



## THE NOVICE RIDER ETIQUETTE HANDBOOK.

In the world of horse competitions there are certain dos and don'ts which each of us has to learn. Herein we will address very basic stuff relating to horse shows, eventing, dressage, driving, english and western pleasure, judged trail rides, foxhunting and trail riding etiquette. Why? Because if you ever find yourselves engaged in any of these events, you don't want to look the fool! Remember that there are many, many more things to know and there are rulebooks put out by each association (listed at the end) to deal with specific issues. When and if you get serious about competitions you will, of course, need to join one of these associations and familiarize yourself with all the ins and outs of that specific discipline. If you are not that serious and only interested in schooling events, then the following will save you from embarrassing moments! Naturally, a mentor is the best teacher. Each discipline listed herein gives a very short description of what is expected of the rider/horse combination and the judge's expectations for that class. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is to observe and ask. Never enter an event without first attending one. Find someone who knows the ropes and can lead you towards a fun and interesting experience. All words in italics will be listed at the end of this paper with an appropriate explanation. These are general rules only. More details can be found on the various websites listed below.

### PREPARATION

If you are considering entering any event make sure you are prepared. Setting a goal for you and your horse will make you achieve a great deal more than you thought you could! Throughout the year you should be working to improve your riding and your horse's knowledge.

At least three weeks before the show or event, you should focus on those skills that you will need. If, for instance, your canter is a bit fast for the show ring, well... practice until your horse's balance is sufficient to enable him to feel comfortable at a slower pace. If the cross-country is weak, find somewhere to school over fences time and time again. If your horse is leery of the water jump, then enter another division and practice, practice. If you need the assistance of a trainer, find one. Remember that doing well is in the details. There is no such thing as too much practice but there certainly is such a thing as not enough! If your horse is green, you can expect nothing. Just continue to take him to shows, either on the ground or in a few easy classes, until you get some mileage on him. Reward his smallest achievement and remember that you always want him to come home and tell his stable mates what a great time he had and not how scared or uncomfortable he was. Keep his exposure short so he will not tire or get frustrated. Keep his exposure simple so he will be comfortable and not over-faced causing him to lose confidence. We all go through this phase; it's not always pretty but it is always necessary. Just like a child, exposure is the best path. Your horse needs to trust you so he will feel safe. Be quiet, confident and consistent.

## TIMING

This is often the hardest unless you are familiar with the process. Before you leave the barn, the horse must be bathed and often braided, brushed, rugged and bandaged. Everything must be loaded into the trailer tack compartment and checked again. You must arrive at the show in time to register, unload and tack up your horse, warm up your horse, change your clothes and get to the ring in time for your class. Remember that the unexpected tends to happen! The horse gets loose, you can't find a piece of tack, you forgot to rub that stain, the warm up is taking forever and he's still not settling! Yep, we've all been there and usually more than once. This gets easier with time and routine. It's important to remember that the more frazzled you become, the more insecure he will be. The quieter you are, the more confident he will be.

## WHO'S IN CHARGE

The ring steward is the one in charge of your class. With few exceptions, you should not leave the ring without permission of the ring steward or the judge. This applies to all disciplines. If your horse is misbehaving and you are asked to leave the ring, do so immediately so no one gets hurt. No rider is allowed to question show procedures or to ask questions of the judge at that time. If, in your opinion, you should've been pinned in that class, keep your mouth shut in and out of the ring. It is very poor sportsmanship to do otherwise. IF, at the end of the show, you would like to talk to the judge, ask the show secretary and she will see if the judge is willing to do so. Be polite when asking your question. Never challenge the judge but learn from what he is saying. You may come under that judge again and all judges have long memories. If that judge doesn't like your horse, well, tough. You have the option not to show under him again. In our opinion, there is nothing worse than a sour and unsportsmanlike rider. Respect must be shown for every judge, show secretary, volunteer and worker at every event. They are mostly unpaid and they have all put a great deal of work into that event for your pleasure. Let's show people that gracious conduct is not a thing of the past and remember there are always children around who emulate their elders: Be a great and gracious example for them to follow.

## HORSE SHOWS

Apart from equitation classes, it's a HORSE show, not a people show. It's the horse that's the star, not you. Keep your tack, your horse, and yourself as "workmanlike" as possible, as clean as a whistle, and neat as a pin. No bling required here-western classes are the only exception! There are many more divisions than are listed here but these are a start. We are not addressing hunt teams, Corinthian classes and other specialty classes. In general terms, there are two categories of horse show, schooling and rated. Schooling is synonymous with practice and these shows are locally organized. Rated shows provide an opportunity for serious competition and national awards. Rated shows are categorized as AA, A, B or C shows. Competitors with the highest points

for the year are awarded prizes at the end of the show year.

## WARM UP AREAS.

The warm up ring may be hectic and cause an inexperienced horse to become very excited. IF you need to lunge your horse before mounting, do so in the field where the trailers are parked or someplace well away from the other horses. It's not fair to monopolize part of a limited warm up area or to upset other horses with your horse's boisterous behavior on the lunge. If you are warming up for dressage, it is customary to pass left side to left side and slower paces yield to faster or lateral work. If you are in a jumping warm up, call your fences clearly and well in advance and give others a chance to jump. Jumping warm up arenas can be particularly chaotic and you will need eyes in the back of your head to keep yourself, your horse and those around you safe. If you are warming up for stadium jumping or cross country in an event, always keep the red flag on your right as you jump the fence, if not, you can be eliminated in the warm up!!

HUNTER UNDER SADDLE requires walk, trot, and canter in both directions on a light contact. However, this is not the time to put your horse "on the bit". The judge is looking for a horse with a good way of going. He should be totally unflappable and suitable to his rider. Although manners are important, they are not as emphasized as in pleasure classes. Emphasis is more on the horse's movement. An understanding of ring etiquette and how to keep your horse in front of the judge in a large class is essential. Know what "line up on me" means or "line up facing the....." This class may require you to back your horse. Dress is conservative dark English attire. Boots and breeches or jodhpurs and jodhpur boots are appropriate; half chaps are not approved attire.

HUNTER HACK requires all three paces in both directions and includes two fences at the appropriate heights. This class also includes showing a hand gallop and halt. The same rules as above apply.

HUNTER OVER FENCES requires your horse to jump the appropriate

course as quietly and consistently as possible preferably with a nice bascule. Naturally his form over fences comes into play. This you can improve to a point but not always enough to win the blue ribbon. That's just fine if you are satisfied with his trip. A note here on preparation for this class: Make sure you know your course!! These courses are posted for all to see and study. Watch other horse's rounds. Make sure you do a courtesy circle before you head to the first fence. This is done to establish your rhythm and settle your horse.

SHOW JUMPING requires you to complete a course of fences at an appropriate height and, usually, within a certain time. There may be a jump off. The judging is simply on who gets around the course with the least number of faults.

ENGLISH PLEASURE requires a horse to move evenly and willingly forward. He must pick up the correct lead and be straight along the rail. He must be quiet, safe and obedient. He needn't be the best mover in the class but, in the judge's opinion, be able to give the most pleasurable ride. Manners are paramount. Go As You Please classes require, apart from the walk, that the horse be shown at his best gait in both directions. The rider should pick the gait at which his horse best shows his abilities. Dress is conservative English attire.

WESTERN PLEASURE requires, according to the AQHA handbook, that "maximum credit be given to the flowing balanced and willing horse that gives the appearance of being a pleasure to ride". In other words, "peanuts pushers" are no longer acceptable. The poll must be level to or slightly above the withers. Dress is conservative Western attire; chaps and spurs are optional.

JUDGED TRAIL RIDES require that the horse and rider negotiate natural or man-made obstacles in a timely, accurate manner with a minimum amount of fuss. Obstacles vary greatly in difficulty and creativity. Points are tallied to determine a winner in different categories usually divided by age and experience. Dress can be casual, English or western. However, all attire should be neat, clean and polished.

DRESSAGE requires a horse and rider to perform a set test at an appropriate level. There are certain bit rules and dress rules for different levels. There is a difference in tests and scoring for dressage performed at a three- phase event and at a regular dressage show. In either discipline, the whistle (or bell) will sound and you have 45 seconds during which you may enter the arena and start your test. During that time and before entering at A, you may choose to ride around the entire arena on the outside in order to familiarize your horse with his surroundings. The judge will acknowledge you and ask you to proceed either by standing up or nodding her head after you have saluted her usually at X. Proceed and ride your test. At the final salute, ride toward the judge and she may choose to give you any verbal comments. If the day is very crowded, she may not do so. Simply ride out of the arena on a long rein but don't take too long as someone else is waiting. When turning in your number to the show secretary, you will receive your test back with judge's comments. It is helpful to know how you can improve your ride for next time.

DRIVING requires, in some classes, that the horse, carriage and whip follow patterns just like a course of fences. This is called an obstacle class. In pleasure driving, the reins should have no slack, the walk should march, the trot should have good cadence. The horse should appear willing and obedient. There are classes for singles, pairs and teams. The whip's attire changes with the class. A hat is usually required along with a carriage rug.

EVENTING requires a horse and rider combination perform three disciplines, dressage, cross-country jumping and show jumping, either all in one day or in two days for bigger events. Roads and tracks and steeplechase are very rarely part of an event anymore. The rider is given a time for each phase and must be ready to ride at the appointed time. However, in case of scratches, the times could change. You may insist on riding at the appointed time if you choose. There are many rules about whip lengths, tack requirements (no standing martingales allowed) and ways in which to jump fences (red on right even when schooling). Whistles are employed for starting the show jumping and

saluting the judge is required. It's essential to have someone explain in detail what is required before you enter a three- phase event. Although there are many rules to follow, they are there to insure the safety of the horse and rider. Rules are usually implemented because of bad experiences, time restraints, or organizational requirements.

COMBINED TESTS require that the rider perform just two disciplines, dressage and show jumping. The rules for both events are the same as in a three-phase event.

FOXHUNTING requires that your horse be calm but fit, that he travels in a group of horses at the gallop in control, that he doesn't kick, buck or generally present himself as a nuisance to others. It is a fast sport when hounds are running and safety could be an issue. Always say "Good Morning to at least one of the Masters, pay your capping fee to the Field Secretary, and stay in the back of the field either with the first flight or the hilltoppers. Dress should be appropriate but not fancy. If you have never hunted before it would be very wise to have a mentor explain what is going on in the field on that day's hunt. Foxhunting is an ancient sport and there are many nuances that, if explained, add a great deal to the day's enjoyment.

## TRAIL RIDING IN A GROUP

Before setting out, discuss amongst each other who will be the lead horse and if your group is large with varying skill levels, it is a good idea to have an experienced rider at the end of the line to communicate to the lead horse when someone in the group is in trouble. The lead horse is responsible for setting the pace for the entire group and ensuring everyone is safe. The lead should obtain permission from those in the group before changing the pace. When changing pace the lead is responsible of informing those behind them of the pace change prior to changing the pace. The lead should use hand signals to indicate the pace changes and the riders behind the lead should repeat these hand signals down the line. The group can make up their own hand signals, however it is important that everyone know the signals before setting out on your ride.

Let's say you go on a ride cross-country with your friends. Your horse is having a wonderful day, you feel good and he wants to go. You suddenly take off at a gallop across an open field. When everyone gets together again, you wonder why no one is speaking to you! What you have failed to realize is that whilst you were having a merry time, "Janie's" horse threw in a couple of good bucks, "Pete's" horse bolted, and "Annie" was in tears as her pony got really upset. Never, ever go at a faster pace than the rest of the group. Never pass someone at a faster pace unless you ask permission. You are seriously putting people at risk and no one wants to be responsible for a hospital visit. If you find that some would like to move out, find a field away from the rest to do your thing. One should always, always ride to the ability of the lowest common denominator. Always be aware of those around you and their abilities. If your horse doesn't like to be crowded from behind, put a red ribbon in his tail. If he is green and unsure of himself, put a green one in. If others crowd you, explain the meaning of the ribbons and tell them to control their horse!

It's also a good idea to stay in line. This is done as a courtesy to the farmer and a courtesy to others. If fields are planted, please stay on the edge. Do not ride across planted fields including corn that's not been harvested. If jumping, please replace all riders as they were. Across a grass field, be aware of holes: some can be seen and some cannot. If you spot a hole, turn and say, "Ware hole". This alerts all behind to be careful. If you go through a gate, leave it as you found it. There may be a problem with a closed gate: It might contain a bull!! This is the time to mention that it's always polite to ask neighbors if they mind you hacking through their property. Just because they give permission to the hunt, doesn't mean they give individuals permission. One never goes wrong by asking.

If riding on public land such as in a park, always stick to the trails. Don't go across fields unless the sign says you may do so. Hikers often use the parks and are not inclined to be happy having a horse gallop up on them. I see their point. There may be a fee for using the trails in some of these parks. Always check the website to see about that and

also any parking rules that may apply.

Whether alone or in a group, a cell phone should be present, however the ringer should be silenced. One rider should take the responsibility of first responder. She or he is in charge of giving directions to others in case of the dreaded accident. Ideally it should be someone with medical training.

When crossing a busy road, cross the road as a group in single file. Before traveling on a busy road, ask the others in your group if their horse is comfortable with traffic. When traveling on a road, stay as far to the edge of the road as possible. Travel single file and in most states horses are required to travel with the traffic (the cars are coming up behind you).

Trail riding is great fun and a wonderful, relaxing way to see the countryside. However, if there are control problems, it's no fun for anyone. Simple rules, common sense and courteous behavior will keep you and your horse safe and happy.

Now that you have one or two or these events under your belt, you can look back and say, with pride, "WE DID IT!!! We learned, we had fun and we met a bunch of nice people. What more can we ask?"

## HORSEY VOCABULARY

### HORSESHOWING

**Schooling** a schooling show is a non-rated horse show usually set up for riders to practice before entering rated shows. It's good practice for inexperienced riders, children, and green horses.

**Rated Shows.** These horse shows are divided into categories according to prize money, points, and facilities provided. The entry fees are a lot higher and the competition a lot stiffer. Rating categories are explained in detail on the USEF website.

**Division** a horseshow division is usually made up of three classes or more. Each division will award a championship and reserve. These divisions are geared towards certain abilities of horse and/or rider. For example, the small pony division will include ponies of a certain height jumping an appropriate height and no one else is allowed in that division. A schooling show may add “inventive” divisions or classes for fun.

**Green** a green horse is a horse that has had limited experience in showing. Age is not a factor.

**Mileage** refers to the amount of experience a horse and/or rider has had.

**Ring Steward** is the person that stands in the ring with the judge. He is responsible for overseeing the classes. He makes sure that the contestants get in the ring in good time, that they line up when the judge is ready that the fences are properly set and generally makes life pleasant for all.

**Pinning** refers to ribbons. “My horse was pinned third in the last class”.

**Equitation** classes are judged solely on the rider’s ability, not on the horses. However the horse has a lot to do with making you look good.

**Workmanlike** is how you present yourself and your horse. This should be clean, immaculately groomed with all tack and clothing fitting properly and safely. Workmanlike does not include shiny objects, loose hair, excess jewelry or any pieces that are not necessary to a good performance

## HORSEY VOCABULARY

**On the bit** is a term with origins in the dressage world. The horse is said to be “on the bit” when he is pushing from behind through to the bit. He seems to be “leaning” into the bit with no slack in the reins. He is in a more collected frame.

**Way of going** simply means the way your horse moves according to the judge's standards.

**"In front of the judge"** means how to maneuver your horse so that he catches the eye of the judge and doesn't get lost in the crowd.

**"Line up on me"** or **"line up facing..."** Is said by the ring steward at the end of the judging of that class. Contestants are asked to line up next to each other facing a certain direction – either facing the ring steward or the stands. Riders must stand quietly, not crowding each other until either your number is called to receive a ribbon or you are dismissed. Listen carefully as it's sometimes hard to hear especially if others are talking. If your horse won't stand, take him in back of the others. Before the next show, teach him to stand quietly as that will count towards his manners.

**Hand Gallop** is a pace faster than a canter but not full out. Don't be afraid to move out but remember, you will be asked to come to a full stop quickly.

**Bascule** is the arc made by a horse's back while jumping. Ideally the high point of his bascule should be directly over the top of the jump.

**Trip** is another word for his round in the ring.

**Courtesy circle** is done at the beginning of your round and is there to give you time to adjust your speed, rhythm and collect your horse under you. It sounds silly but make sure you are going in the proper direction to your first fence!

**Jump off** is done in open jumping if two people are tied either through faults or faults and time.

**Faults** the number of faults accumulated during a jumping round. There are various ways to acquire faults depending upon the rules for that class.

## DRIVING

**Whip** refers to the person driving the vehicle.

## FOX HUNTING

**Masters** elected officials of the hunt. They are the ones you follow. NEVER pass a master. If you are new to hunting, you should stay in the back of the field

**Capping fee** this is the amount you have to pay to hunt that day with that particular hunt. Fees vary so make sure you have your check written ahead of time

**Field Secretary** this is the person who will take your money!

**First Flight** refers to members of the hunt who are jumping and usually, but not always, going faster than the hilltoppers.

**Hilltoppers** refers to members of the hunt who elect not to jump that day.

## TRAIL RIDING

**Riders** in this connotation, means a rail that is put up across a jump to keep cows from getting out. Cows love to crawl over chicken coops.

**Hacking** simply means riding out.

## PLACES TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

**American Quarter Horse Association** Separate organization dealing with all aspects of the Quarter Horse [aqha.com](http://aqha.com)

**United States Equestrian Foundation** is the national governing body of equestrian sport. It deals with all aspects of horseshows, breed shows

and ensures that rules in many disciplines are followed. The USDF, USHJA and the USEA all come under its jurisdiction.

**United States Dressage Federation** [usdf.org](http://usdf.org) United States  
Hunter/Jumper Association [ushja.org](http://ushja.org) United States Eventing  
Association [useventing.com](http://useventing.com)

**North American Trail Riding Conference** is the sanctioned body for competitive trail rides [natrc.org](http://natrc.org)

**Masters of Foxhound Association** is the governing body for all recognized foxhunts in North America [mfha.com](http://mfha.com)

**American Driving Society** is the place to find out all information on events, dressage tests, awards programs and the like  
[americandrivingsociety.org](http://americandrivingsociety.org)

All these sites are wonderful to visit for general information. They will often direct you to more local sites. Each state may have their own organization so it's worth asking someone or googling it. In any case, these organizations are very helpful and you should take advantage of the information given.