

## THE SHOW RING - ARE YOU AND THE HORSE READY?

Performance showing is considered by most horsemen as the ultimate goal in the showing of a horse. In the case of 4-H horse activity, it is the most demanding preparation, the most training and the greatest attention to detail. Performance showing is as variable as the types of horses shown. It can be a class for elegant gaited horses or it can be a class for versatile Western trail horses; it varies from high-stepping harness horses and ponies to the novelty races of gymkhana events; it can be as sedate and precise as dressage or as fast and free as pole bending and barrel racing. But through it all runs a central theme, a unity of purpose, this being to display the horse at his best, doing what he does best. The rider then, in contrast to his dominant position in equitation classes, has a minor role. He is there to give aid and direction, to encourage but not as is all too frequent "go along for the ride". In contrast to equitation where the rider should seem to merge with his mount, in performance the emphasis should shift to the horse, and the rider should seem to be no longer a part of the scene. In fact, the rider should seem to almost disappear.

Showing in performance classes is and should be fun. This fun should be the result of the *knowledge* that both horse and rider are *completely prepared* to accept the challenge of demonstrating the true ability of both. The show arena should not, however, be looked upon as a "show-off arena", nor should it be considered a schooling arena or training ground. It is a place of work, strict rules, and attention to the 4 C's: confidence, cooperation, consideration, and carefulness.

What is required to show a horse in a performance class? What is required to win? Neither question can be answered simply. There is complete dependence on all past experience and knowledge; since as was previously indicated, this type of showing is more or less the apex of all horse showing.

As is stated in the recipe for rabbit stew, first you must catch a rabbit, so indeed to show in performance classes first there must be a horse. There are a wide

variety of performance classes so that almost any horse can do moderately well in one or more of them. If interest lies in one particular phase of performance, a horse suitable to be shown in those particular classes is required. Selection of a suitable horse to fit desires or demands is of major importance. It is virtually impossible to take just any horse and hope to compete on equal terms with horses bred, selected, and trained for one particular type of performance. No one should expect to show one horse in very many classes. Most horse shows preclude entry of one horse in more than a very limited number of classes, and very few horses are able to compete successfully in more than a very few classes.

It should be borne in mind that the actual length of time a horse is engaged in a performance class is quite limited, for as little as 20 seconds in races to as much as 20 minutes or more in large pleasure classes. Since the exposition time is so short, it's obvious that the show ring cannot be used to train. There is little enough time to just demonstrate already learned ability. It also serves to emphasize the fact that most of the work for performance classes must take place outside the show arena and long before the show.

Once the horse has been properly trained and the rider is ready, then actual showing can be considered.

Showing begins long before entry into the ring. Most horses cannot be "turned-on" at the entry gate. They must be warmed up to the occasion. The rider has to prepare himself as well. But, even farther back, is the saddling or harnessing of the horse and the dressing of the rider. Both horse and rider should be prepared long enough in advance of the call for a class so there is no rushing. Great care should be taken to insure every detail is correct. A check list such as a pilot uses before take-off is very helpful. The tack of the horse should be checked to be sure it is sound and complete and it conforms to the class requirement. These requirements do vary from show to show within the same class; failure to meet requirements is just cause for dismissal or even refusal of entry. Typical items to watch for are



ATTENTION TO THE 4 C'S: CONFIDENCE, COOPERATION, CONSIDERATION AND CAREFULNESS

such things as slickers, spurs, crops, ropes and hobbles. A check of the horse's feet and shoes could forestall many problems. Insuring the tightness of shoes is essential before most performance classes because re-shoeing during a class is impossible. Many of these classes are extremely hard on shoes, so only good shoes that have been put on properly should be allowed. Equal care should be taken to insure that personal appointments are as prescribed and are complete.

This is also the time to make the final decision concerning actual entry into a class. Since most horses are vanned to shows, the chances of leg injury are always present. It is much better to scratch an entry than to enter a lame, injured, or sour horse. This type of entry is an insult to the judge, to the audience as well as to fellow exhibitors and to the horse himself. In general, it is considered a poor practice to ride your horse to a show and then expect top quality performances. It should be remembered that to be in top form, both horse and rider must be fresh, rested and in top physical condition. Also, it is extremely difficult to keep a horse and appointments clean and neat during a long ride.

When all preliminary preparations for a show have been completed, the warm-up of the horse should begin. This should be timed so as to give both horse and rider a chance to get stiff muscles loosened up and to achieve a mental attitude conducive to competition. This length of time will vary with each horse and with the class. Many horses need only to be walked for a few minutes, others perform best when quite warm. The horse should not be indiscriminately raced nor should last minute training be attempted. If an exercise area has been provided this should be used. If none is available, some area away from people, cars and other distractions can usually be found.

Alleyways, runways, and parking areas or any area where there are many people should be avoided during warm-ups. Anticipation of the classes will create a great deal of excitement, particularly in young people. This excitement is often transmitted to the horse. Every effort should be used to ease this tension and control excess excitement.

Timing warm-ups to be complete at about the time a class is called takes practice and a knowledge of the horse. It is generally much better to have to wait a few minutes to enter the arena than for the rest of the class to have to wait for a late entry. All entries should be ready to enter the arena when the class or their numbers are called. There should be no attempt at entry before a class is called and certainly the entry should

not be made late. Some shows allow for only a short waiting period so punctuality is essential. Each class has its own prescribed rules and procedures. Every rider should be completely familiar with these procedures from entry to exit. Failure to follow a given course or the directions from judges and stewards will be considered disqualifications in many events. When gait or direction changes are called for, compliance should be as rapid as is safe and correct. It is most disrespectful to hesitate or ignore such directions and if repeated, often calls for dismissal from the class. The conduct in a class, whether in a group that is working together or an individual working singly, should be approached in a businesslike manner. Even though these classes are usually "fun", as indeed they should be, they are all serious. It is a time for maximum effort on the part of both the rider and his mount. It is not a time to wave to friends or to "show-off". No horse should be handled in such a manner as to make him excited. There is a wide difference between animation and excitement.

While in group classes, bunching up should be avoided. If it becomes necessary to get away from a pack or bunch, a rider may short cut a corner, pass and get into the clear. A reasonable distance between horses should be kept. The horse should be placed in such a position that the judge can clearly observe him. However, one rider should never purposely attempt to place his own mount between the judge and a competitor. This is bad show manners.

When horses are asked to be aligned in the center ring, immediate compliance is again in order. Failure to line up quickly or properly can accomplish nothing more than irritate the judge and cause a "loss of points". There should be room left on each side of the horse for close inspection by the judge. When horses are too close the judge cannot see; what he cannot see he cannot place. What usually happens as a result of the judge's not being able to see a horse is a lower placing than perhaps deserved. At no time should the exhibitor relax or allow the horse to relax. Showing begins at entry and ends *after* exit. Nothing creates a worse impression of a horse than to see one badly out of position among a group being held posed and at attention. There is no way of anticipating a judge's turning for a look backwards, so the necessity of keeping set is always present. The audience is watching also.

Many performance classes do not require posing, gait changes and the kinds of situations previously discussed. Classes such as Western trail, barrel racing, pole bending and reining usually have a contestant working alone, against a clock or under the careful

scrutiny of a judge. In timed events, form counts little except as it may effect time; but even in these timed events, time is not all important.

Generally speaking, the same type of actions are required in such classes as reining and trail. Emphasis should be on a quiet, steady, well-mannered display. At no time should the rider display loss of temper, with its resultant abuse of the horse, nor should the rider indulge in any actions that would tend to excite or annoy the horse. Very careful use of the reins to avoid any indication of head fighting is required. If spurs are worn, they should not be used except with a light touch.

When winners are announced there is a tendency to either relax or become more excited. Both should be avoided. Win graciously - lose the same way. When riding to pick up the rosette, care should be taken to avoid riding over the judge or steward. If no award is received, exit should be in an orderly manner after the award presentation.

Pay close attention to the official discussion of the placing of the class. This will help you to perform better in the future. One of the worst things that can be done after a class is to engage in criticism of the judge and his decisions. He usually knows much more about the entire business than any of the exhibitors and was in a much better position to see the class, thus render a decision. It's all too easy to find other losers to "cry" with. After all, there can be only *one* winner.

Another rather unpardonable bit of conduct is all too frequently seen following the completion of a class. This is groups of exhibitors, now free from the anticipation of the show arena, racing around, both mounted and afoot, causing distractions, confusion and in general, being of no little annoyance to the exhibitors in the arena the judge and the audience. It is certainly poor manners and thoughtlessness on the part of those thus engaged.



Win or lose, improvement can always be made.

Everyone can profit from experience and the show arena is good experience. Always the attempt should be "To make the best better".

The performance classes for horses are so many and varied that it is not possible to describe them in a guide sheet of this kind. Instead, follow the official rules of the show in which you are exhibiting.

### SPECIAL SHOW HINTS FOR YOUTH GROUPS

- 1) Be ready when class is called.
- 2) Good sportsmanship shall prevail at all times.
- 3) Unnecessary roughness or discourtesy will be cause to be dismissed from further competition.
- 4) Contestants shall, at all times, act as ladies and gentlemen.
- 5) Exhibitor shall keep horse under control at all times.
- 6) No horse is to be exercised except in assigned area. No riding shall be permitted in spectator or concession area.
- 7) Do not tie horses to arena fence or park them at the arena.
- 8) Check saddle cinch before every performance and loosen cinch after each class when dismounted.
- 9) Neat and appropriate attire shall be worn in all classes. Sneakers and low shoes are not considered safe or suitable.
- 10) Teach horse to lead easily and freely at any gait before trying to show in ring.
- 11) Walk beside a horse when leading, never in front
- 12) Always turn the horse to the right and walk around him when showing. This allows the judge an unobstructed view.
- 13) Every show announcement is to carry a full description of what the class will be expected to do and how it will be judged.



DRAW OR PASTE A PICTURE OF YOUR HORSE HERE.

