

Judge's View of Western Horsemanship

Riding a Western Horsemanship Pattern correctly, riders exhibit their ability to maneuver their horse through a pattern while maintaining control and balance of both the horse and themselves. As a judge I am looking for riders not passengers. I want to see riders communicating effectively with their weight, legs and hands in a seemingly effortless manner. A balanced horse will maintain collection and not break gait, unless asked to do so. Although it is the rider being judged in this class, how the horse moves indicates how effective the rider is.

Transitions should occur when the horse's front leg/shoulder is at the pylon. If the pattern says "beginning at A" then you must be waiting at A to start your pattern. If the pattern says "from A to B ..." then you may walk up to A to start your pattern. Always be sure the judge acknowledges you before beginning the pattern. Likewise at the end of a pattern, the rider needs to acknowledge to the judge by looking at them, that the pattern is complete.

How to Read the Pattern:

1. Stop-Walk Transition
 - Horse needs to be standing square and still. Smoothly move into brisk walk in a straight line
 - Rider needs to have focus point straight ahead in order to maintain straight line. Send body forward with the horse, maintaining the same upright body position as when standing.
2. Walk-Extended Jog Transition
 - Horse needs to maintain straightness and gradually increase stride for extension
 - Rider needs to cue for jog before pylon so transition happens at pylon. Maintain straightness and drive horse forward with increased leg pressure and impulsion created by driving hips forward. Do not bounce or post.
3. Stop
 - Horse needs to stop square with shoulder at pylon and all 4 feet flat on ground
 - Rider needs to cue for stop. Breathe out-sink weight down into seat and heels-Check & Release if required. Maintain straight stop with equal weight in seat bones. If horse does not stop square, check your stirrup length and your weight aids to be sure you are not causing it. If the horse continues to stop at an angle, be ready with your legs to correct that. Once horse is settled, count to 2.
4. 180 degree (½) Turn to Right on Haunches
 - Horse needs to pivot on hind end moving shoulders to right. No more and no less than 180 degrees.
 - Rider needs to sing weight into right seat bone and add left leg. Draw back with reins to keep horse from moving forward.
5. Stop-Lope Right Lead transition
 - Horse needs to lope off on right lead. A few walk steps are acceptable but jogging is not
 - Rider needs to simply give lope cue as they finish the pivot. The left leg will already be on the horse. Do not lean! Maintain an upright balanced body position that will help the horse, not hinder it. Leaning throws the horse off balance. You can feel for the correct lead by knowing that the horse will shift all its' weight over the hind left leg when starting. The inside right shoulder will come up and reach out the furthest. Your right hip/leg will also reach out/rotate to the right. Change the lead if it is incorrect. As a judge I value a rider who knows if the lead was incorrect and tries to fix it.
6. Circle Pylon
 - Horse needs to maintain lope so continue to ride using your legs and voice to keep forward momentum. Try to keep horse collected/balanced so they do not drop their

shoulder in towards the pylon on inside of circle. It is desirable to have the horse's nose pointing forward or to the inside of the circle, not outwards.

- Rider needs to look where they are going around the circle so that they keep the pylon in the middle. The smaller the circle, the higher the degree of difficulty, the higher the points from the judge IF it is completed correctly. Rather be safe than sorry. Ride a circle sized appropriately for your horse and its abilities. Do not break gait.

7. Lope-Jog transition

- Horse needs to break to jog at pylon as indicated on pattern. Do not walk.
- Rider needs to breathe out and give the appropriate cues on time. Be ready with your body as the horse changes gaits and slows. Do not throw your body forward during the downward transitions.

8. Jog ½ circle around the pylon

- Horse should maintain rhythm and balance as they bend in ½ circle around pylon. A slower more balanced jog is desirable to watch and easier to ride.
- Rider should maintain equal distance around pylon and ride it as a ½ circle. Again look in the direction you are traveling as you make the turn.

9. Jog-Lope Left Lead transition

- Horse should start lope on correct lead when shoulder is at pylon. Maintain a straight line of travel
- Rider needs to cue correctly ahead of time so transition occurs at pylon. Use inside left leg closer to cinch if needed during lope transition in case horse moves to left too much and does not maintain a straight line. Maintain lope and do not break gait.

10. Stop and Back Up

- Horse needs to stop square just as before. Start Back Up within 2 seconds. Back up should be free flowing and brisk, straight back at least 1 horse length. Horse should back up using their hind end and not pushing through your hands.
- Rider needs to maintain straightness throughout using weight aids of seat bones, legs and hands. Know which way your horse tends to back up naturally so you can keep them straight. Do not lose body and leg position. Stay upright with your legs underneath you. When finished, look to judge to signal completion of pattern. Move out of the way briskly so you are not in the way of the next rider.

Be prepared for rail work if the judge calls for it. I only ask for rail work if I need help placing my class.

Practice, Practice, Practice. Know HOW to communicate to your horse so they understand WHAT and WHEN. Calculate WHERE you need to ask for transitions so they happen on time i.e. 2 strides before pylon for a jog. Have someone video you so you can see your body position as you ride a pattern. Help your horse complete the pattern by riding balanced and communicating clearly. Do not hinder the horse by being a distraction and sending mixed/confusing/unclear signals.

Walk out your pattern ahead of riding it in the class so you can visualize it. Practicing it with your horse helps your horse to know what to expect. Watch other patterns ahead of you so you can see potential difficult areas.

Perfect patterns are far and few between so the proper, effective riders will often come out on top. Show the judge you really know how to ride!