

## **Western Horsemanship**

Judging the Western Horsemanship is much different than judging the Western Pleasure class, in that the class is judged on the ability of the horse and rider to complete a pattern designed by the judge. For judging contestant purposes, the pattern will be distributed prior to the class beginning. The judging participant should spend time looking over the pattern and visualizing what the pattern should look like. The following is a more in-depth description of the Western Horsemanship class. Information was compiled from American Paint Horse Association (APHA) and American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) handbooks.

The western 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 body position. The ideal horsemanship pattern is extremely precise with the rider and horse working in complete unison, executing each maneuver with subtle aids and cues. All exhibitors must enter the ring and then work individually or each exhibitor may be worked from the gate individually.

**Suggested Scoring:** Scoring may be on a basis of 0 to 20 with half-point increments acceptable. Ten points should be allocated toward overall appearance of exhibitor and horse and 10 points allocated toward performance of the pattern.

**Overall Appearance of Exhibitor and Horse (10 points):** The exhibitor's overall poise, confidence, appearance and position throughout the class, as well as the physical appearance of the horse, will be evaluated.

**Position of Exhibitor:** The exhibitor should appear natural in the seat and ride with a balanced, functional and correct position regardless of the maneuver or gait being performed. During the rail work and pattern the exhibitor should have strong, secure and proper position. Exhibitors should sit and maintain an upright position with the upper body at all gaits. The rider should sit in the center of the saddle and the horse's back with the legs hanging to form a straight line from the ear, through the center of the shoulder and hip, touching the back of the heel or through the ankle. The heels should be lower than the toes, with a slight bend in the knee, and the lower leg should be directly under the knee.

1. The rider's back should be flat, relaxed and supple. An overly stiff and/or overly arched lower back will be penalized. The shoulders should be back, level and square. The rider's base of support should maintain secure contact with the saddle from the seat to the inner thigh. Light contact should be maintained with the saddle and horse from the knee to mid-calf. The knee should point forward and remain closed with no space between the exhibitor's knee and the saddle. The exhibitor will be penalized for positioning the legs excessively behind or forward of the vertical position. Regardless of the type of stirrup, the feet may be placed home in the stirrup, with the boot heel touching the stirrup, or may be placed with the ball of the foot in the center of the stirrup. The rider's toes should be pointing straight ahead or slightly turned out, with the ankles straight or slightly broken in. Riding with toes only in the stirrup will be penalized. Those exhibitors that can maintain the proper position throughout all maneuvers should receive more credit. When

riding without stirrups, the exhibitor should maintain the same position as previously described.

2. Both hands and arms should be held in a relaxed, easy manner, with the upper arm in a straight line with the body. The arm holding the reins should be bent at the elbow, forming a line from the elbow to the horse's mouth. The free hand and arm may be carried bent at the elbow in a similar position as the hand holding the reins or straight down at the rider's side. Excessive pumping of the free arm as well as excessive stiffness will be penalized. The rider's wrist is to be kept straight and relaxed, with the hand held at about 30 to 45 degrees inside the vertical. The rein hand should be carried immediately above or slightly in front of the saddle horn. The reins should be adjusted so that the rider has light contact with the horse's mouth, and at no time shall reins require more than a slight hand movement to control the horse. Excessively tight or loose reins will be penalized.
3. The rider's head should be held with the chin level and the eyes forward, and may be directed slightly toward the direction of travel. Excessive turning of the head to the inside of the circle, or down at the horse's head or shoulder, will be penalized.
4. The exhibitor should not crowd the exhibitor next to or in front of them when working on the rail and should pass to the inside of the arena. When reversing on the rail, the exhibitor should always reverse to the inside of the arena.

**APPEARANCE OF HORSE:** The horse's body condition and overall health and fitness should be assessed. The horse should appear fit and carry weight appropriate for the body size. A horse that appears sullen, dull, lethargic, emaciated, drawn or overly tired should be penalized according to severity. Tack should fit the horse properly and be neat, clean and in good repair.

**PERFORMANCE (10 POINTS):** The exhibitor should perform the work accurately, precisely, smoothly and with a reasonable amount of promptness. Increasing speed of the maneuvers performed increases the degree of difficulty; however, accuracy and precision should not be sacrificed for speed. Exhibitors that perform the pattern sluggishly and allow their horse to move without adequate impulsion, collection or cadence will be penalized. The horse should perform all maneuvers in the pattern willingly, briskly and readily, with minimal visible or audible cueing.

1. Failure to follow the prescribed pattern, knocking over or working on the wrong side of the cones, or severe disobedience will not result in a disqualification, but should be severely penalized, and the exhibitor should not place above an exhibitor that completes the pattern correctly.
2. Excessive schooling or training, or willful abuse by the exhibitor is cause for disqualification.
3. The horse should track straight, freely and at the proper cadence for the prescribed gait. Transitions should be smooth and prompt in the pattern and on the rail, and should be performed when called for on the rail. The horse's head and neck should be straight and in line with its body while performing straight lines, and slightly arched to the inside on curved lines or circles. Circles should be round, and performed at the appropriate speed, size, and location as requested in the pattern. The counter-canter should be performed smoothly, with no change in cadence or stride unless specified in the pattern.

4. The stop should be straight, square, prompt, smooth and responsive, with the horse maintaining a straight body position throughout the maneuver. The back should be smooth and responsive.
5. Turns should be smooth and continuous. When performing a turn on the haunches, the horse should pivot on the inside hind leg and step across with the front legs. A rollback is a stop and 180-degree turn over the hocks with no hesitation. Backing during turns will be penalized severely.
6. The horse should step across with the front and hind legs when performing the side pass, leg yield, and two track. The side pass should be performed with the horse keeping the body straight while moving directly lateral in the specified direction. When performing a leg yield, the horse should move forward and lateral in a diagonal direction with the horse's body arced opposite to the direction that the horse is moving. In the two track, the horse should move forward and lateral in a diagonal direction with the horse's body held straight or bent in the direction the horse is moving.
7. A simple or flying change of lead should be executed precisely in the specified number of strides and/or at the designated location. A simple change of lead is performed by breaking to a walk or trot for one to three strides. Flying changes should be simultaneous front and rear. All changes should be smooth and timely.
8. Position of the exhibitor and performance of the horse and rider on the rail must be considered in the final placing.

**FAULTS:** Faults can be classified as minor, major or severe. The judge will determine the appropriate classification of a fault based upon the degree and/or frequency of the infraction. A minor fault will result in a 1/2- to 4-point deduction from the exhibitor's score. A major fault will result in a deduction of 4 1/2 points or more from the exhibitor's score. An exhibitor that incurs a severe fault avoids elimination, but should be placed below all other exhibitors that complete the pattern correctly. A minor fault can become a major fault and a major fault can become a severe fault when the degree and/or frequency of the infraction(s) merits.

*Faults in the overall appearance of exhibitor and horse include:*

- a) Loose, sloppy, dirty or poor fitting clothing or hat; or loss of hat
- b) Over-cueing with reins and/or legs
- c) Poorly groomed, conditioned or trimmed horse; or poorly or ill-fitted equipment
- d) Excessive staring at judge, head held crooked, or severe turning of the head
- e) Stiff, artificial or unnatural body, leg, arm and/or head position
- f) Reins too long or short, or uneven
- g) Loose leg with open knee, or toes pointed down
- h) Shoulders held crooked or arms held in a straight, unbent position
- i) Exhibitor looking down to check leads or falling forward when stopping
- j) Poor position of the exhibitor in saddle, legs too forward or back

*Faults of the performance include:*

- a) Wrong lead or break of gait for a few strides
- b) Oblong or flat-sided circles, or horse dropping shoulder (counter arc) when circling
- c) Stopping rough, crooked, or dropping a hip out when stopping
- d) Backing sluggishly or crooked

- e) Failure to maintain a pivot foot or stepping behind with the front legs when turning, or failure to complete entire 90-, 180-, 270- or 360-degree turn
- f) Holding the head and/or neck excessively crooked when moving in straight lines or when stopping or backing
- g) Showing resistance when cued or reined
- h) Hesitation during any maneuver unless specified
- i) Failure of horse to stand still in pattern
- j) Pattern work or rough transitions
- k) Failure to exhibit change of speed when requested

*Severe faults in the overall appearance of exhibitor and horse (avoids disqualification but should be placed below other exhibitors that do not incur a severe fault) include:*

- a) Touching horse
- b) Grabbing the saddle horn or any other part of the saddle
- c) Cueing with the end of the romal
- d) Spurring in front of the shoulder

*Severe faults of the performance (avoids disqualification but should be placed below other exhibitors that do not incur a severe fault) include:*

- a) Omission or addition of maneuvers
- b) Turning the wrong way
- c) Knocking over a cone or working on the wrong side of the cones
- d) Kicking at other horses, exhibitors or judge
- e) Severe disobedience or resistance by horse including, but not limited to, rearing, bucking or pawing

*Disqualifications (should not be placed) include:*

- a) Failure by exhibitor to wear correct number in visible manner
- b) Willful abuse
- c) Excessive schooling or training
- d) Fall by horse or rider
- e) Illegal use of hands on reins
- f) Use of prohibited equipment

**SUGGESTED FINAL SCORING** shall be on a basis of 0-20, with an approximate breakdown as follows:

1. Score of 20: Excellent equitation, including body position and use of aids. Pattern is performed promptly, precisely and smoothly.
2. Score of 18-19: Generally excellent performance, with one minor fault in appearance and position of exhibitor or execution of the pattern (performance).
3. Score of 16-17: Generally good pattern execution and equitation, with one minor fault in precision or execution of pattern (performance) or appearance and position of exhibitor.
4. Score of 14-15: Average pattern that lacks quickness or precision, or rider has obvious equitation flaws that prevent effective horsemanship, or commits two or three minor faults in the performance or appearance and position of exhibitor.

5. Score of 12-13: One major fault or several minor faults in the performance and/or appearance and position of exhibitor that precludes effective communication with the horse.
6. Score of 10-11: Two major faults or many minor faults in the performance or appearance and position of exhibitor.
7. Score of 6-9: Several major faults or one severe fault in the performance or appearance and position of exhibitor. Exhibitor demonstrates a complete lack of riding ability or commits a severe fault in the performance or appearance and position of exhibitor.
8. Score of 1-5: Exhibitor commits one or more severe faults in the performance or appearance and position of exhibitor, but does complete the class and avoids disqualification.

**Suggested terms for comparing equitation and horsemanship riders:**

1. He was more correct in his pattern being quicker about picking up his leads and quieter about his cues.
2. She was more correct in her pattern showing more shape to her circle and more correct placement of her final stop.
3. She was more accurate in the placement of her second stop, placing her in more proper position for her departure into her left lead.
4. She was more precise in her turn around, avoiding contact with the second marker.
5. He was more stylish about his first departure at the jog, as 3 was extremely crooked and delayed.
6. He was faster in his turn around, spinning over his hocks with more flair, and setting himself up more properly for his departure into his circle to the right.
7. She was more correct in the placement of her simple at marker two.
8. He was more precise in his flying lead change from his circle to the left and into his circle to the right.
9. He was more correct in maintaining the proper gait when loping down the strait away to the final marker.
10. He was more correct in maintaining the proper lead when performing his circle to the left.
11. She was more accurate in the placement of her circle being more nearly between the second and third marker.
12. He was more correct in pushing his horse forward in the downward transition to the jog after the third marker.
13. He was straighter in his lope from the first to second marker.
14. Two had the advantage of accuracy and precision throughout the pattern, especially evident in his lope line from the third to the fourth marker.
15. She was more correct in picking up and maintaining the proper diagonal in her trot circle to the right.
16. He was more correct in changing diagonals after his circle to the left and prior to his straight line trot to the third marker.

**Key terms for pattern work:** correct, quicker, quieter, accurate, precise, stylish, faster and straighter.

**Position:**

1. He dropped a straighter line from his shoulder, through his hip and to the back of his heel.
2. He was quieter about his upper body when loping left on the rail.
3. She was taller with her upper body and remained quieter about her hands, especially when transitioning from the jog to the lope.
4. He was more correct in the placement of his eyes, especially when changing diagonals out of his circle.
5. She had a stronger and quieter leg when loping down the straight line.
6. He was quieter about his hands when changing leads out of his figure eight.
7. She sat deeper in her saddle, giving her a quieter appearance at all gaits and a strong seat overall.
8. He was more correct in looking up and around his corners, consequently being taller and straighter about the placement of his shoulders.
9. She used fewer and more subtle cues in changing leads when loping out of her circle to the left and approaching the straight line to the third marker.
10. She was more correct in the placement of her eyes when performing her turn around and lope off.
11. He was quieter about his hands in his flying lead change at the center marker.
12. She was a more stylish rider who sat deeper and stronger in her saddle and was the quietest through her pattern.
13. He was the most correct in the placement of his hands.
14. She had a stronger leg evident by her being able to keep her heels down throughout all gaits.
15. He sat deeper in his saddle and drove his heels down in the stirrups to have the most correct heel position of any other rider in the class.
16. She was more correct in looking around her circle, especially when changing diagonals.
17. He was quieter with his free arm and was more correct about his upper body position.
18. She was quicker and more stylish in picking up all diagonals.
19. She presented the most desirable picture of horse and rider working in unison; she was a more effective rider, who showed her horse to its fullest potential.
20. Executed her aids with more discretion, which complemented the overall appearance of control and harmony of horse and rider working together.
21. Gave a more complete picture of horse and rider working in unison.
22. Maintained a picture of confidence and control.
23. Sat taller in the saddle, riding with more style and confidence.
24. Showed a more elegant and correct posture.
25. Maintained a smoother and more controlled ride throughout the class.

26. Was a stronger, more capable, more confident rider.
  27. Carried her head up, was more alert, attentive and confident.
  28. Sat taller and more erect in the saddle, holding her head higher, while looking straighter through the horse's ears.
  29. Sat deeper in the saddle, with her weight more evenly distributed.
  30. Was quieter and deeper-seated.
  31. Steadier at the canter, sitting deeper in the saddle.
  32. More rhythmic and effortless in her position and steadier in her seat at the canter.
  33. Was squarer in the shoulders, yet more relaxed in her back, which allowed her to more easily absorb the concussion of the horse's motion.
  34. Was squarer with her shoulders and more correctly arched in her lower back.
  35. Maintained a more correct, straighter line from her shoulder through her hip to her heel.
  36. Had kinder, more sympathetic hands and was relaxed in her arms, which more easily allowed her to follow the movement of the horse's head at the walk and canter.
  37. Lighter, more effective hands, which encouraged her horse to have a more elegant head set with more flexion at the poll.
  38. More stable and educated hands.
  39. Maintained a horizontal line from bit to elbow.
  40. Smoother and more effective execution of the aids, showing more adaptability, sympathy and control.
  41. Had a more secure leg that maintained closer contact with the sides of the horse, which allowed her to be more discreet in her aids.
  42. Stronger, more effective leg with more angulation to the heel.
  43. A more solid heel.
  44. Carried more weight in her heel.
  45. More correct rotation of the leg, which allowed the toes to be pointed straight ahead.
  46. Maintained more contact with her upper leg, showing more angulation to her heels, with the toes pointed forward.
  47. Easier and more fluid posting at the trot.
  48. More effortless and rhythmic posting at the trot.
  49. More functionally correct, maintaining correct diagonals at the trot and correct leads at the canter.
  50. Was quieter with her hands and lower leg at the posting trot.
  51. Was smoother at the posting trot.
  52. Maintained a smoother and more controlled ride throughout the class.
  53. Posted more correctly with the motion of her horse.
  54. Stayed with her horse and sat the transitions more smoothly.
- Key words for position:** straighter, quieter, taller, correct, stronger, deeper, stylish

### **Suggested Terms for Criticizing a Rider**

1. Was a sloppier rider, with less control of her leg.
2. Was round-shouldered.
3. Carried his leg too far forward.
4. Failed to maintain contact with the knee and thigh.
5. Was rough and unsteady with her hands.
6. Exhibited less balance and control.
7. Took the wrong diagonal (lead) when trotting (cantering).
8. Was loose and uncontrolled in her lower leg, and failed to keep her weight in her heels.
9. Lost her stirrup at the canter.
10. Had to look down to check her leads.
11. Lacked control and confidence.
12. Carried her hands too high and with her wrists broken.
13. Continually kept her heel in her horse's side.
14. Was loose with her elbows at the canter.
15. Turned her toes out too far.
16. Gripped with the back of her calf.
17. Leaned forward and hunched her shoulders at the canter.

### **Sample Western Horsemanship Reasons**

---

#### **I PLACED THE WESTERN HORSEMANSHIP 1-2-3-4**

There was a top rider in 1 who was the most correct and stylish rider of all, and a bottom rider in 4, who had two major deviations from the pattern.

In the top pair, I placed 1 over 2, as 1 was more correct in the placement of his turn around at the second marker. Furthermore, he was straighter and stronger through his upper body and was more correct in the placement of his leg. He drove his heel deeper into his stirrup, having the most correct heel position of any rider in class today.

I will grant 2 was more correct in her departure to the jog at the first marker.

Advancing on to a closer middle pair, I placed 2 over 3. Two was straighter in her initial departure into the pattern, and proceeded to have the nicest stop at the second marker of any horse in the class today. Additionally she had a stronger leg than 3 and dropped a straighter, more correct overall line from her shoulder, through her hip, and to the back of her heel. She was



steadier in her upper body at the final straight line lope in the pattern, and ended the pattern with a quicker and straighter back at the final marker.

I did see 3 was quieter about his hands in the turn around.

Moving on to an easy decision in the bottom pair it is 3 over 4. Three was more correct in his turn around, as he avoided contact with the marker. Additionally, and more importantly, he was more correct in picking up the proper lead into his final straight line at the lope.

I will grant 4 was smoother in her final stop and back.

However, I faulted 4 and can easily use her bottom, as she had two major faults in her pattern. First, due to poor preparation, she knocks over the marker in her turn around. Second, she picks up the wrong lead in her final straight line at the lope for three strides before correcting to the proper lead. Additionally, she is the most incorrect in her body position overall, and therefore can go no higher than last. For these reasons, I placed the class of Western Horsemanship 1-2-3-4.

---

## **Reference**

Official Handbook of the American Quarter Horse Association, 2002.