

Oklahoma 4-H Horse Project Member Self-Evaluation

Horse Shows: Showing in Conformation at Halter

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Showing at competitive events is one of the most popular horse activities that people enjoy. Conformation at Halter classes rank horses based on the conformation of their body. Judges will determine how well conformed the horse's body is as compared to what is determined to be ideal or desired by the breed or sport organization. These classes are different than the Showmanship at Halter class. Showmanship at Halter evaluates the exhibitor's ability to show a horse at halter, and doesn't require the best conformed horse to win. In conformation at halter classes, the exhibitor moves the horse at a walk and trot, and presents the horse at a standstill so the judge can evaluate the horse's conformation. The exhibitor is responsible for presenting a well conformed, fit, clean and well mannered horse for visual appraisal. Even though halter classes are placed on the movement and body conformation of the horse, proper preparation and showing is essential for the horse to appear and behave at its best. This 4-H member guide provides questions for you to answer about conformation at halter classes. You will find that use of rulebooks and judging guides will be helpful in answering questions, so ask your leaders or parents to supply one before beginning. Hopefully, you'll have the chance to discuss your answers and thoughts with others to compare your knowledge of and preparation for halter classes.

Judging Criteria for Halter Classes

The desired shape and size of the horse's body parts are related to performance ability. While having a well conformed body will not guarantee a great athlete (riding horse), there are advantages to certain conformational characteristics that help performance. Weaknesses in conformation will cause limitations in performance. The following are general categories that are assessed in halter. Can you define what each term means in relation to a horse's conformation?

- Balance
- Muscle and Substance
- Structural Correctness
- Quality
- Breed and Gender Characteristics

Thoughts and discussion: You will find that a judging guide will be useful to define the terms. In addition to defining the terms, can you make one or two general statements that would be considered desirable for each of the terms? Relate what is desirable to how it might benefit performance ability.

Knowing the 'Parts'

Deciding how well your horse's conformation measures up to the 'ideal' requires you to be familiar with the body parts of the horse. Using a picture or diagram, can you quickly point out the location of the following body parts?

- Withers
- Croup
- Stifle
- Forearm
- Heartgirth
- Loin

Thoughts and discussion: The skeletal system provides the foundation for conformation. Can you identify the bones located under the parts listed above? Could you draw the location of the humerus and femur bones on a picture of a horse? Can you identify the different types of vertebra on the horse's spine?

'Evaluating Myself'

Being able to objectively evaluate your actions is an important skill for success. The first step is being able to identify your actions and ideas, then reflect on how your actions and ideas worked. By doing so, your future actions and ideas become more effective in reaching your goals.

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 thoughts and possible group discussion are provided for each question.

It is hoped that completing this guide will help you learn more about yourself and your actions, and help in future decision making. If this is done with a group, you will be able to learn from experiences of others. Group discussions should be positive, encouraging and non-judgmental. Otherwise, you and others won't 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 the questions.

Measuring Up

Balance is one of the most important judging criteria for halter. It is defined in ways which relate to how well proportioned the individual body parts are to one another. One principle for balance relates the size of the shoulder, middle and hip areas of the horse's body: The more equal the sizes (length, depth width) of the three portions, the more balanced a horse's body. Given the two choices in each of the following examples, which characteristic would aid balance?

- A sloping shoulder (withers located well behind the chest or point of shoulder when observing a horse from the side) or a straight shoulder (line from the point of the shoulder to the withers is nearly vertical to the ground).
- A long back in comparison to the length of the horse's underline of its middle or a short back in comparison to the length of the horse's underline of its middle.
- A long hip and croup or a short hip and short, steeply angled croup.

Thoughts and discussion: What do judging guides mention about balance from withers to the ground? Rate your horse's balance with the ideal proportionality. Would a balanced horse have advantage in muscle and structural correctness over a poorly balanced horse?

Muscle

Where are the largest amounts of muscle observed on the horse? How does muscling appear differently on a fit horse as compared to a overly fat or extremely underweight horse? Would you rate your horse as heavily muscled, adequately muscled or lightly muscled?

Structural Correctness and Movement

Structural correctness refers mainly to the size and angle of the bones of the horse's legs. Which of the following are correct statements as to desired structural correctness and movement?

- When standing, the knee joint should bend the knees well forward of the bones above and below the knee when viewed from the side.
- The hocks should bow outwardly from the structures above and below it when viewed from the rear.
- The pastern bones should be angled, so the pastern and hoof slope forward and at the same angle when viewed from the side.
- A horse's footpath should be more or less straight under the body when watching a horse move from the front or rear.

Thoughts and discussion: Can you describe some of the undesirable ways a horse's footpath might appear when observing movement from the front, back or side? How straight does your horse travel? Does your horse walk and trot willingly beside you and is your horse easy to guide with cues from the lead rope?

Quality

Quality mainly applies to the shape of the horse's head and neck. Which would you think would be desirable?

- A large head or a small head in relation to total body size.
- A short, thick neck or a long, lean neck in relation to total body size.

Thoughts and discussion: How would poor quality affect athletic ability? How would you rate your horse: Very high quality, average quality or poor quality as compared to the ideal?

Showing

Halter requires horses to stand quietly with feet and legs in specific places under its body. Can you describe where the front and hind legs should be positioned when viewing a properly posed horse from the front, side and rear? Which of the following statements best describes you and your horse?

- a. My horse responds so quickly that it moves its feet in position with little cueing from me.
- b. I have to pull and push on the lead rope more than I want to get my horse to position its legs correctly.
- c. I have to push on my horse or kick my horse's front feet to move them. My horse is not responsive at all to the lead rope pressure.

Thoughts and discussion: What cues do you use to teach your horse to respond specifically with its front or hind feet when setting up a horse for halter evaluation? How good are you at knowing how the legs appear from the side while you are positioned along your horse's head?

Shaping Up

A well-prepared halter horse appears physically fit and well groomed. Generally, the horse's condition allows for enough fat cover so the ribs are not visible, the backbone is level with the surrounding tissues, and there are small amounts of fat cover on the croup, shoulder and neck. An overly fat or thin condition will lower the horse's desirability in a halter class. The hair coat should be shiny and slick, and long hairs on the head and legs trimmed. Hooves should be properly trimmed and clean. Conditioning for halter requires several weeks, maybe months, of preparation. Do you do any special conditioning routines for showing in halter, or does your general riding and daily grooming keep your horse in shape to show at halter? What types of equipment and routines do you use to prepare the horse's hair coat?

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