

Oklahoma 4-H Horse Project Member Self-Evaluation

Horse Shows: Showing in Western Pleasure

4H-ANSI-416

Western Pleasure class is designed for you to exhibit how well your horse performs the gaits: walk, jog and lope. The class procedure is fairly easy, you are instructed to walk, jog or lope along the arena rail with a group of others. This class is frequently one that those inexperienced with showing will enter. However, excellence requires a horse to be broke, willing and responsive with defined ways of movement. As with any competitive event, success requires preparation, practice and self-evaluation. This 4-H member guide provides questions for you to answer about how you prepare for and perform the western pleasure class. Hopefully, you will have the chance to discuss your answers with others and identify some of the common and various ways others prepare themselves and their horse for horse shows. You will likely find that a rulebook will be needed, so ask your leader or parent for a copy before you work through the questions.

Do you know the rules?

As with any class, there are requirements for certain types of tack and attire. Which of the following pieces of tack are allowed in the Western Pleasure class:

- Closed or roping reins
- Mechanical hackamores
- Tie downs
- Snaffle bits

Thoughts and discussion: Can you describe each of the pieces of equipment listed above? Is your definition of snaffle bit the same as described in the rule book of the show? Are there conditions that none of the answers above would be allowed, i.e. certain age of a horse? What are other types of equipment that are allowed, i.e. bits? How about attire (your clothing): What is allowed or required, i.e. hats, boots?

'Evaluating Myself'

Being able to objectively evaluate your actions is an important skill for success. This guide contains a list of questions to help you develop self-evaluation skills. Some questions may not have a single, correct answer. Some follow-up questions for your own thought and possible group discussion are provided for each question.

By completing this guide you will learn more about yourself and your actions to help in future decision making. Completing this with a group will allow you to learn from others experiences. Group discussions should be positive, encouraging and non-judgmental, so you and others will feel comfortable speaking with one another. Remember, different methods and actions are not necessarily wrong, and there isn't necessarily only one right or wrong answer to all the questions.

First Step: Functionally Correct

It is important that a Western Pleasure horse be functionally correct. This means that it takes the gaits when asked, maintains the gaits asked and moves from one gait from another when asked. How would you rate your horse on functional correctness?

- My horse usually resists me when I ask for certain gaits to the point he becomes ill or ignores my cues
- I usually have to really cue my horse hard to take or keep a certain gait
- My horse takes gaits and keeps the gaits I ask for, but sometimes he resists by pulling the reins, moving his head up or down too much, mouthing the bit or other noticeable ways
- All in all, my horse is pretty good at picking up the gaits and keeping the gaits without much cueing by me

Thoughts and discussion: Do you know which lead you are on when loping? What practice routines could be done to help a horse be more functionally correct? How do you cue for different gaits?

How Broke?

A Western Pleasure Horse should move through the gaits and at desired speeds without observable cueing from the rider. Your horse should appear willing, alert and broke. Does your horse frequently exhibit undesirable traits which suggest unwillingness or resistance?

- a. My horse moves too fast, and won't slow down when I cue
- b. My horse moves too slow, and wants to break gait
- c. My horse wants to buck, kick or switch its tail when I ask it to move at certain gaits around other horses
- d. My horse hates it when I use rein cues and shows it by backing its ears, holding its head high, mouthing the bit or ...
- e. I have to keep a tight rein so my horse will go the speed and direction I want him to move

Thoughts and discussion: Does your horse act one way during practices and another at shows? How does your horse behave in large groups of horses?

Movement Quality

Judges look for functionally correct, willing horses that appear broke. Beyond that, horses are judged on how well they move in comparison to what is desired in the class. There are many different terms used to describe quality of movement. The terms may be hard to understand and hard to identify. Several of the terms used to describe movement quality in Western Pleasure are defined below. Ask others to help explain any of the terms that are confusing. Think of how your horse moves and rate him within each of the terms as:

1	2	3	4	5
highly desirable	better than average	good enough	needs help	doubt that he/she will ever come close

- _____ Consistent: Moves at a constant, desirable rate of speed and strides without obvious cues from the rider. (Think: moves the same way all the time)
- _____ Cadenced: Each foot moves distinctly and in rhythm within each stride so the number of strides within a set distance or time is consistent. Cadence should be flowing, of natural stride length, and reasonably slow as long as the gait is distinct. (Think: members of a marching band moving in step)
- _____ Distinct: The movement of each foot is clearly observable and in proper rhythm for the stride. An indistinct horse may appear to drag his feet or his feet may move out of rhythm making the normal beats per stride hard to distinguish
- _____ Rhythmic: The rate that each foot moves within strides is consistent and cadenced. (Think: like the beat of a song)
- _____ Balanced: Moves with collection so that the weight of the front and hind quarters are centered under the rider as the horse moves
- _____ Collected: Stride length, drive (impulsion from the hindquarters) and head carriage combine to allow for a balanced, flowing stride that feels smooth to the rider. Hind legs should reach well under the horse while maintaining a distinct and cadenced gait
- _____ Frame: The appearance of the horse's body while moving. When in-frame the horse is moving with collection while carrying his head and neck in a relaxed manner. The poll (top of the head) is level with or slightly above the withers. The nose is slightly in front of the position of the ears in relation to the ground (the face is positioned in front of a vertical line to the ground). When moving in frame, the top-line (poll to the tail) of the horse appears to remain level instead of having a lot of up and down movement in the head, neck or hips.

Thoughts and discussion: Can you describe how the legs move in sequence with one another at a walk, trot and lope? How many 'beats does each stride have? What other terms can you think of to describe movement quality? What happens to movement quality when a horse moves without any drive or impulsion from the hindquarters? Is it harder for a horse to move slow and have movement quality or harder to have movement quality while traveling fast?

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert E. Whitson, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President, Dean, and Director of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. 1209 GH