

6. Western Classes

6.1 Western Pleasure

- In this class the horse is judged more than the rider. The horse is judged on performance, manners, way of going, smoothness of ride, alertness and responsiveness to cues. A good pleasure horse has a free flowing stride of reasonable length. He should travel with a bright, relaxed and alert expression.
- The horse and rider should work both ways of the arena at all three gaits on a reasonably loose rein. The jog is to be a rhythmic two beat gait. The lope is to be a natural three beat gait (A four beat lope will be penalized). Extension of gaits may be asked for.
- All transitions should be executed smoothly and efficiently within 1-3 strides. Horse's head position should be maintained with nose slightly in front of the vertical with no bobbing at any gait. The head and neck should be carried in a relaxed, natural position, with the poll level or slightly above the withers.
- Excessive speed or slowness is to be penalized. Horses are to travel to breed standards.
- The stop should be straight and square.
- The back should be smooth and responsive and horses should stand quietly on a loose rein.

6.2 Western Horsemanship

This class may be called Western Equitation at some shows.

- In a Horsemanship Class, it is the skill of the rider that is being judged (seat, hands, ability to control and show the horse). Cues and aids should not be noticeable. Riders should display a precise ride in total unison with their horse, exhibiting poise and confidence.
- Judges may ask riders to ride an individual pattern and/or work on the rail. If a rider is unsure of the pattern, the rider should ask the judge for clarification before any riders begin the pattern.
- Patterns should be posted or distributed at least one hour before the class. Check your regional show rules to confirm this.

6.2.1 Basic Position

Rider should sit in the center of the saddle with the ear, shoulder, points of the hip, and back of the heel in a vertical straight line. Stirrups should be just short enough to allow the heels to be lower than the toes. The rider should maintain contact with the saddle from the seat to the inner thigh with only light contact between the lower leg and the horse and saddle. The body should appear comfortable, relaxed and flexible. Hands and arms should be held in a relaxed easy manner with the upper arms in a straight line with the body, the one holding the reins bent at the elbow. The off hand should be held parallel to but slightly lower than the rein hand or loosely straight down at side just behind the thigh. Excessive pumping of arm will be penalized. The rider's wrist should be kept straight and relaxed. The rein hand should be carried immediately above or slightly in front of the saddle horn. The rider should maintain light contact with the horse's mouth.

6.2.2 Position in Motion:

Rider should sit to jog. Do not post unless the judge requests a rising trot. Maintain contact with the seat of the saddle. All movements of the horse should be performed with precision and a subtle use of aids and cues. Exaggerated shifting of rider's weight is undesirable, and will be penalized.

- Riders may be asked to dismount and mount.
- When riding a figure eight pattern, always start and finish in the middle or the center of the pattern, unless otherwise instructed.
- Accuracy is desired, so start and end transitions exactly at posted markers.
- If a horse or rider should fall, it does not necessarily mean elimination, but may be penalized at the judge's discretion.

- The exhibitor should perform the work accurately, precisely, smoothly and promptly.
- The stop should be straight and square.
- The back should be smooth and responsive.

6.3 Trail Horse

- This class is to be judged on the performance of the horse over and through obstacles with emphasis on manners, response to the rider, and attitude.
- Horses must work over and through obstacles as directed by a pre-determined course. Obstacles will not be dangerous or hazardous to horse or rider.
- Trail experience is recommended.
- If you have questions about the pattern, ask the judge for clarification before you start the pattern.
- The gait between the obstacles will be identified in the pattern. Riders may be required to display the three basic gaits (walk, jog, lope) depending on the level of the rider.
- All obstacles should have a time limit and limited number of attempts, to be decided at the show committee and judge's discretion. (Suggested 2 refusals or 30 sec max).
- Once a course has been set there will be no practicing.
- Classes will consist of a minimum of 6 obstacles.
- The following may result in a no score but not necessarily disqualification:
 - Doing an obstacle differently than described in the pattern
 - Failure to complete an obstacle
 - Failure to be in the prescribed gait
- The following will result in disqualification from the class:
 - Not doing the obstacles in the prescribed order
 - Illegal equipment
 - Willful abuse
 - Major disobedience i.e. rearing

6.3.1 Common Trail Obstacles

- Check your regional rules to see which obstacles are mandatory, if any.
- Safety will be the primary concern when designing the course.

The Gate

- The gate must be set so a rider can open it from their right or left side.
- There are several ways to open a gate: pushing it away, pulling it open toward the rider, or backing through it. It is the competitor's responsibility to be aware of all the various ways and follow the specific instructions of the pattern. Gates that are used for backing through should not have a ground bar for safety reason.
- Riders may change hands prior to opening the gate and then change back after the gate has been negotiated. This may be relaxed for Riders in Levels 1 – 3 or on Junior horses in some regions.
- Riders may not change hands or lose control of the gate while passing through. This may be relaxed for Riders in Levels 1 – 3 or on Junior horses in some regions

The Bridge

- A bridge should have a wooden floor, not to exceed 30 cm (12") in height, with no walls. Suggested minimum bridge length to be 150 cm (60"). No rocking bridges.

Walkovers

- A walkover is to consist of a minimum of 4 smooth logs at least 120 cm (4 ft) long. Walk over rails should be placed at least 45-60 cm (18-24") apart.. Trot over rails should be placed 90 cm (3 ft) apart and lope over rails should be 180 cm (6 ft) apart.

6.3.2 Other obstacles

- **Carrying an object:** carry an object from one part of the arena to another. (Only objects of reasonable weight and that might be used on a trail ride may be used).
- **Back** through L, V, U, straight or similar shaped course at least 36" – 48" wide . May be elevated no more than 24".
- **Slicker:** Put on and remove slicker. The slicker is to be located so the rider can put it on and remove it while mounted. Reins may be dropped on the neck of the horse or over the saddle horn or held while putting slicker off and on.
- **Mailbox:** Remove and replace obstacle in a mailbox.
- **Sidepass:** May be elevated to a maximum height of 12". If using two rails, they should be spaced 20" – 24" to allow for either front or rear hooves, or 5' to 6' to allow for entire horse.
- **Turn around box or square:** An obstacle consisting of 4 logs each 5 ft to 7 ft long laid in a square. To be negotiated by riding over a log or a rail as designated. When all four feet are in the box rider should execute the turn as indicated and depart.
- **Serpentine** obstacles at walk or a jog. Spacing to be a minimum of 6 feet for a jog.
- A combination of two or more obstacles is acceptable
- **Unacceptable obstacles are:** Tires, animals hides, PVC pipe, rocking or moving bridges, water boxes or hazards, logs or poles elevated in a manner that permits them to roll, flames, dry ice.

6.4 Reining

To rein a horse is not only to guide him, but also to control his every movement. The best reining horse should be willfully guided or controlled with little or no apparent resistance. Any movement on his own should be considered a lack of control. All deviations from the exact written pattern must be considered a lack of, or temporary loss of control, and therefore faulted according to severity of deviation. Credit will be given for smoothness, finesse, attitude, quickness and authority in performing the various maneuvers while controlling speed.

There are eight possible elements in reining: walk-in, stops, spins, rollbacks, circles, backups, lead changes, run downs, and run-arounds. Each element is scored by the judge based on how well it is performed.

Following are brief descriptions of perfect execution for each element.

- **Walk-in:** This brings the horse from the gate to the center of the arena to begin the pattern. The horse should appear relaxed and confident. During this time the horse should not be checked and should walk smoothly into the center of the arena. For some patterns this element may not be present, as the pattern may require that the contestant begin the pattern at the end of the arena.
- **Stops:** The horse is slowed down from a lope to a stop by bringing the hind legs under the horse in a locked position sliding on the hind feet. The horse should enter the stop by bending the back, bringing the hind legs further under the body while maintaining forward motion, ground contact and cadence with the front legs. Throughout the stop, the horse should continue in a straight line while maintaining ground contact with the hind feet.
- **Spins:** Spins are a series of 360 degree turns, executed over a stationary (inside) hind leg. Propulsion for the spin is supplied by the outside rear leg and front legs, and contact should be made with the ground and a front leg. The location of the hindquarters should be fixed at the start of the spin and maintained throughout the spin. The horse should be low and flat throughout the spin. Although one hind leg should be stationary, the front legs should move, and the outside leg should cross over the inside leg. Once these elements have been mastered, then the rider can work on improving speed, cadence, smoothness and finesse.
- **Rollbacks:** Rollbacks are the 180 degree reversal of forward motion completed by running to a stop, rolling (turning) the shoulders back to the opposite direction over the hocks and departing in a lope, as one continuous motion. The horse should not step ahead or back prior to rolling back. Some hesitation is allowed.

- **Circles:** Circles are done at the lope and are of a designated size and speed, which demonstrates control, willingness to guide and degree of difficulty in speed and speed changes. Circles must at all times be run in the area of the arena specified by the pattern description and have a common center point. There must be a clearly defined difference in speed and the size between small and large circles. Additionally, the small slow circles to the right must be similar in size and speed to the small slow circles to the left, as must the large fast circles to the right be same in size and speed as the large fast circles to the left.
- **Back-ups:** A backup is a maneuver in which the horse is moved in a reverse motion in straight line for a required distance – at least ten feet.
- **Hesitate:** To hesitate is the act of demonstrating the horse's ability to stand in a relaxed manner at a designated time in the pattern. In a hesitation, the horse should remain motionless and relaxed. The hesitation is used in many patterns at the end of the pattern to indicate completion of the pattern.
- **Lead Changes:** Lead changes are the act of changing leading legs of the front and rear pairs, at a lope, when changing the direction of travel. The lead change must be executed at a lope with no change of gait or speed and be performed in the exact area of the arena specified by the pattern description. The change of front and rear leads must take place within the same stride to avoid penalty. During the lead change, the horse should remain calm and flat with no indication of annoyance or disobedience.
- **Run Down and Run-arounds:** Run downs and run-arounds should demonstrate control and gradual increase in speed.