

The Judge's View

Horse showing should be an enjoyable activity that enables you to receive recognition for all the hard work you do with your horse, showing off both of your talents. As an all around competitor for 30+ years competing in hundreds of classes, as a coach of over 30 first time exhibitors and as an EC general performance judge, here follows my advice!

It's Different at a Show

A horse show is an exhibition of what you have accomplished at home, divided in half. Everyone is a champion at home. There, there is no pressure of people watching, having to get to class on time, patterns to be memorized, an announcer, strange horses, no sleep the night before, etc. This remains true, to a lesser extent, even with years of experience under the rider and horse's belt. A show environment is simply different.

To help minimize the effects of all the changes at a show, get your horse real broke at home. Depending on the events you will be competing in, practice the toughest smallest patterns you can. Even if you know the size of arena at the show, you do not know how tight the judge will set the pattern. Have people help you mimic show sounds around the arena. If you are going to a fair, tie up balloons where the horse will walk. Change your riding environment. If you normally ride alone, bring in horses that you have to ride with, stand beside, pass, etc. If you are normally in a group, ride alone. If your horse has a buddy at home, separate those two while you practice.

Come Prepared

Find out as much about the show and location as you can before you leave home. Know which classes are offered and what the actual schedule looks like in case you have back to back classes that require tack changes. Know exactly the route you will take to the show and prepare to arrive the night before or 1.5 hours before the start of your show. Somehow things always take longer in the morning to get ready and when rushed, exhibitors miss eating, are stressed, get uptight and over react when their horse does not react perfect, run out of time to memorize patterns, quarrels begin, etc.

Before you leave home, be sure your clean clothes are on hangers together for the appropriate classes. Have all your accessories attached to that hanger including ties, gloves, belts, socks, etc. Hats and boots are cleaned. If you have any, bring along copies of your horse registration papers and your memberships in case they are required. Ensure your tack is clean and in good condition. Always carry extra Chicago screws and leather tie strips. Wet Ones are great for washing up quickly throughout the day. Pack water and ready to eat food. This is handy when your nerves finally calm down and you are hungry, or when the canteen line is too long and you need to be getting ready for a class.

If you will be tying your horse to the trailer for the duration of the show, consider the following: What angle do I need to park at so there is shade in the afternoon for the horse? How near to the arena can I park so I am close to the in gate and can see what class is in the arena? How far is the water source for horses? If you will be stabling, consider the following: What type of floor is in the stall? How can I make my horse most

comfortable? Will my hooks work for buckets? How much contact will my horse have to others? Do I need to put up a barrier to prevent fighting? Infections are often picked up at horse shows so be sure you vaccinate in advance and minimize contact with other horses at the show. Never share water or feed buckets with horses from other locations!

Entering Your Classes

When entering your classes for the show, be sure to get the schedule as well. Know what time classes start, when lunch is, when other events like draft horses, miniatures, beef cattle, etc. will be shown. Set yourself up for success by planning where you will be at which times of the day. Just because you think your horse can attempt each class does not mean you should enter it. Make it a positive experience for both you and your horse. A show is not the place to try trail class for the first time. Western Riding requires several flying lead changes every few strides so do not enter just because you can ride western. Do not try a jumping class just because you can jump over one jump at home. Remember your horse is functioning at 50% because of their environment and you.

Know the different divisions and high point awards at a show. Then you can enter the classes that will best set you up to have a successful day. Some high point awards require that certain classes be entered. This is why it is good to get a class list ahead of time. Once you are entered, have the schedule at your work area with your classes listed so you can keep track of how the show is moving along and you can remember if you entered a class or not. If you have more than one exhibitor number, write the horse's name on the back so you do not get confused.

Judging Halter

I will discuss several key events that I judge at Open shows. In Halter, the horse's conformation is being judged. You are asked to walk **your horse** in a straight line to the judge, the judge will step to the side, and you trot your horse still in that straight line for about 30' before turning left and lining up head to tail. The judge is looking for correctness in the body structure and movement. This class is about the horse, not the handler. The handler's job is to show that horse as best as they can to the judge. That includes a brisk walk and trot in straight lines, a set up that sets the horse's feet squarely (depending on breed) under the body and head up so I can see the chest.

Stretching the horse's head forward gives it a leaner throatlatch and shows a longer neck. Leaner is desirable and longer may be depending on how proportionate that is to the rest of the horse. Use a well fitting halter that enhances the horse's features. Handlers of Mares and Stallions need to practice showing the teeth so the judge can look for parrot mouth, an undesirable trait in breeding animals. Always line up a safe distance away from other horse's so neither you nor the judge are in danger.

When I judge this class at an Open show, I am looking for the horse with the most ideal/correct conformation that is athletic enough to get through the days classes.

Judging Showmanship

This class is judged on how well the handler can use the horse to get through the pattern. It is a beautiful display of communication between horse and handler when executed properly. Show up with your horse well groomed and clipped. Use a well fitting halter and preferably a lead with chain under the chin. As a handler be sure your hat is clean and well shaped, girls hair tied back neatly and simple, no dangling, jewelry. The outfit does not need to be expensive but it does need to be neat and well coordinated. Shirts must have a collar, open with jewelry or a scarf for the ladies, closed with a tie or scarf for men. Long sleeves and cuffs for the tops. Your belt should match boots and hat. Clean jeans long enough to cover ankles of boots. Clean hands, gloves preferred for a finished look.

In English, traditional riding attire including helmet, with hair tied neatly back. Ladies wear simple jewelry with a neck pin. Clean neutral colored clothing including darker jacket and lighter shirt with neutral breeches and clean boots. Check with the show committee whether half chaps are allowed or if actual English riding boots are required. Horse's are shown in a bridle.

No spurs, chaps or whips for either discipline are allowed.

Bring pylons or some sort of markers to the show so you can practice your patterns ahead of time. The showmanship pattern should be executed by a confident, smiling handler leading on the left side, never touching the horse, timing the changes to happen when the horse's shoulder is even with the pylon. Each maneuver is scored so complete it before moving on. When asked to stop straight on with the judge, stop one arm length away between the judge and the horse's nose. When switching sides in the inspection a) learn the boxes and always be where the judge can see you and your horse b) never be in the same box as the judge c) move only as quickly as the judge is moving. Always turn the horse away from you and teach the horse to pivot on the hind end, preferably the right hind leg. When leaving the pattern or traveling straight away from the judge, check back over your shoulder to see where the judge is. Staying in the correct position or "box" is important throughout the entire class because that is the safest position for the handler. For safety reasons the lead rope should not be wrapped around the handler's hand but rather looped or one big coil.

As a judge I look for a well prepared, groomed and turned out handler, executing the pattern correctly and with enough confidence to show any other horse in that class.

Riding Pattern Class

Whether it is English or Western, Horsemanship or Equitation, this class is judged on how well the rider can execute the pattern in a balanced position and controlled manner. Ensure you know the pattern and have practiced it before hand. Come into the class with enough contact on the reins that you do not have to adjust much, you are ready to ride the pattern and your hand will not move unnecessarily. Read the pattern well so you know if you must start at the first pylon or if you just need to be moving by then. Set yourself up for a successful pattern. Often riders do not transition early enough, making them late and past the pylon, giving themselves less room for the next maneuver and several more late

transitions. Become a balanced and effective rider that communicates well with your horse and this class is fun.

Always wait for a nod from the judge before commencing your pattern. This is a scored class so every maneuver needs to be judged. Know which side of the pylons you need to be on and when. Getting this mixed up is off pattern and cause for disqualification. It is not fair to score riders who do not follow the pattern because those who rode it correctly had a different degree of difficulty within they were judged. Bucking, excessive backing, rearing are means for disqualification.

If the pattern allows some freedom as to size of circle, ride the best smaller circle you can as this shows a degree of difficulty. It is better to ride a little larger and more correct than smaller less correct. This class is not about speed. Ride at a speed that is comfortable for you and your horse to get through the pattern as best as you can. Too slow is agonizing to watch and too fast encourages errors.

When I judge this horsemanship or equitation class I am looking for “riders’ not “passengers” that ride balanced, communicating well enough with their horse to execute a correct pattern. This rider would be able to get on any horse and ride it well.

Rail Pleasure Class

This class requires the rider to show their horse in such a way that exhibits a proper moving, controlled, balanced horse that is a pleasure to ride. Come into the class with the horse properly warmed up and ready. Enter the gate with sufficient spacing beyond other horses so the judge can get a great first impression of you. Keep your horse collected/balanced at all times. Place your horse in the arena where you can show it off best. That may mean staying away from horses your mount does not like, or staying near to a horse that travels similar to yours. When a transition is asked for, do it as correctly as you can within about 6 seconds. It is okay to wait for other horses to move on out of your way or perhaps you want to get out of the jam first. If your horse throws its head or has otherwise poor transitions, try to not let the judge see that. I like to look around my entire arena so that is harder in my classes. Some judges purposely do not look at certain parts of the arena so use that to your benefit if you can.

For me, the reverse is simply a maneuver to change direction so do it quickly but keep your horse balanced otherwise I may use that if the placings are close. The slowest horse does not necessarily win but a slow, balanced proper moving horse does show a more athletic horse that should place well. Do not break gait during a class as this shows loss of balance and cadence. If your horse is a faster moving horse, stay to the inside track and do not weave on and off to the rail. This changes your horse’s balance and disrupts other horses. Teach your horse to back up. A horse that backs up properly is free on the front end and moves off their hind strongly, exhibiting a more desirable balanced horse.

When passing other horses, always give at least one full horse length around the horse you are passing so that you do not disturb their ride. Stay far enough to the side of the

other rider that you can not reach out and touch them. Never circle in a class as this slows a horse down, giving you an unfair advantage over other horses in the class.

Realize when your horse is disrupting the class and affecting other's performance. Ride to the centre of the arena where you are out of the way. Not only will the judge already have seen that you were not meeting the requirements of the class, but now you will have the respect of fellow competitors for not destroying their opportunity to place.

In western, Junior horses are considered 5 years and younger and can be ridden in a snaffle or bosal with 2 hands or a shank bit with 1 hand. Senior horses are considered 6 years and older and must be ridden 1 hand on a shank bit. Riding any other way is means for disqualification, except in speed events.

Trail Class

Most trail patterns require you to back up, walk over a bridge, side pass, open and close a gate, travel over logs, turn in a box and sometimes carry an object. Practice this all at home in many different variations including rope and metal gates. Use different colored ropes at different heights. Back up through barrels, pylons, logs in straight or curved lines. Sidepass both directions over, between logs in straight and L shapes. Turn in varying sizes of boxes for $\frac{3}{4}$, full, $1\frac{1}{4}$ turns.

Trail is not a speed event but the horse should move freely throughout the pattern. Each maneuver is scored with penalties added on for such things as ticking a log, stepping out of or off an object, breaking stride, etc. Learn the rules. Most committees use AQHA rules so use those if you are in doubt. After 3 refusals at an object, you will be asked to move on. Bucking, Rearing, Blatant disobedience, 2 hands on a shank bit, touching the horse and going off pattern are all means for a score of zero which should not place.

As a judge I look for a horse and rider team that communicate well, maneuver through the obstacles correctly and accumulate the least amount of penalties.

Reining Class

For the Open show level, this is often ridden as a horsemanship pattern and that is fine. It is a loping pattern of circles and straight line, roll backs, pivots and back up. Memorize your pattern and ride it correctly. Your left and right circles need to mirror each other and show clear change in speed and size. If you can not do a flying lead change, take the penalty and do a simple lead change. This gives you less penalties then riding any portion of the circle in a wrong lead, breaking gait and picking up the correct lead. Roll backs are always towards the fence. Always run past centre before stopping and backing up to centre. Stopping before or at centre in this maneuver is a penalty. Teach your horse to pivot on the hind end and do not over or under spin. Get a rule book and learn what the penalties are so you can avoid them.

Some horses spook at a stationary judge sitting in a chair like we often do while judging reining. Have someone sit themselves along the rail at centre and ride your pattern. A

reining pattern is set up so most maneuvers start and finish even with the judge. Get your horse over this so they are not concentrating on the judge more than the rider.

Judging this class I look for the most correctly ridden pattern with the least penalties.

Other tips:

1. Keep a notebook of patterns so you can practice them at home. Write the pattern yourself onto a paper that you can carry with you in your pocket as you prepare for your class. Never depend on someone else to tell you the pattern.
2. Watch how the judge is organizing and placing their classes. This enables you to better prepare for your class. If you placed lower than you thought you deserved, see how those who placed performed compared to you, and adapt if you get another chance. Too often I see horses ridden too jammed up, slow and trashy moving in the western pleasure class so I do not place them. They come in again and ride even worse thinking they were not slow enough. If the rider had looked at what I did place, they would have let their horses move out more freely and placed better.
3. English and western horses should not move the same so ride and have the horses move according to the class they are being ridden in.
4. Always have your number on both sides of your saddle pad where the judge can easily see it. Do not take the chance that the judge wanted to write your number down but could not see your number so you got missed.
5. Gauge your successes of the day according to your own abilities and performance level. Sometimes you will place higher than you deserved and sometimes lower.

I often hear from competitors that the judge had a favorite for the day. The truth is that the real broke, collected, balanced, athletic, obedient horse will naturally do all the classes well and therefore deservingly earn higher placings. Push yourself and continuously strive to be better than you were last time. And have fun! Meet new people, encourage other competitors, thank anyone who helped you and thank the committee for hosting an event for you to compete at. Be the kind of exhibitor and competitor that others enjoy winning and losing against.

Written by Tara Reimer of Cloud 9 Ranch in Steinbach, Manitoba – February 2013

Tara Reimer BSc. Ag has always been involved with horses. Tara spent 15 years with 4-H. From young, she has driven and shown the family's Belgian hitch and now enjoys her own team at home. Tara and her husband, Derek, own/operate Cloud 9 Ranch where she teaches Western and English riding and vaulting lessons, trains horses, judges and gives clinics. She is a CHA Clinic Instructor certifying riding coaches across Canada and USA and she is the CHA Region 2 Director. She is also an AQHA Professional Horseman. Through Equine Canada she is a General Performance Judge and Western Coach. Tara continues to show horses and enjoys the challenge of preparing young horses for Futurities. She loves horses no matter the discipline. She has experience showing AQHA, Futurities, Open shows, Gymkhana, Reining, Rodeo and Working Cow Horse Events. Tara's passion is teaching, humans or horses. She is proud of all her students who are effective and attentive riders whether in the show ring or on the trail. Her students have earned National AQHA Championships.

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