide to the point that pattern placement cannot be determined
- Knocking over markers
- Failure to cross the pole
- Fall of horse or rider

Disqualification

- Willful abuse
- Use of illegal equipment

Helpful Strategy

Use subtle body shifts to prepare your horse several strides before the change.

Training Insight

 **Judge's Tip** Clean, correct lead changes with steady cadence are essential.

Practice simple changes first to build balance and responsiveness.

Presentation Tip

Maintain a relaxed, upright posture to help your horse stay smooth.

[Hunter Under Saddle \(2 and 3 gait\)](#)

Purpose of the Class

Hunter Under Saddle evaluates the horse's **movement, manners, consistency, and suitability as a hunter-type mount**. Horses should demonstrate long, ground-covering strides, a forward and athletic way of going, and a pleasant, willing attitude. The ideal hunter moves freely and naturally, without artificial headset or exaggerated action.

This class rewards a horse that is **forward, rhythmic, and soft**, showing the qualities desirable in a future over-fences horse.

General Rules

- Horses are shown on the rail at the **walk, trot, and canter** in both directions.
- Horses should maintain a **steady, forward rhythm** with long, sweeping strides.
- Transitions must be **smooth, prompt, and without resistance**.
- Horses should carry their heads and necks in a **natural, relaxed position**, appropriate for hunter type.
- Riders may be asked to:
 - Extend the trot
 - Hand gallop (advanced divisions only)
 - Halt
 - Back up
- Tack and attire must follow Hunt Seat rules.

Judging Criteria

1. Quality of Movement



New to Showing?

Hunter Under Saddle is about forward, natural movement — not slow movement. A horse that covers ground with ease will always outscore one that shuffles or crawls.

- **Walk:** long, marching stride; relaxed and forward
- **Trot:** long, sweeping, two-beat gait with minimal knee action
- **Canter:** rhythmic, three-beat gait with balance and impulsion
- **Extension:** smooth lengthening without rushing

2. Consistency

- Even pace and rhythm
- No rushing, dragging, or breaking gait
- Maintains frame and balance throughout the class

3. Manners and Responsiveness

- Quiet mouth and tail
- Soft transitions
- Willingness to guide
- No pinning ears, wringing tail, or resistance

4. Overall Picture

- Relaxed, pleasant expression
- Natural head and neck carriage
- Rider's quiet hands and seat
- Horse appears suitable for hunter over fences work

COMMON MISTAKES

Riders often try to “package” the horse too much, creating a short, choppy stride. Allow the horse to move forward freely — hunters should look effortless.



Judge's Tip A horse with a long, sweeping stride and steady rhythm will always stand out.

Penalties

Minor Faults

- Slight inconsistency in rhythm
- Mild head tossing
- Brief hesitation in transitions
- Slightly behind the vertical

Moderate Faults

- Breaking gait for 1–2 strides
- Excessive speed or lack of forward motion
- Poor transitions
- Over-flexion or behind the vertical
- Heavy contact or resistance

Major Faults

- Breaking gait for more than 2 strides
- Wrong lead
- Severe head tossing or resistance
- Obvious lameness (DQ)
- Unsafe behavior

Class Procedure

1. Riders enter the arena and proceed at the **walk** in a counter-clockwise direction.
2. The judge will call for the **trot**, then the **canter**.
3. Riders reverse direction and repeat the gaits.
4. Back on the rail.

Helpful Strategy

Think “forward first, frame second.” Let the horse move freely.

Training Insight

Practice transitions within the trot to build elasticity.

Presentation Tip

Keep your hands soft and follow the horse’s motion.

[Hunt Seat Pleasure \(2 and 3 gait\)](#)

Purpose of the Class

Hunt Seat Pleasure evaluates the horse’s **manners, movement, consistency, and suitability as a pleasant and enjoyable English mount**. Horses should demonstrate a forward, ground-covering stride, a soft and willing attitude, and a steady rhythm appropriate for Hunt Seat disciplines.

The ideal Hunt Seat Pleasure horse moves freely and naturally, showing the qualities of a comfortable, reliable riding horse.

General Rules

- Horses are shown on the rail at the **walk, trot, and canter** in both directions.
- Horses should maintain a **consistent, forward rhythm** with a relaxed and natural frame.
- Transitions must be **smooth, prompt, and without resistance**.
- Horses should carry their heads and necks in a **natural, hunter-type position**, avoiding exaggerated flexion or artificial headset.
- Riders may be asked to:
 - Extend the trot
 - Halt
 - Back up
- Tack and attire must follow Hunt Seat rules.

Judging Criteria

1. Quality of Movement

- **Walk:** relaxed, forward, and purposeful
- **Trot:** long, sweeping stride with minimal knee action
- **Canter:** rhythmic, balanced, and ground-covering
- **Extension:** smooth lengthening without rushing

COMMON MISTAKES

Letting the horse get behind the leg.

2. Consistency

- Even pace and rhythm
- Maintains frame and balance throughout the class
- No breaking gait, rushing, or dragging

3. Manners and Responsiveness

- Quiet mouth and tail
- Willing transitions
- Soft, pleasant expression
- No resistance or tension

4. Overall Picture

- Relaxed, natural head carriage
- Rider's quiet hands and seat

- Horse appears enjoyable and comfortable to ride

💡 Helpful Strategy

Keep a light, steady leg to maintain forward energy.

🐾 Training Insight

 **Judge's Tip** Consistency and manners matter more than big movement.

Practice long, low stretching to encourage relaxation.

👁️ Presentation Tip

Maintain a quiet upper body to enhance the horse's smoothness.

[*Hunt Seat Equitation Pattern \(2 or 3 gait\)](#)

Purpose of the Class

The hunt seat equitation class is to judge the **rider's skill, posture, and subtle communication with the horse**, not just the horse's performance, establishing a foundation for jumping and creating an illusion of an effortless ride.

Judging Criteria

Hunt Seat Equitation is judged on the **rider's ability to perform maneuvers in harmony with their horse**, using subtle, effective, and nearly invisible aids. The rider should demonstrate a **calm, functional seat**, moving with the horse while maintaining correct alignment from **heel to hip to shoulder**.

- Overall appearance and polish
- Rider's position and balance
- Quiet, effective use of aids
- Ability to guide the horse smoothly and accurately through the pattern



New to Showing?

Equitation is about *you*, not your horse. A steady upper body, quiet hands, and consistent diagonals and leads will carry you far, even if your horse isn't perfect.

Communication should be soft and unobtrusive, reflecting a rider who is confident, balanced, and in control.

Class Procedure

Riders perform the **posted pattern** (unless the class is designated as freestyle). Patterns may include:

- Walk / Posting trot / Sitting trot
- Canter (for 3-gait riders)
- Lead changes
- Back-ups
- Pivots
- Maneuvers over a pole

COMMON MISTAKES

Many riders look down to check diagonals or leads. Keep your eyes up — it improves balance, shows confidence, and prevents costly penalties.

Each maneuver is scored from **0 to 10**, with penalties applied as listed below.

Penalties

3-Point Penalties

- Tick or hit of a cone
- Over- or under-spin up to ¼ turn
- Break of gait up to 2 strides

5-Point Penalties

- Incorrect lead
- Not performing the specified gait
- Break of gait for more than 2 strides
- Loss of iron (stirrup)
- Obviously looking down to check lead or diagonal

10-Point Penalties

- Loss of rein
- Using either hand or rein to instill fear
- Spurring in front of the girth
- Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling the rider)

Disqualification

- Willful abuse
- Fall of horse or rider

- Illegal use of hands on the reins
- Use of prohibited equipment
- Off-pattern

Freestyle Maneuver Requirements

Freestyle patterns must include **at least six maneuvers**, including:

- **Walk** of at least 10 feet (straight, curved, serpentine, square, or circle)
- **Posting trot** of at least 20 feet (straight, curved, serpentine, square, or circle)
- **Canter** of at least 30 feet (3-gait riders only; straight, curved, serpentine, square, or circle)
- **Pivot** of at least 180 degrees
- **Back-up** of at least 4 steps

For the remaining required maneuvers, riders may choose additional:

- Pivots
- Backs
- Walks
- Jogs
- Loping segments

Or select from the optional maneuvers below.

Optional Maneuvers (up to 10 total maneuvers)

- Dropping stirrups
- Sidepass
- Turn on the forehand
- Drop-down lead change
- Flying lead change
- Counter-canter

Helpful Strategy

Think “tall and open” — shoulders back, chest lifted.

Training Insight

Practice transitions using mostly seat and leg to improve subtlety.

Presentation Tip

Look ahead and ride with confidence.

Ground Poles (2 and 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

Ground Poles evaluates the horse's **willingness, rhythm, and correctness of movement** while navigating one or more poles placed on the ground. The class is designed to showcase the horse's ability to maintain a steady pace, remain attentive to the rider, and adjust stride naturally and smoothly when approaching and crossing poles.

The ideal Ground Poles horse is relaxed, forward, and responsive, demonstrating confidence and accuracy without hesitation or rushing.



New to Showing?

Ground Poles is one of the best classes for building confidence. Focus on rhythm first — a steady, relaxed pace will help your horse find the poles naturally without rushing or hesitating.

General Rules

- Horses are shown at the **walk, jog/trot, and lope/canter** as appropriate for the division.
- Horses must cross the pole(s) **without breaking gait**, hesitating, or dramatically altering stride.
- Riders should maintain a consistent pace and guide the horse straight and centered over each pole.
- Poles may be set:
 - As a single pole
 - In a line
 - In a pattern (straight, curved, serpentine, or angled)
- The judge may require riders to perform additional rail work before or after the pole portion.
- Tack and attire must follow the rules of the discipline being shown (Western, Hunt Seat, or Gaited).

Judging Criteria

1. Quality of Movement

- Forward, rhythmic stride
- Natural, relaxed movement
- No rushing, hesitation, or excessive stride changes

2. Approach and Departure

- Straightness and alignment
- Smooth, consistent pace
- Balanced transitions before and after the poles

3. Accuracy Over the Poles

- Clean, centered steps
- No hitting, dragging, or stepping on poles
- Maintains gait and rhythm throughout

4. Manners and Responsiveness

- Willing attitude
- Soft cues and smooth guidance
- No resistance, tension, or disobedience

5. Overall Picture

- Horse and rider appear confident and prepared
- Consistent pace and frame
- Calm, pleasant expression

Helpful Strategy

Look ahead and ride the track, not the obstacle.

Training Insight

Practice poles at different distances to improve stride control.

Presentation Tip

Keep your hands soft and allow your horse to stretch.

 **Judge's Tip** A steady tempo and straight line are key.

Hunter Hack (2 and 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

Hunter Hack evaluates the horse's **movement, manners, and suitability as a hunter**, both on the flat and over low fences.

The class is designed to showcase a horse that moves with the style and athleticism appropriate for hunter over fences work, while also demonstrating calmness, responsiveness, and correct form.

The ideal Hunter Hack horse is forward, balanced, and willing, with a long, ground-covering stride and a pleasant expression.

General Rules

- The class consists of **flat work** and **two low fences**.
- Horses are shown on the rail at the **walk, trot, and canter** in both directions.
- Horses should demonstrate a **natural, relaxed frame** with long, sweeping strides.
- Riders may be asked to extend the trot or hand gallop, depending on division rules.
- After flat work, horses will be asked to jump **two fences**, typically set in a straight line.
- Fences should be approached in a steady, rhythmic canter appropriate for hunter style.
- Horses should jump in good form, maintaining rhythm and straightness before and after the fences.
- Tack and attire must follow Hunt Seat rules.

Judging Criteria

1. Quality of Movement (Flat Portion)

- Long, ground-covering stride
- Relaxed, forward rhythm
- Balanced transitions
- Natural head and neck carriage

2. Jumping Style

- Straight, rhythmic approach
- Clean, correct jump with good form
- No hesitation, refusal, or excessive speed
- Balanced departure and recovery



New to Showing?

Hunter Hack is a bridge between flat classes and over-fences work. Focus on maintaining the same rhythm on the flat that you'll need when approaching the jumps — consistency builds confidence for both horse and rider.

COMMON MISTAKES

Riders often over-collect or “package” the horse before the fences, causing hesitation or chipping in. Keep the canter forward and flowing — hunters should look effortless, not manufactured.

3. Manners and Responsiveness

- Willing attitude
- Soft cues and smooth guidance
- No resistance, tension, or disobedience

4. Overall Picture

- Horse appears suitable for hunter over fences work
- Rider maintains quiet, effective position
- Calm, confident expression throughout the class

Helpful Strategy

Establish rhythm on the flat before approaching the fences.

Training Insight

Practice small fences with emphasis on straightness and calmness.

Presentation Tip

Keep your upper body quiet and let the horse jump naturally.

 **Judge's Tip** Smooth transitions between flatwork and fences show true hunter style.

[*Hunter Over Fences \(2 and 3 gait\)](#)

Purpose of the Class

Hunter Over Fences evaluates the horse's **jumping style, movement, manners, and suitability as a hunter**. Horses should demonstrate a consistent rhythm, correct form over fences, and a calm, willing attitude. The ideal hunter jumps in good balance, maintains a steady pace, and shows the qualities desirable in a traditional hunt field.

This class rewards:

- Correct jumping form
- Straightness and rhythm
- Smooth approaches and departures
- Manners and willingness
- A pleasant, forward, ground-covering way of going

General Rules

- Horses are required to jump a course of **fences set at appropriate heights** for the division.
- Courses may include:
 - Vertical and oxer fences
 - Lines set on hunter distances
 - Single fences
 - Diagonal lines
 - Outside lines
- Riders may be asked to hand gallop a single fence in upper divisions.
- Horses must maintain a **steady, even pace** throughout the course.
- Lead changes should be **automatic or simple**, performed smoothly and without resistance.
- After completing the course, horses may be asked to work on the flat at the walk, trot, and canter.
- Tack and attire must follow Hunt Seat rules.

Judging Criteria

1. Jumping Style

- Rounded bascule
- Tight, even knees
- Straight approach and departure
- No twisting, drifting, or hesitation

2. Rhythm and Pace

- Consistent, forward stride
- No rushing or chipping
- Smooth, balanced canter between fences



New to Showing?

Think of your course as a series of connected lines, not individual jumps. A steady rhythm between fences is the foundation of a smooth, confident round.

COMMON MISTAKES

Riders often “pick” at the horse too much on the approach, causing chipping or hesitation. Set your pace early, keep your eyes up, and allow the horse to stay in rhythm.

3. Approaches and Departures

- Straightness
- Balanced turns
- Correct leads before and after fences

4. Manners and Attitude

- Calm, willing expression
- No refusals, run-outs, or excessive resistance
- Soft, responsive ride

5. Overall Picture

- Horse appears suitable for hunter competition
- Rider maintains a quiet, effective position
- Performance is smooth, confident, and polished

Pick Your Pattern Course Requirements – Rider must include, at a minimum, 6 jumping efforts with 8 being preferred. Rider may use 2, 4, 6, or more individual jumps and go over some or all jumps multiple times to meet the required minimum 6 jumping efforts. Must include one change of direction.

Helpful Strategy

Find your canter rhythm early and keep it.

Training Insight

Practice counting strides in lines to improve consistency.

Presentation Tip

Look ahead to the next fence, not down at the jump.

 **Judge's Tip** A smooth, even round with no surprises always beats a flashy but inconsistent one.

*Hunt Seat Equitation Over Fences (2 and 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

Hunt Seat Equitation Over Fences evaluates the **rider's position, effectiveness, and ability to navigate a course of fences with accuracy, control, and confidence**. The emphasis is on the rider — not the horse — and how well the rider maintains correct equitation while guiding the horse smoothly and precisely through the course.

The ideal equitation rider demonstrates:

- A secure, balanced jumping position
- Quiet, effective use of aids
- Accurate track and pace control
- Smooth approaches and departures
- Confidence and harmony with the horse

General Rules

- Horses are required to jump a course of **fences set at appropriate heights** for the division.
- Courses may include:
 - Vertical and oxer fences
 - Lines set on hunter distances
 - Single fences
 - Diagonal lines
 - Outside lines
- Riders may be asked to hand gallop a single fence in upper divisions.
- Riders should maintain appropriate equitation throughout the course.
- Lead changes should be **automatic or simple**, performed smoothly and without resistance.
- Tack and attire must follow Hunt Seat rules.

Judging Criteria

Judging is based on the **rider's form, function, and effectiveness** while completing the posted course. Riders should demonstrate:

- A correct, balanced two-point position
- Quiet hands following the horse's motion
- Heels down, leg secure, and eyes up



New to Showing?

Equitation over fences is about *control and position*, not big jumps. Focus on keeping your leg secure, your eyes up, and your pace steady — the fences will come to you.

- Smooth, accurate approaches to each fence
- Correct leads and balanced turns
- Subtle, effective communication with the horse

The rider should appear confident, polished, and in full control of pace and direction.

Penalties

1-Point Penalties

- Cross cantering or out of lead up to 2 strides

3-Point Penalties

- Tick or hit of a fence
- Break of gait up to 2 strides
- Incorrect or missed diagonal at the trot
- Minor loss of balance or position

5-Point Penalties

- Incorrect lead or cross cantering more than 2 strides
- Break of gait for more than 2 strides
- Obviously looking down to check lead or diagonal
- Adding stride to a fence
- Position over fence is either ahead or behind
- Poor approach resulting in chip or long spot
- Canter at a trot fence or anywhere on course if a walk trot class – each instance

10-Point Penalties

- Loss of rein
- Using hand or rein to instill fear
- 1st or 2nd refusal
- Spurring in front of the girth
- Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling the rider)
- Loss of stirrup

Disqualification

- Willful abuse
- Fall of horse or rider
- Illegal use of hands on reins
- Use of prohibited equipment

COMMON MISTAKES

Many riders “jump ahead” or throw their upper body at the fence. Let the horse close your hip angle naturally — forcing the release or position leads to instability and penalties.

- Off-pattern
- Refusal, run-out, or unsafe behavior that compromises safety

Pick Your Pattern Course Requirements – Rider must include, at a minimum, 6 jumping efforts with 8 being preferred. Rider may use 2, 4, 6, or more individual jumps and go over some or all jumps multiple times to meet the required minimum 6 jumping efforts. Must include one change of direction.

 Helpful Strategy

Wait for the horse — let the jump come to you.

 Training Insight

Practice two-point and transitions to build strength and balance.

 Presentation Tip

Keep your eyes up and your release soft.

***Jumping (2 or 3 gait)**

Purpose of the Class

Jumping evaluates the horse’s **athletic ability, scope, form, and willingness** while navigating a course of fences. The class is designed to showcase a horse that jumps safely, confidently, and with correct technique, while maintaining rhythm, balance, and straightness throughout the course. At live shows this class is generally not judged, but instead scored on the number of faults and time of the ride. At virtual shows the judges are looking for the horse that can and will take a jump as if in a live jumping class, one that may have some issues with proper form but who still manage to clear every jump with room to spare.

The ideal jumping horse demonstrates:

- A forward, rhythmic canter
- Correct bascule and tight front end
- Straight approaches and departures
- Adjustable stride and balance
- Willingness and confidence over fence



New to Showing?

Jumping is all about rhythm. Set your pace early and keep it — a steady canter makes distances easier and helps your horse jump with confidence.

General Rules

- Horses are required to jump a course of **fences set at appropriate heights** for the division.
- Courses may include:
 - Vertical and oxer fences
 - Lines set on hunter distances
 - Single fences
 - Diagonal lines
 - Outside lines

Judging Criteria

Jumping is not a judged class. It is placed based on faults and time. For virtual shows this class is judged on the potential a horse has for competing in a jumping class.

Penalties:

4-point

- Knock downs (lowering the height of the jump)
- First and second disobedience (refusals, run outs, unnecessary circling on course, or loss of forward motion)

COMMON MISTAKES

Rushing the approach or making last-second adjustments.

 **Judge's Tip** A smooth, consistent round with correct pace and straightness will always beat a round with big, dramatic jumps but poor rhythm or control.

Disqualification

- Bolting from arena
- Willful abuse
- 3rd refusal

Off course

- Horse or rider falling
- Rider taking wrong path of course

Pick Your Pattern Course Requirements – Rider must include, at a minimum, 6 jumping efforts with 8 being preferred. Rider may use 2, 4, 6, or more individual jumps and go over some or all jumps multiple times to meet the required minimum 6 jumping efforts. Must include one change of direction.

 Helpful Strategy

Set your pace early and keep it — rhythm solves most distance problems.

 Training Insight

Practice cantering poles to develop stride awareness.

 Presentation Tip

Look ahead and stay centered over your horse.

***Dressage (all seats and 2 or 3 gait)**

Purpose of the Class

Dressage evaluates the horse's **training, obedience, suppleness, and harmony with the rider** through a prescribed pattern of movements performed in a standard arena. The goal is to demonstrate a horse that is attentive, balanced, and responsive, moving with rhythm and relaxation while performing each movement with accuracy and ease.



New to Showing?

Dressage is about harmony, not perfection. Focus on steady rhythm and smooth transitions — these two elements alone can dramatically improve your score.

The ideal dressage horse shows:

- Clear, steady rhythm in all gaits
- Relaxation and suppleness
- Straightness and balance
- Willingness and attentiveness
- Smooth transitions and accuracy in figures

Dressage rewards **precision, harmony, and correctness**, not speed or dramatic movement.

General Rules

- Riders perform the **posted dressage test**, which may include:
 - Walk (free, medium, or collected depending on level)
 - Trot (working, lengthened, or collected)
 - Canter (working, lengthened, or collected)

- Circles, serpentines, and changes of rein
- Transitions between and within gaits
- Halts and rein-backs
- Tests must be ridden **exactly as written**, with movements performed at the designated letters.
- Accuracy, geometry, and obedience are essential components of the score.
- Horses should move freely forward with natural head and neck carriage appropriate to their level of training.
- Whips and spurs may be permitted depending on division rules.
- Tack and attire must follow Dressage or English discipline rules for the division.

Judging Criteria

1. Gaits

- Purity and clarity of walk, trot, and canter
- Regularity and rhythm
- Freedom and elasticity

2. Impulsion

- Energy and engagement from the hindquarters
- Forward intention without rushing
- Ability to lengthen and shorten stride

3. Submission

- Willingness and attentiveness
- Acceptance of the bit
- Straightness and suppleness
- Calm, obedient transitions

4. Rider Position and Effectiveness

- Balanced, quiet seat
- Steady hands and correct rein contact
- Clear, subtle aids
- Ability to guide the horse accurately through the test

5. Accuracy and Geometry

- Circles round and correct size
- Movements performed at the correct letters
- Straight centerlines and diagonals

COMMON MISTAKES

Many riders over-collect or hold too tightly, causing tension and loss of rhythm. Allow your horse to move forward freely — relaxation is the foundation of every good dressage test.

 Helpful Strategy

Think “prepare, then execute.” Set up transitions early.

 Training Insight

Practice transitions within the gait to build balance and engagement.

 Presentation Tip

Keep your posture tall and your hands steady.

 **Judge’s Tip** Accuracy is one of the easiest ways to gain points. Ride your circles to the correct size, hit your letters cleanly, and keep your geometry precise. Even a modestly trained horse can score well with accurate riding.

Dressage Suitability (all seats and 2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

Dressage Suitability evaluates the horse’s **potential** to perform well in dressage as it advances in training. Unlike a full dressage test, this class focuses on the horse’s **movement, conformation, temperament, and overall impression** as a future dressage mount. The horse should demonstrate natural ability for balance, rhythm, suppleness, and willingness.

The ideal Dressage Suitability horse shows:

- Clear, pure gaits
- Natural elasticity and freedom of movement
- A relaxed, willing attitude
- Good balance and straightness
- Conformation supportive of dressage development

This class rewards **natural ability and potential**, not finished training.



New to Showing?

Dressage Suitability is about potential, not perfection. A young or green horse can score very well if it shows natural rhythm, relaxation, and a willing attitude.

General Rules

- Horses are shown on the rail at the **walk, trot, and canter** in both directions.
- Horses should demonstrate **steady rhythm, relaxed topline**, and **natural forward energy**.
- Transitions should be smooth and willing, appropriate to the horse's level of training.
- Horses should carry their heads and necks in a **natural, relaxed position**, without forced collection or artificial headset.
- Riders may be asked to:
 - Show free walk on a long rein
 - Halt
 - Back up
- Tack and attire must follow Dressage or English discipline rules for the division.

Judging Criteria

1. Gaits

- Purity and clarity of walk, trot, and canter
- Regularity and rhythm
- Freedom and elasticity
- Natural engagement appropriate for the horse's age and training

2. Movement Quality

- Swing through the back
- Soft, relaxed topline
- Straightness on straight lines
- Bend and suppleness on circles

3. Temperament and Attitude

- Willingness and attentiveness
- Relaxation and confidence
- Acceptance of the rider's aids

4. Conformation (as it relates to dressage potential)

- Balance and proportion
- Correct limb structure
- Neck and shoulder suitable for dressage development
- Overall athleticism

COMMON MISTAKES

Riders sometimes try to “package” the horse into a dressage frame. Suitability classes reward natural movement — let the horse show its own balance and freedom.

5. Overall Impression

- Horse appears capable of progressing in dressage
- Rider presents the horse effectively
- Performance is calm, forward, and harmonious

Class Procedure – Each rider should show the horse at the walk, trot, and canter both ways of the arena. Reversing direction should occur away from the rail, toward the inside of the arena. The reverse may be done at the walk or trot, never at the canter. The horse must back at least one horse length at the end of the ride. Horses may be asked to extend the walk, trot, or to hand gallop.

*Dressage Equitation (all seats and 2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

Dressage Equitation evaluates the **rider's position, balance, and effectiveness of aids** while performing a dressage test or rail work appropriate to the division. The emphasis is on the **rider**, not the horse, and how well the rider maintains classical dressage position while influencing the horse with subtle, correct, and harmonious aids.

The ideal Dressage Equitation rider demonstrates:

- A balanced, independent seat
- Quiet, steady hands
- Correct alignment (ear–shoulder–hip–heel)
- Subtle, effective aids
- Harmony and softness with the horse

This class rewards **correct equitation, precision, and effective communication**.



New to Showing?

Dressage Equitation rewards quiet confidence. Focus on sitting tall, breathing evenly, and allowing your seat to follow the horse — a relaxed rider creates a relaxed horse.



Judge's Tip Relaxation and natural movement matter more than collection.

General Rules

- Riders perform the **posted equitation test** or rail pattern.
- Tests may include:
 - Walk, free walk, and medium walk

- Working trot, sitting trot, and posting trot
- Working canter
- Circles, serpentines, and changes of rein
- Transitions between and within gaits
- Halts and rein-backs
- Judges evaluate the **rider's position and effectiveness**, not the horse's level of training.
- Horses should move freely forward with natural carriage appropriate to their training.
- Tack and attire must follow Dressage or English discipline rules for the division.

Judging Criteria

1. Rider Position

- Balanced, centered seat
- Quiet, independent hands
- Straight line from elbow to bit
- Heels down, leg long and steady
- Upright posture without stiffness

COMMON MISTAKES

Many riders grip with their knees or lean forward in transitions. Keep your leg long and your upper body tall — balance comes from your seat, not your hands.

2. Use of Aids

- Subtle, effective cues
- Clear preparation for transitions
- Soft rein contact
- Correct use of leg, seat, and weight aids

3. Accuracy

- Movements performed at the correct letters
- Clean geometry in circles and figures
- Straight centerlines and diagonals

4. Harmony

- Rider and horse appear connected and confident
- Aids are invisible or nearly invisible
- Smooth transitions and consistent rhythm

5. Overall Impression

- Rider demonstrates classical dressage principles
- Performance is polished, calm, and controlled

Class Procedure – Rider will perform the posted pattern (unless a freestyle class) that may consist of trot, canter, changes of diagonals, change of leads, halts, serpentines, circles, change of rein and back ups.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10.

Freestyle Maneuver Requirements – Rider must include, at a minimum, 6 maneuvers including:

- Walk of at least 10 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, or circle
- Posting trot of at least 20 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, or circle
- Sitting trot of at least 20 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, or circle
- For 3 gait (Canter) riders only – canter of at least 30 feet either straight curved, serpentine, , or circle

Additional walks, jogs/trots, or lopes/canters may be chosen for the 4th, 5th and/or 6th required maneuver or select from the below. Maneuvers may not exceed 10 scored maneuvers:

- Dropping stirrups
- Drop down lead change
- Flying lead change
- Counter Canter



Judge's Tip The best equitation riders look like they're doing nothing at all. When your aids are subtle and your position is steady, your horse performs better, and your score rises.

Helpful Strategy

Use your core to stabilize your position.

Training Insight

Practice sitting trot in short intervals to build strength.

Presentation Tip

Keep your eyes up and shoulders open.

Saddle Seat Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

Saddle Seat Pleasure evaluates the horse's **manners, performance, and suitability as a pleasurable, stylish English mount**. Horses should exhibit brilliance, animation, and presence while remaining calm, responsive, and easy to ride. The ideal Saddle Seat Pleasure horse moves with **elevated front action**, a bright expression, and a consistent, forward rhythm.

This class rewards a horse that is **elegant, willing, and mannerly**, showing both animation and rideability.

General Rules

- Horses are shown on the rail at the **walk, trot, and canter** in both directions.
- Horses should maintain a **steady, forward pace** with animation appropriate to Saddle Seat style.
- Transitions must be **smooth, prompt, and without resistance**.
- Horses should carry their heads and necks in a **high, natural, and stylish position**, without overflexion or behind-the-vertical carriage.
- Riders may be asked to:
 - Extend the trot
 - Halt
 - Back up
- Tack and attire must follow Saddle Seat rules, including appropriate bridle, saddle, and rider attire.



New to Showing?

Saddle Seat Pleasure rewards elegance and manners. Focus on presenting a horse that looks proud and stylish, but still easy and enjoyable to ride. A calm, confident performance always stands out.

Judging Criteria

1. Quality of Movement

- Animated, elevated front action
- Straight, ground-covering stride behind
- Consistent rhythm at all gaits
- Smooth transitions

2. Manners and Responsiveness

- Willing attitude
- Soft mouth and quiet tail

- No resistance, pinning ears, or tension
- Prompt response to rider cues

3. Presence and Style

- Bright, alert expression
- High head and neck carriage appropriate to Saddle Seat type
- Elegance and animation without loss of control

4. Consistency

- Maintains same pace and frame throughout the class
- No breaking gait or loss of rhythm
- Balanced, steady performance

5. Overall Picture

- Horse appears enjoyable, stylish, and mannerly
- Rider maintains correct Saddle Seat position

Class Procedure – to be shown at a walk, trot, and canter both ways of the arena. Stop and back one horse length. Extended trot may be required.

COMMON MISTAKES

Riders often push too hard for animation, causing the horse to rush or become tight in the back. True Saddle Seat brilliance comes from relaxation and forward energy, not speed.

 **Judge's Tip** The winning horse shows animation **without tension**. A bright expression, elevated front end, and steady rhythm — paired with soft, willing manners — create the ideal picture of Saddle Seat Pleasure.

 Helpful Strategy

Think “up and forward,” not fast.

 Training Insight

Practice transitions within the trot to build expression.

 Presentation Tip

Keep your shoulders open and posture tall.

Saddle Seat Road Hack (2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

Saddle Seat Road Hack evaluates the horse's **manners, brilliance, and ability to move with speed and control** while maintaining the elegance and style characteristic of Saddle Seat disciplines. Horses should demonstrate animation, presence, and a forward, energetic way of going, yet remain obedient, responsive, and easy to handle.

The ideal Road Hack horse shows:

- Bright expression and elevated front action
- Strong, ground-covering stride behind
- Smooth transitions between collected and extended gaits
- Willingness and control even at higher energy levels

This class rewards a horse that is **stylish, animated, and mannerly**, capable of showing brilliance without sacrificing obedience

General Rules

- Horses are shown on the rail at the **walk, trot, road trot, and canter** in both directions.
- The **road trot** should be bold, energetic, and ground-covering while remaining controlled and balanced.
- Horses must maintain a **steady, forward rhythm** appropriate to Saddle Seat style.
- Transitions should be **prompt, smooth, and without resistance**.
- Horses should carry their heads and necks in a **high, natural, stylish position**, without overflexion or behind-the-vertical carriage.
- Riders may be asked to:
 - Extend the trot
 - Show a strong road trot
 - Halt
 - Back up
- Tack and attire must follow Saddle Seat rules.

Judging Criteria

1. Quality of Movement

- Animated, elevated front action
- Strong, driving hind end
- Bold, controlled road trot



New to Showing?

Road Hack highlights both brilliance and control. Think of it as showing off your horse's power while proving you can ride it with finesse.

2. Manners and Responsiveness

- Willing attitude
- Quiet mouth and tail
- No resistance, tension, or disobedience
- Prompt response to rider cues

3. Presence and Style

- Bright, alert expression
- High head and neck carriage
- Stylish, elegant performance

 **Judge's Tip** The winning Road Hack horse shows a bold, energetic road trot **without losing manners**. A horse that looks excited but stays obedient and balanced will always stand out.

4. Consistency and Control

- Maintains frame and rhythm throughout
- No breaking gait or rushing
- Smooth transitions between collected and extended gaits

COMMON MISTAKES

Riders often push too hard for speed in the road trot, causing the horse to flatten or rush. True road trot is bold, not frantic — maintain lift and rhythm.

5. Overall Picture

- Horse appears powerful yet manageable
- Rider maintains correct Saddle Seat position
- Performance is polished, forward, and confident

Class Procedure – to be shown at a walk, trot, and canter both ways of the arena. Stop and back one horse length. Extended trot and hand gallop may be required.

 Helpful Strategy

Build energy gradually before asking for the road trot.

 Training Insight

Practice transitions between working and stronger trots.

Presentation Tip

Maintain steady hands to help your horse stay balanced.

Saddle Seat Country Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

Saddle Seat Country Pleasure evaluates the horse's **manners, smoothness, and suitability as a comfortable, stylish, and enjoyable English mount**. Horses should demonstrate a pleasant, willing attitude with a more relaxed and natural way of going than Saddle Seat Pleasure or Road Hack. While still elegant and expressive, the Country Pleasure horse must remain **calm, steady, and easy to ride**.



New to Showing?

Country Pleasure is all about a horse that feels as good to ride as it looks. Think smooth, steady, and pleasant — a horse you'd want to ride all day.

The ideal Country Pleasure horse shows:

- A relaxed, natural frame
- Soft, flowing movement
- Pleasant expression and manners
- Consistent rhythm and smooth transitions
- Style appropriate to Saddle Seat without excessive animation

This class rewards a horse that is **comfortable, mannerly, and enjoyable**, with enough presence to reflect Saddle Seat tradition.

General Rules

- Horses are shown on the rail at the **walk, trot, and canter** in both directions.
- Horses should maintain a **steady, relaxed pace** with light animation appropriate to Country Pleasure style.
- Transitions must be **smooth, prompt, and without resistance**.
- Horses should carry their heads and necks in a **natural, upright position**, without exaggerated elevation or tension.
- Riders may be asked to:
 - Extend the trot
 - Halt
 - Back up
- Excessive speed, high action, or tension is considered undesirable.
- Tack and attire must follow Saddle Seat rules.

Judging Criteria

1. Quality of Movement

- Smooth, flowing stride
- Light, natural animation
- Consistent rhythm at all gaits
- Balanced transitions

2. Manners and Responsiveness

- Willing, pleasant attitude
- Quiet mouth and tail
- No resistance, tension, or disobedience
- Prompt response to rider cues

3. Presence and Style

- Upright, natural head and neck carriage
- Bright but relaxed expression
- Stylish without excessive animation

4. Consistency

- Maintains same pace and frame throughout
- No breaking gait or rushing
- Steady, comfortable performance

5. Overall Picture

- Horse appears enjoyable, mannerly, and suitable for a pleasant ride
- Rider maintains correct Saddle Seat position
- Performance is polished, relaxed, and confident

COMMON MISTAKES

Riders sometimes push for too much action, making the horse look rushed or nervous. Country Pleasure should feel effortless — let the horse settle into a natural, comfortable stride

 **Judge's Tip** The winning horse shows style **without tension**. A relaxed topline, soft expression, and steady rhythm are more important than animation.

Class Procedure – to be shown at a walk, trot, and canter both ways of the arena. Stop and back one horse length. Extended trot may be required.

 **Helpful Strategy**

Focus on steady rhythm and soft contact.

 **Training Insight**

Encourage stretching to promote relaxation.

 **Presentation Tip**

Ride with quiet hands and a calm seat.

***Saddle Seat Pattern Equitation (2 or 3 gait)**

Purpose of the Class

Saddle Seat Equitation evaluates the **rider's position, balance, and effectiveness of aids** while guiding the horse through rail work and, when applicable, a posted pattern. The emphasis is on the **rider**, not the horse. Riders should demonstrate a poised, elegant position and subtle, effective communication that enhances the horse's performance without visible effort.

The ideal Saddle Seat Equitation rider demonstrates:

- A tall, elegant upper body
- Quiet, steady hands
- Long, relaxed leg with heels down
- Subtle, effective cues
- Confidence, poise, and harmony with the horse

This class rewards **correct equitation, precision, and polished presentation**.



New to Showing?

Pattern Equitation highlights precision and poise. Correct equitation ridden with refined elegance should be demonstrated.

 **Judge's Tip** The best equitation riders look effortless. When your aids are subtle and your position is steady, your horse performs better and your score rises.

General Rules

Saddle seat equitation rules focus on a balanced, upright posture with a straight line from ear to shoulder to hip to heel, relaxed joints, and hands held high over the withers, reflecting elegance, control, and harmony with the horse's animation. Key elements include a strong core, a slight knee bend, heels down with balls of feet on the iron, and responsive communication with the horse through subtle rein aids, maintaining a confident and polished presence throughout the class.

Judging Criteria

1. Rider Position

- Tall, elegant posture
- Straight line from shoulder–hip–heel
- Quiet, steady hands carried correctly
- Eyes up and forward
- Secure, balanced seat

2. Use of Aids

- Subtle, effective cues
- Smooth preparation for transitions
- Soft rein contact
- Correct use of leg and seat

COMMON MISTAKES

Don't rush the pattern by pushing the horse for more action rather than focusing on your position.

3. Accuracy

- Clean execution of the pattern (if applicable)
- Straight lines, balanced circles, and correct geometry
- Prompt, smooth transitions

4. Harmony

- Rider and horse appear connected and confident
- Aids are nearly invisible
- Horse responds willingly and without resistance

5. Overall Impression

- Rider demonstrates polish, poise, and control
- Performance is elegant, stylish, and confident

Class Procedure – Rider will perform the posted pattern (unless a freestyle class) that may consist of walk, trot, canter, changes of diagonals, changes of leads, circles, serpentine, dropping of stirrups, and back up.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10.

Penalties:

- 3 point
 - Tick or hit of cone
 - Break of gait up to 2 strides
- 5 point:
 - Incorrect lead
 - Not performing specified gait
 - Break of gait more than 2 strides
 - Loss of stirrup
 - Obviously looking down to check lead
- 10 point:
 - Loss of rein
 - Use of either hand or rein to instill fear
 - Holding of the saddle
 - Spurring in front of cinch
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
 - Fall by horse or rider
- Disqualification:
 - Willful abuse
 - Illegal use of hands on reins
 - Use of prohibited equipment
 - Off pattern

Freestyle Maneuver Requirements – Rider must include, at a minimum, 6 maneuvers including:

- Walk of at least 10 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, or circle
- Trot of at least 20 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, or circle
- For 3 gait (canter) riders only – Canter of at least 30 feet either straight curved, serpentine, or circle
- Back of at least 4 steps

Additional backs, walks, trots, or canters may be chosen for the 5th and/or 6th required maneuver or select from the below. Maneuvers may not exceed 10 scored maneuvers:

- Dropping stirrups
- Turns on the Forehand
- Drop down lead change

- Flying lead change
- Counter Canter

Helpful Strategy

Break the pattern into segments and ride each with intention.

Training Insight

Practice transitions using mostly seat and leg.

Presentation Tip

Keep your eyes up and ride with confidence.

Gaited Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

The gaited pleasure class is to showcase a horse's natural ability to perform smooth, comfortable, and stylish ambling gaits (like the flat walk, running walk, rack, or slow gait) in a way that appears effortless, quiet, and a "pleasure" to ride, emphasizing manners, responsive disposition, and quality movement over speed



New to Showing?

Gaited Pleasure rewards smooth, consistent, natural gaiting.

General Rules

Gaited pleasure rules emphasize smooth, comfortable, and effortless movement, with the horse maintaining a natural head carriage, light rein contact, and excellent manners, focusing on a balanced, ground-covering stride rather than animation or speed, with penalties for head tossing, laboring, or resistance, and requiring prompt transitions and quiet standing.

Judging Criteria

Horse should perform a flat walk and the second gait appropriate to its breed (running walk, fox trot, rack, etc. In 3 gait classes horse must also perform the third gait of its breed or canter. The walk should be smooth, easy, and comfortable. The intermediate or 2nd gait should be smooth without excessive speed.

Class Procedure – to be shown at a walk, 2nd gait, and 3rd gait or canter both ways of the arena. Stop and back one horse length.

 Helpful Strategy

Focus on relaxation and rhythm.

 Training Insight

Practice transitions between gaits to build consistency.

 Presentation Tip

Keep your hands steady to support a smooth gait.

Gaited Country Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of Gaited Country Pleasure is to showcase a horse that offers a **smooth, comfortable, and manageable ride**, prioritizing manners and natural, balanced gaits (like the flat walk, running walk, or fox trot) over animation or speed, making it ideal for a relaxed trail or pleasure ride, often with a loose rein and two hands, and for beginner/intermediate riders. It emphasizes effortless transitions and quiet disposition, aiming to present the horse as a true "pleasure" to ride



New to Showing?

Country Pleasure focuses on a smooth, natural gait with a relaxed, pleasant attitude. Think "comfortable and willing," not flashy

General Rules

Gaited pleasure rules emphasize smooth, comfortable, and effortless movement, with the horse maintaining a natural head carriage, light rein contact, and excellent manners, focusing on a balanced, ground-covering stride rather than animation or speed, with penalties for head tossing, laboring, or resistance, and requiring prompt transitions and quiet standing.



Judge's Tip A horse that maintains its gait willingly and calmly will always stand out.

Judging Criteria

Horse should perform a flat walk and the second gait appropriate to its breed (running walk, fox trot, rack, etc. In 3 gait classes horse must also perform the third gait of its breed or canter. The walk should be smooth, easy, and comfortable. The intermediate or 2nd gait should be smooth without excessive speed. This class's focus is on a comfortable ride that you could easily take the horse on a relaxing ride on a country road.

Class Procedure – to be shown at a walk, 2nd gait, and 3rd gait or canter both ways of the arena. Stop and back one horse length.

Helpful Strategy

Keep a soft, steady contact and ride with your seat to maintain rhythm.

Training Insight

Practice transitions between a slower and slightly more energetic version of the same gait to build control.

Presentation Tip

Maintain a quiet upper body and let your horse's smooth gait shine.

COMMON MISTAKES

Allowing the horse to pace, trot, or fall out of gait. Consistency is key..

Gaited Show Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of the Gaited Show Pleasure class is to showcase their natural animated gaits in an elegant, thrilling, and visually striking performance, emphasizing the horse's beauty, presence, and the rider's skillful, effortless control and harmony with the animal.



New to Showing?

Show Pleasure rewards a bit more brilliance and animation than Country Pleasure, but still requires manners and consistency.



Judge's Tip A horse that maintains its gait consistently, without breaking or rushing, will always place higher.

General Rules

Gaited Show Pleasure emphasize smooth, comfortable, and effortless movement, with the horse maintaining a natural head carriage, excellent manners, with a lot of drive and animation.

Judging Criteria

All gaits to be performed in collected balance with natural elegance, natural animation, cadence and style both ways of the ring. Natural action and way of going required. There should be impulsion and power from behind, with knee and hock flexion with extension in front. All gaits are more animated than as gaited pleasure. Bold with elegance and style and airiness of motion. Some breeds call this “brio” or brilliance.

Class Procedure – to be shown at a walk, 2nd gait, and 3rd gait or canter both ways of the arena. Stop and back one horse length.

Helpful Strategy

Build energy gradually — don't surprise your horse with sudden cues.

Training Insight

Work on strengthening the hind end to support a more expressive front end.

Presentation Tip

Keep your hands steady and allow your horse to elevate naturally.

COMMON MISTAKES

Asking for too much animation, causing the horse to lose its natural gait.

 **Judge's Tip** The best Show Pleasure horses look stylish without losing smoothness or control.

[*Gaited Equitation Pattern \(2 and 3 gait\)](#)

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of gaited equitation is to showcase riders effectively communicating with their horse using balanced aids (rein, leg, seat, weight) to achieve **smoother, more comfortable, and efficient gaits** (like the running walk or fox trot) through relaxation, balance, and engagement, improving the horse's strength, symmetry, and overall soundness for both trail and discipline riding, rather than just relying on the horse's natural motion. It transforms the rider into a

balanced partner, guiding the horse to perform its unique four-beat gaits with rhythm, connection, and self-carriage.

General Rules

Gaited Equitation is characterized by balance, grace, and form. Exhibitors are judged on their seat, hands, ability as it relates to the performance of the horse, appointments of both horse and rider, horsemanship/showmanship, and overall presentation.

Judging – This class evaluates the riders' ability to perform a set of maneuvers with precision, balance, and smoothness along with confidence. The rider's equitation is judged on overall appearance, position, and use of aids. Rider should have a calm easy seat that moves with the horse, lower heels, straight from heel to shoulder with balance and function.

Class Procedure – Rider will perform the posted pattern (unless a freestyle class) that may consist of walk, 2nd gait, 3rd gait or canter, spins of various degrees, changes of leads, dropping of stirrups, back up, and sidepass.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10. Penalties are as follows:

- 3 point
 - Tick or hit of cone
 - Over or under spin up to ¼
 - Break of gait up to 2 strides
- 5 point:
 - Incorrect lead
 - Not performing specified gait
 - Break of gait more than 2 strides
 - Loss of stirrup
 - Obviously looking down to check lead
- 10 point:
 - Loss of rein
 - Use of either hand or rein to instill fear
 - Holding of the saddle horn
 - Spurring in front of cinch
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
- Disqualification:
 - Willful abuse



New to Showing?

Gaited Equitation focuses on the rider's position, accuracy, and subtlety of cues — not the horse's animation.

COMMON MISTAKES

Leaning forward or gripping with the knees, which disrupts the horse's gait.

- Fall by horse or rider
- Illegal use of hands on reins
- Use of prohibited equipment
- Off pattern

Freestyle Maneuver Requirements – Rider must include, at a minimum, 6 maneuvers including:

- Walk of at least 10 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, squared or circle
- 2nd Gait of at least 20 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, squared or circle
- For 3 gait (Canter) riders only – Canter or 3rd Gait of at least 30 feet either straight curved, serpentine, squared, or circle
- Pivot of at least 180 degrees
- Back of at least 4 steps

Additional pivots, backs, walks, 2nd gaits, or 3rd gaits (canters) may be chosen for the 5th and/or 6th required maneuver or select from the below. Maneuvers may not exceed 10 scored maneuvers:

- Dropping stirrups
- Sidepass
- Turns on the Forehand
- Drop down lead change
- Flying lead change
- Counter Canter

 **Judge's Tip** Smooth, accurate patterns with a balanced, elegant rider always score highest.

 **Helpful Strategy**

Think “tall and quiet” — let your posture support your horse’s smooth movement.

 **Training Insight**

Practice pattern elements (circles, straight lines, halts) at home to build confidence.

 **Presentation Tip**

Keep your eyes up and ride each maneuver with intention.

*Trail (all seats and 2 or 3 gaits except Ranch)

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of a horse show trail class is to test a horse's training, manners, and willingness to calmly navigate obstacles mimicking natural trail situations, showcasing the horse's agility, obedience, and the rider's skill in handling challenges like opening gates, crossing bridges, and navigating logs, demonstrating they are a reliable partner for real-world trail riding



New to Showing?

Trail is about precision, calmness, and partnership. Your horse should navigate obstacles willingly and confidently.

General Rules

judges look for calmness, control, and quality movement, starting from a base score (like 70), with deductions for errors (like touching poles) and bonuses for exceptional execution, ensuring the horse stays attentive and smooth through the pattern, requiring walk, jog, and lope (or gaits specific to the breed).

Judging Criteria

Shown over and through obstacles in a responsive manner showing willingness and general attitude. Demonstration of control, flexibility, and calmness. Emphasis on manners, suitability, and ability to work obstacles as required.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10. Penalties are as follows:

- ½ point:
 - Each tick of pole, cone, or obstacle
- 1 point:
 - Each step on a pole or obstacle
 - Break of gait for 2 strides or less
 - Failing to step into a required space
 - Failure to meet correct strides in trot overs
 - Splitting the pole (pole between 2 front or 2 hind feet) at the lope
- 3 points:
 - Break of gait or not picking up correct gait or out of lead
 - Knocking down a pole or obstacle
 - Stepping outside of an obstacle (such as stepping off a bridge)
- 5 points:
 - Letting go of gate or dropping rope gate

COMMON MISTAKES

Rushing obstacles or over-handling the horse.

- Dropping obstacle
- 1st or 2nd refusal or evasion an obstacle
- 10 points:
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
 - Failure to complete an obstacle
- 0 Score or Disqualification;
 - Performing obstacles out of order
 - No attempt to perform an obstacle
 - 3rd refusal or evasion of obstacle
 - Willful abuse
 - Equipment failure
 - Failure to demonstrate correct gait

Freestyle Obstacle Requirements – Rider must include, at a minimum, 6 obstacles including:

- Gate (standard or rope gate)
- Back through
- Walk over at least 3 poles
- Trot/jog over of at least 2 poles
- Lope over (for 3 gait riders only) of at least 2 poles
- Bridge (actual wooden bridge, tarp, palm fronds, etc may be used)

The remaining mandatory obstacle may be chosen for the 6th required obstacle. Rider may also include any additional maneuvers up to a maximum of 10 scored maneuvers.

- Additional walk or trot/jog overs
- Raised walk or trot/jog overs to a maximum of 6" for walk or 8" for trot/jog or 8" for lope/canter
- Sidepass
- Water hazard
- Serpentine
- Turn in 6' box
- Pick up and drop off an item (mailbox, bucket on a barrel, put on/off slicker)

Live animals are not allowed to be used



Judge's Tip Smooth, controlled navigation of obstacles is more important than speed.

Class Procedure – Rider will perform the posted pattern (unless a freestyle class) that may consist of walk, jog, lope, back up, sidepass, serpentine, poles, turns or spins, and variations of these.

 Helpful Strategy

Break each obstacle into steps — pause, breathe, and guide your horse through each part.

 Training Insight

Practice obstacles at home using cones, poles, tarps, or household items to build confidence.

 Presentation Tip

Keep your eyes ahead and ride the line, not the obstacle.

Pleasure Driving

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of pleasure driving at horse shows is to showcase a horse's suitability as a calm, reliable, and elegant companion for relaxed carriage rides, emphasizing good manners, smooth gaits (walk, trot, extended trot), responsiveness, and quality conformation, highlighting the horse's ability to enjoy its job in a harmonious partnership with the driver.



New to Showing?

Pleasure Driving rewards a smooth, pleasant, and obedient horse with a steady rhythm.

General Rules

Pleasure driving at horse shows emphasizes a harmonious, well-turned-out horse and driver, focusing on manners, correct gaits (walk, working trot, strong trot), and presentation. Judges look for confident, happy exhibitors and a horse comfortable in its harness, penalizing faults like knocking cones (in obstacle classes) or excessive speed.

Judging Criteria

Gaits should be smooth, relaxed, balanced and consistent. Judged on manners, quality, performance, and suitability.

Class Procedure - Shown at a walk, working trot, and strong trot both ways of the ring. Reverse toward the inside of the arena to opposite side or along same side if size of arena warrants. Reinback required.

 Helpful Strategy

Use your voice and reins softly to maintain rhythm and relaxation.

 Training Insight

Practice transitions between working and more energetic gaits to build adjustability.

 Presentation Tip

Maintain a quiet upper body and steady rein contact.

Reinsmanship

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of reinsmanship at horse shows is to demonstrate **precise, subtle, and effective communication** between the driver and the horse using reins, voice, and whip to execute complex patterns, showcasing the horse's athleticism, training, and responsiveness in a controlled setting, ultimately highlighting the partnership and control.

General Rules

Reinsmanship centers on subtle, effective control, emphasizing a light, consistent contact from a straight line (elbow to bit), using minimal apparent resistance for guidance, maintaining the correct hand position (thumb on top, fingers around reins, no fingers between), and avoiding harsh cues like wrapping reins or using the free hand for pressure, all while demonstrating precision and finesse in movements like spins and lead changes.

Judging Criteria

This class evaluates the driver's ability to perform a set of maneuvers with precision, balance, and smoothness along with confidence. The driver's suitability and skill is judged on overall appearance, position, and use of aids. Control, posture, use of whip, and handling of reins should count for 75% of the total score and 25% on the condition and neatness of attire, harness, and vehicle.



New to Showing?

Reinsmanship evaluates the driver's position, rein handling, and effectiveness — not the horse's movement.

Class Procedure – Rider will perform the posted pattern (unless a freestyle class) that may consist of walk, trot, extended trot, change of rein, halt, and back.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10.

Penalties

- 3 point
 - Break of gait up to 2 strides
- 5 point:
 - Not performing specified gait
 - Break of gait more than 2 strides
- 10 point:
 - Loss of reins
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
- Disqualification:
 - Willful abuse
 - Use of prohibited equipment
 - Loose horse
 - Off pattern

COMMON MISTAKES

Over steering or overusing rein cues.

Freestyle Maneuver Requirements – Rider must include, at a minimum, 6 maneuvers including:

- Walk of at least 10 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, squared or circle
- Working or Strong trot of at least 20 feet either straight, curved, serpentine, squared or circle
- Reinback of at least 4 steps

Additional reinbacks, walks, or trots may be included plus collected trots. Maneuvers may not exceed 10 scored maneuvers:

 **Judge's Tip** Quiet hands, correct posture, and smooth rein handling are essential.

 **Helpful Strategy**

Practice holding the reins correctly and making subtle adjustments.

 **Training Insight**

Teach your horse to respond to light rein cues for smoother patterns.

 **Presentation Tip**

Sit tall, keep your shoulders open, and maintain a steady contact.

Driven Obstacles

Purpose of the Class

Driven obstacles at horse shows test a horse and driver's ability to navigate real-world trail challenges, building confidence, coordination, balance, and communication through simulated hazards like water, bridges, and narrow passages, turning fear into curiosity and strengthening their partnership.



New to Showing?

Driven Obstacles test precision, control, and communication between driver and horse.

General Rules

Reinsmanship at horse shows centers on subtle, effective control, emphasizing a light, consistent contact from a straight line (elbow to bit), using minimal apparent resistance for guidance, maintaining the correct hand position (thumb on top, fingers around reins, no fingers between), and avoiding harsh cues like wrapping reins or using the free hand for pressure, all while demonstrating precision and finesse in movements like spins and lead changes

Judging Criteria

Judge will evaluate horse's willfulness to complete obstacles, ability to negotiate obstacles with finesse. Credit will be given for speed that does not sacrifice correctness.

Class Procedure – Driver will complete posted pattern (unless a freestyle class) that may consist of walk, trot, extended trot, reinbacks, serpentines, halts, boxes, and other similar obstacles.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10. Penalties are as follows:

- ½ point:
 - Each tick of pole, cone, or obstacle
- 1 point:
 - Each step on a pole or obstacle
 - Break of gait for 2 strides or less
 - Failing to step into a required space
- 3 points:
 - Break of gait or not picking up correct gait
 - Knocking down a pole or obstacle
 - Stepping outside of an obstacle (such as stepping off a bridge)
- 5 points:
 - 1st or 2nd refusal or evasion an obstacle

COMMON MISTAKES

Cutting corners too tightly or approaching obstacles at the wrong angle.

- 10 points:
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
 - Failure to complete an obstacle
- 0 Score or Disqualification;
 - Performing obstacles out of order
 - No attempt to perform an obstacle
 - 3rd refusal or evasion of obstacle
 - Willful abuse
 - Equipment failure
 - Failure to demonstrate correct gait

Freestyle Obstacle Requirements – Driver must include, at a minimum, 6 obstacles including:

- Walk in circle, serpentine, square, or straight
- Trot in circle, serpentine, square, or straight
- Halt
- Reinback

The remaining mandatory obstacle may be chosen for the 6th required obstacle. Rider may also include any additional maneuvers up to a maximum of 10 scored maneuvers.

- Additional walk or trot including working or extended trot
- Trot with cart wheel between at 2 poles
- Water hazard
- Serpentine
- Turn in box
- Pick up and drop off an item (mailbox, bucket on a barrel, put on/off slicker)

 **Judge's Tip** Smooth, accurate navigation of obstacles is more important than speed.

 **Helpful Strategy**

Look ahead and plan your path before entering each obstacle.

 **Training Insight**

Practice bending, halting, and backing to improve maneuverability.

Presentation Tip

Keep your hands steady and your posture balanced.

Driven Cones

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of a driven cones class in horse shows is to test the horse's **suppleness, obedience, fitness, and the driver's skill** by navigating a tight, timed course of cones without knocking them over, demonstrating precision, balance, and the partnership built.



New to Showing?

Driven Cones require accuracy, rhythm, and control through a timed or judged pattern.

General Rules

In a horse show driven cones class, you navigate a course of numbered cones, aiming for the fastest time with the fewest faults (knocked-off balls on cones), emphasizing **accuracy and control over raw speed**, requiring precise turns, maintaining pace, and ensuring the vehicle clears narrow spaces with penalties for dropping balls or going off course.

Judging Criteria

Judge will evaluate driver and horse's ability to negotiate a course of cones with 20 individual gates.

COMMON MISTAKES

Approaching cones too quickly and losing steering accuracy.

Class Procedure – Driver will complete posted pattern (unless a freestyle class). Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10. Penalties are as follows:

- 3 point:
 - Knocking a ball off cones (per cone dislodgement)
 - Knocking down or dislodging any part of an obstacle
- Disqualification
 - Taking gates out of order or wrong direction

Freestyle Requirements - driver may select the placement and order of the 20 individual cone gates. Must include a minimum of 1 change of direction. Driver may use fewer than 20 cone gates but must complete 20 cone gate efforts (ex: driver may have 10 cone gates and go through each twice, or through fewer gates more often so that the total number of efforts is 20).

 Helpful Strategy

Establish a consistent pace before entering the course.

 Training Insight

Practice steering exercises to improve precision.

 Presentation Tip

Look ahead to the next cone, not the one you're passing.

*Ground Handling

Purpose of this Class

The purpose of ground handling classes is to evaluate the handler's ability to communicate with and control a horse from the ground, emphasizing safe, efficient, and respectful partnership through realistic maneuvers like leading, backing, pivoting, and moving body parts. These classes build essential skills for under-saddle work, assess the horse's obedience and confidence, and demonstrate good manners for everyday situations, serving as a foundation for successful riding.

General Rules

Ground handling classes test the handler's ability to control and maneuver a horse from the ground, focusing on the horse yielding to pressure (forward, backward, sidepasses) in a workmanlike, obedient manner, and performing specific pattern maneuvers.

Judging Criteria

This class tests the handler's ability to communicate with the horse from the ground by judging a series of maneuvers that require the horse to yield to pressure – forward, backward, and laterally. Exhibitor movements should be workmanlike and efficient and the horse should be obedient and cooperative. It is permissible to touch horse to perform lateral movements and when lowering head.

Class Procedure – Handler will complete posted pattern that may consist of walk, trot, extended trot, back ups, serpentines, halts, sidepasses, lowering head, and sending the horse in a circle.



New to Showing?

Ground Handling isn't showmanship and shouldn't be approached as such. It is a true partnership where the handler allows the horse to perform with confidence.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10.

 **Judge's Tip** Calm, confident handlers with clear communication always stand out.

Penalties

- ½ point:
 - Break of gait 1 full stride
- 1 point:
 - Touching horse other than when allowed
- 2 point:
 - Freeze up or complete loss of forward, backward, or lateral movement
 - Break of gait more than 1 full stride
 - Use of hand on halter or touching horse with lead
 - Artificial or overdone showing
- 5 point:
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
 - Failure to complete a maneuver
 - Touching horse with lead 2nd offense
- 0 or Disqualification
 - Off pattern
 - Illegal tack
 - Willful abuse

COMMON MISTAKES

Over-handling – too much movement or tension in the lead rope.

Helpful Strategy

Use your body position to influence your horse instead of relying on the rope.

Training Insight

Practice yielding the hindquarters, backing, and moving the shoulders with light cues.

Presentation Tip

Maintain a safe, consistent distance from your horse at all times.

Ranch Pleasure (2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of a Ranch Pleasure class is to showcase a horse's versatility, attitude, and movement as a functional, working ranch horse, emphasizing a natural, forward-moving gait with light rein contact, unlike traditional western pleasure which favors slower, more collected gaits. Judges look for a horse that is quiet, soft, making smooth transitions, reflecting a true ranch mount that's a pleasure to ride from one job to the next, not just an arena show horse.



New to Showing?

Ranch Pleasure rewards forward, purposeful movement with a natural frame — not slow or artificial

General Rules

Ranch Pleasure classes judge a horse's ability to be a versatile, relaxed, and responsive working ranch horse, focusing on natural movement, soft contact, and correct transitions in walk, jog, lope, and sometimes extended gaits, all on a loose rein with a functional, natural head carriage, avoiding showy or exaggerated movements while penalized for draped reins, being over-bridled, or breaking gait.



Judge's Tip A horse that looks like it could work all day with ease will always stand out.

Judging Criteria

Horse should be functional for use on a ranch in addition to being a pleasure to ride. Performance should simulate a horse riding outside the confines of an arena and one of a working ranch horse. The horse should be well-broke, relaxed, quiet, soft, and cadenced at all gaits. Horse should be responsive to the rider, yield to contact, and make required transitions smoothly, timely, and correctly. Free flowing stride, natural lift and carriage, smooth gaits and transitions should be exhibited.

Class Procedure – Each rider should show the horse at the walk, jog, and lope both ways of the arena on a reasonably loose rein. Reversing direction should occur away from the rail, toward the inside of the arena. The reverse may be done at the walk or jog, never at the lope. The horse must back at least one horse length at the end of the ride. Horses may be required to extend the walk, jog, or lope.

COMMON MISTAKES

Riding too slow or trying to create a Western Pleasure frame.

 Helpful Strategy

Think “forward and free” — let the horse move with purpose.

 Training Insight

Practice transitions within the gait to build adjustability.

 Presentation Tip

Keep your posture tall and your hands steady.

***Ranch Riding (2 or 3 gait)**

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of a ranch riding class in horse shows is to showcase a horse's versatility, athleticism, and suitability as a practical, enjoyable partner for everyday ranch work, focusing on fluid movement, responsiveness, and a relaxed attitude rather than artificial finesse, reflecting authentic ranch horsemanship through patterns with natural-looking obstacles and gait changes.



New to Showing?

Ranch Riding highlights transitions, patterns, and forward, functional movement.

General Rules

Ranch Riding classes judge a horse's suitability as a versatile ranch partner, focusing on natural movement, responsiveness, and a functional, modest appearance with minimal silver or polish, while allowing for flexible equipment like romal reins or two-reins

Judging Criteria

Horse should be functional for use on a ranch in addition to being a pleasure to ride and respond to the rider to perform the maneuvers required. Performance should simulate a horse riding outside the confines of an arena and one of a working ranch horse. The horse should be well-broke, relaxed, quiet, soft, and cadenced at all gaits. Horse should be responsive to the rider, yield to contact, and make required transitions smoothly, timely, and correctly. Free flowing stride, natural lift and carriage, smooth gaits and transitions should be exhibited.

Class Procedure – Rider will complete posted pattern that may consist of walk, trot, extended trot, lope, extended lope, back ups, halts, turns/spins, sidepasses, and going over poles. Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10.

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Penalties

- 1 point:
 - Break of gait at walk or jog for 2 strides or less
- 3 point:
 - Break of gait at walk or jog for more than 2 strides
 - Wrong lead or out of lead
 - Overly draped reins
 - Out of lead or cross cantering more than 2 strides when changing leads
 - Trotting more than 3 strides when making a simple lead change
 - Severe disturbance of any obstacle
- 5 point:
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
- Off Pattern (placed below all other horses)
 - Eliminate or add maneuver
 - Repeated blatant disobedience
 - Incomplete maneuver
 - Use of 2 hands on a shanked bit
- 0 or Disqualified:
 - Illegal equipment
 - Willful abuse

COMMON MISTAKES

Over-bending or over-collecting the horse.

 **Judge's Tip** Clean transitions and correct lines matter more than speed.

Helpful Strategy

Ride each maneuver with clarity — prepare early, execute cleanly.

Training Insight

Practice extended and collected versions of each gait.

Presentation Tip

Keep your eyes up and ride with purpose.

*Ranch Reining

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of ranch reining classes in horse shows is to demonstrate a ranch horse's athletic ability and responsiveness in performing fundamental handling maneuvers, showcasing skills like stops, spins, and lead changes in a pattern, but with a more natural, relaxed, and forward-looking style than traditional reining, making it more accessible and appealing to those with a working ranch horse background



New to Showing?

Ranch Reining rewards control, precision, and functional movement — not dramatic sliding stops..

General Rules

Ranch reining rules emphasize a horse's ability to perform essential ranch maneuvers (like spins, stops, circles, lead changes) with a willing, responsive attitude, judged on control and a natural, working appearance rather than flashy maneuvers, requiring light rein contact (often one-handed) and classic western attire with minimal bling, focusing on functionality, unlike traditional reining's emphasis on complex patterns and high-speed maneuvers

Judging Criteria

The ranch reining class measures the ability of the ranch horse to perform basic handling maneuvers with a natural head carriage in a forward looking manner. Each horse will be judged on the neatness, dispatch, ease, calmness, and speed with which it performs the pattern.

Class Procedure – Rider will complete posted pattern that may consist of walk, trot, extended trot, back ups, halts, turns/spins, sidepasses, and going over poles.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10.

Penalties

- ½ point:
 - Starting a circle or exiting a rollback at a trot for up to 2 strides
 - Delayed change of lead by 1 stride where the change is required
 - Over or under spin by up to 1/8 turn
- 1 point:
 - Out of lead (this is cumulative with 1 point penalty for each ¼ circle)
 - Over or under spin by 1/8 to ¼ turn
 - Slipping a rein

COMMON MISTAKES

Over-spinning or rushing the rundown.

- 2 point:
 - Break of gait
 - Freeze up in spins or rollback
 - Scotching or failure to pass the specified marker before initiating a stop
 - Trotting more than 2 strides but less than ½ circle or ½ length of arena
- 5 point:
 - Spurring in front of cinch
 - Use of hand to instill fear
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
- Off Pattern (placed below all other horses)
 - Breaking pattern
 - Inclusion of maneuver (i.e., over or under spinning, backing more than 2 strides)
 - Repeated blatant disobedience
 - Use of 2 hands on a shanked bit
- Disqualification:
 - Use of illegal equipment
 - Leaving arena before pattern is complete
 - Fall of horse or rider

 Helpful Strategy

Focus on rhythm in circles and balance in stops.

 Training Insight

Build stops gradually — don't chase speed.

 Presentation Tip

Stay centered and quiet in the saddle.

***Ranchmanship (2 or 3 gait)**

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of ranchmanship classes in horse shows is to showcase a horse's versatility, trainability, and suitability as a working ranch horse, emphasizing natural, purposeful movement, a calm attitude, and responsiveness to the rider for common ranch tasks like navigating obstacles (logs, gates) and smooth gait transitions.

General Rules

Ranchmanship classes (like AQHA Ranch Riding) judge horses on their natural, willing attitude and ability to mimic a working ranch horse, focusing on smooth, ground-covering gaits (walk, jog, lope) with light rein contact, not draped reins, and forward movement

Judging Criteria

The purpose of this class is to bring forth the versatility in both the ranch horse and exhibitor, constructed of maneuvers from Ranch Riding, Ranch Trail and Ranch Reining.

Class Procedure – Rider will complete posted pattern that may consist of walk, trot, extended trot, back ups, halts, turns/spins, sidepasses, and going over poles.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10. Penalties are as follows:

- ½ point:
 - Starting a circle or exiting a rollback at a trot for up to 2 strides
 - Delayed change of lead by 1 stride where the change is required
 - Over or under spin by up to 1/8 turn
 - Each tick of a pole or obstacle
- 1 point:
 - Out of lead (this is cumulative with 1 point penalty for each ¼ circle)
 - Over or under spin by ¼ turn
 - Slipping a rein
 - Step on pole or obstacle
 - Skipping over or failure to step in a required space
- 2 point:
 - Break of gait
 - Freeze up in spins or rollback
 - Scotching or failure to pass the specified marker before initiating a stop
 - Trotting more than 2 strides but less than ½ circle or ½ length of arena
- 5 point:
 - Spurring in front of cinch
 - Use of hand to instill fear
 - Holding on to saddle
 - Dropping an object



New to Showing?

Ranchmanship evaluates the rider's position, effectiveness, and accuracy through a ranch-style pattern.

COMMON MISTAKES

Pushing for speed when not required and trying to slow down so much that the horse can't maintain the gait.

- First and second refusals
- Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
- Disqualification:
 - Use of illegal equipment
 - Inclusion of additional maneuvers
 - Trotting more than ½ circle or ½ length of arena
 - Overspin more than ¼ turn
 - Leaving arena before pattern is complete
 - Fall of horse or rider
 - More than 1 finger between reins or use of two hands with a shanked bit

 Helpful Strategy

Break the pattern into segments and ride each with intention.

 Training Insight

Practice transitions using mostly seat and leg.

 Presentation Tip

Keep your posture tall and confident.

Ranch Horsemanship (2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

The ranch horsemanship class is designed to evaluate the rider's ability to execute, in concert with their horse, a set of maneuvers prescribed by the judge with precision and smoothness while exhibiting poise and confidence, and maintaining a balanced, functional, and fundamentally correct seat.

General Rules

The following maneuvers are acceptable in a pattern: walk, jog, lope, extended jog in a straight line, curved line, serpentine, circle or figure 8, or a combination of these gaits and maneuvers; stop, back in straight or curved line, turn or pivot, back, including spins and rollbacks on the haunches and/or on the forehand, sidepass, two-track or leg-yield, flying or simple lead changes, counter-canter, or any other maneuver, or ride without stirrups.



New to Showing?

Ranch Horsemanship focuses on the rider's position and effectiveness in a forward, functional frame.

Judging Criteria

The horsemanship class is designed to evaluate the rider's ability to execute, in concert with their horse, a set of maneuvers prescribed by the judge (unless a freestyle class) with precision and smoothness while exhibiting poise and confidence, and maintaining a balanced, functional and fundamentally correct seat. The ideal horsemanship pattern is extremely precise with the horse and rider working in complete unison, executing each maneuver with subtle aids and cues.

Class Procedure – Rider will complete posted pattern (unless a freestyle class) that may consist of walk, trot, extended trot, back ups, halts, turns/spins, sidepasses, and going over poles.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10. Penalties are as follows:

- 1 point:
 - Break of gait at walk/jog up to 2 strides
 - Out of lead
 - Over or under spin by 1/8 turn
 - Obviously looking for lead
 - Tick or hit of cone
- 3 point:
 - Not performing specific gait
 - Incorrect lead more than 2 strides (this is cumulative with 1 point penalty for each ¼ circle)
 - Break of gait at walk/jog for more than 2 strides
 - Freeze up in spins or rollback
 - Over or under spin 1/8 to ¼ turn
- 5 point:
 - Spurring in front of cinch
 - Use of hand to instill fear
 - Holding on to saddle
 - Cueing with end of romal
 - Loss of stirrup or rein
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
- 0 score (not to place above anyone receiving a score above 0)
 - Off pattern
 - Wrong side of cone or knocking over cone
 - Failure to perform specified gait or lead
 - Over/under turn more than 1/4
- Disqualification:
 - Loss of control of horse

COMMON MISTAKES

Pushing for speed when not required or trying to slow down so much that the horse can't maintain the gait.

- Use of illegal equipment
- Illegal use of hands on reins
- Leaving arena before pattern is complete
- Fall of horse or rider

 **Judge's Tip** A balanced rider who supports a forward horse will always stand out.

 **Helpful Strategy**

Think “forward first, form second.”

 **Training Insight**

Practice riding with a soft rein and active leg.

 **Presentation Tip**

Keep your shoulders open and your eyes ahead.

*Ranch Trail (2 or 3 gait)

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of a Ranch Trail class is to showcase a horse's versatility, willingness, and training for real-world ranch work by having them navigate natural-looking obstacles (like logs, gates, bridges, and drags) calmly and efficiently, demonstrating good manners, correct gaits (walk, trot, lope), and responsiveness to the rider in a pattern that mimics everyday tasks

General Rules

Ranch Trail classes test a horse's ability to navigate realistic ranch obstacles (gates, logs, bridges, etc.) at walk, trot, and lope, emphasizing a natural, willing, and efficient performance on loose reins, with judges looking for a calm demeanor and good manners.

Judging Criteria



New to Showing?

Ranch Trail tests your horse's ability to navigate obstacles with confidence and purpose.

Judged on the performance of the horse over obstacles with emphasis on manners, response to rider and quality of movement. Credit will be given to horses negotiating the obstacles with style and some degree of speed, providing correctness is not sacrificed. Horses should receive credit for showing attentiveness to the obstacles and the capability of picking their way through the course when obstacles warrant it, and willingly responding to the rider's cues on more difficult obstacles.

 **Judge's Tip** Smooth, correct patterns with subtle cues score highest.

Class Procedure – Rider will complete posted pattern (unless a freestyle class) that may consist of walk, trot, extended trot, back ups, halts, turns/spins, sidepasses, and going over poles.

Each maneuver is scored 0 to 10.

Penalties

- 1 point:
 - Each step on a pole or obstacle
 - Break of gait for 2 strides or less
 - Splitting the pole (pole between 2 front or 2 hind feet) at the lope
- 3 points:
 - Break of gait or not picking up correct gait or out of lead more than 2 strides
 - Knocking down a pole or obstacle
 - Stepping outside of an obstacle (such as stepping off a bridge)
- 5 points:
 - Letting go of gate or dropping rope gate
 - Dropping obstacle
 - 1st or 2nd refusal or evasion an obstacle
 - Failure to complete an obstacle
 - Use of either hand to instill fear
- 10 points:
 - Blatant disobedience (biting, pawing, rearing, kicking, circling handler)
- Disqualification;
 - Performing obstacles out of order
 - No attempt to perform an obstacle
 - Use of 2 hands on a shanked bit
 - 3rd refusal or evasion of obstacle

COMMON MISTAKES

Overhandling or micro-managing your horse.

- Willful abuse
- Equipment failure
- Failure to demonstrate correct gait
- Fall by horse or rider

 **Judge's Tip** Precision and willingness matter more than speed.

Freestyle Obstacle Requirements – Rider must include, at a minimum, 8 obstacles including:

- Gate (standard or rope gate)
- Back through
- Walk over at least 3 poles
- Trot/jog over of at least 2 poles
- Lope over (for 3 gait riders only) of at least 2 poles
- Drag Object – log, pole, roping dummy, brush, etc
- Bridge (actual wooden bridge, tarp, palm fronds, etc may be used)

The remaining mandatory obstacle may be chosen for the 8th required obstacle. Rider may also include any additional maneuvers up to a maximum of 10 scored maneuvers.

- Additional walk or trot/jog overs
- Raised walk or trot/jog overs to a maximum of 6" for walk or 8" for trot/jog or 8" for lope/canter
- Sidepass
- Water hazard
- Serpentine
- Turn in 6' box
- Pick up and drop off an item (mailbox, bucket on a barrel, put on/off slicker)
- Rope dummy (can use a standard rope dummy, bale of hay, post or jump standard, large bucket – rider should rope from back of horse – you do not need to "catch" the object. Drop the rope after the attempt)
- Ground tie

Live animals are not allowed to be used.

 **Helpful Strategy**

Break obstacles into steps and ride each part deliberately.

Training Insight

Practice obstacles at home using natural materials like logs, gates, and poles.

Presentation Tip

Keep your eyes ahead and ride the line, not the obstacle.

Side Saddle - All

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of side saddle classes in horse shows is to celebrate the elegant, historical tradition of riding with both legs to one side, showcasing riders' refined posture, balance, and control on well-mannered horses in events like flat classes, jumping, and dressage, maintaining both beauty and athleticism while honoring centuries-old equestrian skills

General Rules

Side saddle show rules focus on correct, elegant appointments (saddle, attire, bridle) and rider position, emphasizing a traditional English hunt seat or Saddleseat look, with specific guidelines for hats (bowler/safety hat), jackets (length), and equipment like a short whip/cane, judging elegance, manners, and flawless gaits (walk, trot, canter), requiring riders to go both directions and perform patterns, penalizing incorrect leads or lost contact

Judging Criteria

Side saddle classes are judged the same as other similar classes with the following exceptions:

Reins may be closed, knotted, or buckled, split reins not required.

Timed Events - all

Purpose of the Class

The purpose of timed event classes in horse shows (like barrel racing, pole bending, or some jumping classes) is to test a horse's **speed, agility, and responsiveness** under pressure, rewarding the rider-horse pair who can complete a specific, often intricate, course or pattern in the **fastest time with the fewest faults (penalties)**, showcasing precise control and raw athletic ability.

General Rules

Timed event horse show classes (like [barrel racing](#), [pole bending](#), [gymkhana](#)) focus on speed and accuracy, with the fastest clean run winning, requiring riders to complete specific patterns without knocking poles or missing targets, adding time penalties or disqualification for errors.

Judging Criteria

Timed events are not judged. They are placed strictly on the time to complete the posted pattern.

Class Procedure – Horse will walk or jog into arena unless an alley is available. Horse will work the posted pattern and then walk or jog out of the arena unless an alley is available.

Unbridled Classes – all

Judging and class procedures will be the same as all non-unbridled classes with the following exceptions:

In hand - Pattern must be performed without a lead shank (no lead shank, lead rope, lead line, etc) – the handler may not touch the horse – not on the halter, face, neck, or body.

Ridden classes - Headstall may be worn and reins may be knotted (or you may use barrel/roping reins) over the horse's neck. Touching the reins leading to the horse's bit will result in a disqualification. You may use an additional rein or rope around the horse's neck and hold that rein, you may not run that rein up the horse's neck in order to turn or stop, the rein must remain low on the horse's neck, near the shoulder. Credit will be given for entries that do not use a rope around the horse's neck.

Walk

Judging and class procedures are the same as other classes, whether pleasure, equitation, rail, trail, or dressage. The rider will ride alone with no side handler and perform all maneuvers at a walk. 2 hands may be used regardless of type of bit used. Closed reins may also be used.

Leadline

Judging and class procedures are the same as other classes, whether pleasure, equitation, rail, trail, or dressage. The rider will have a leader that is in primary control of the horse. They will perform all maneuvers at a walk. Rider should hold reins if possible. 2 hands may be used regardless of type of bit used. Closed reins may also be used.

Conclusion

By using these rules you will ensure your ultimate success in the ring. Build on your strengths and add classes to your knowledge. If you have any questions about these rules or need additional information please contact info@showohsa.com.