

Oklahoma 4-H Horse Project Member Self-Evaluation

Horse Shows: Showing in Hunter Under Saddle

4H-ANSI-423

The Hunter Under Saddle class is designed for you to exhibit how well your horse performs at a walk, trot and canter while riding in hunt seat attire and tack. The class routine is similar to the Western Pleasure class in that you are instructed to walk, trot or canter along the arena rail with a group of others. Excellence requires a horse to be suitable to purpose in its mannerisms and movement. Horses should have a long, flowing stride with a low, steady frame of movement. While doing so, the horse should appear willing, under control and respond willingly to the rider's cues. 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 hunter under saddle 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.

Suitable to Purpose

A hunter horse should be suitable to purpose. The horse's conformation, manners and stride aid in the type of movement that would be desired if traveling across a hunt field with a group of other horses for a long period of time. Manners and responsiveness to cues are essential. To move efficiently, the horse's legs must reach to cover a comparably long distance as compared with the horse's body size. It will take less strides to cover the same distance with long strides as compared to moving with quicker, shorter strides. Longer strides provide a lower frame of movement. Frame is the position of the horse's body as it moves. A lower frame movement results when there is more forward movement and less up and down movement with each stride. A low frame is achieved when the horse's hind legs reach well under the body and drives the body forward with each stride. The movement of the front legs is driven from the movement of the shoulder so stride length of the front legs is similar to the hind leg stride length. When in frame, the horse's topline, the back, neck and head, will be flexible and supple, yet in a relatively steady position. When in frame, the horse's center of balance is under the position of the rider rather than behind or forward. This centering allows for a collected movement that feels smoother to the rider while enhancing maneuverability of the horse.

Thoughts and discussion: Describe the movement of a long strided as compared to a short strided trot including differences in the actions of the horse's shoulder, hindquarter, hind legs and front knees. Why would increasing the length of stride be more desirable than increasing the stride frequency? Which would you expect to feel smoother? Which type of horse would you think would be better able to go long distances over a hunt field, a short strided horse or a long strided horse?

First Step: Functionally Correct

It is important that a Hunter Under Saddle horse be functionally correct: The horse takes the gaits, maintains the gaits 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/she 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 resists by pulling the reins, moving the head up or down too much, mouthing the bit or resisting in 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 cantering? How about your diagonals at a posting trot? How do you cue for different gaits? Will you horse stand quietly if you release rein pressure after stopping from a trot or canter? How easily does your horse back up when asked?

'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.

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 Hunter Under Saddle class:

- a. Curb bit
- b. Mechanical hackamores
- c. Kimberwick bit
- d. Snaffle bits
- e. Split or open reins
- f. Cavesson
- g. Standing martingale

Thoughts and discussion: Equipment rules are covered in rulebooks. Can you describe each of the pieces of equipment listed above? What types of snaffles are allowed? How about attire (your clothing): What is allowed, required or not allowed, e.g. saddle type, clothing, boots?

Mannerisms

A hunter horse should be well mannered and under control at all times. Does your horse frequently exhibit any of the following undesirable traits which suggest resistance or ill manners?

- a. My horse moves with its head too high and fights pressure on the bit when I trot or canter.
- b. I have to continually cue my horse to move the speed I want, which causes his gait to be inconsistent.
- c. It takes too long to stop from a trot or canter because my horse is resisting the bit by pulling back on the reins and moving his head and neck too much.
- d. My horse keeps his ears back, acts mad, and wants to kick out at other horses.

Thoughts and discussion: If you ride in western events also, do you have more difficulty controlling your horse while riding in hunt seat tack and bridles? Do you feel securely seated when riding in a hunt seat saddle? How might your insecurity lead to poor mannerisms of your horse?

Movement Quality

Beyond functionally correct, well mannered horses, judges look for certain ways of going which aid in the smoothness of gait and efficiency of movement. There are many different terms used to describe quality of movement. Several of the terms used to describe movement quality in Hunter Under Saddle are defined below. Ask others to help explain any of the terms that are confusing. Think of how your horse moves and rate him/her 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 stride length without resistance (Think: moves the same way all the time).

___Collected: Stride length, drive (impulsion from the hindquarters) and head carriage combine to allow for a flowing stride that feels smooth to the rider. When trotting, the horse's impulsion allows you to naturally post instead having to push yourself up and down in the saddle. Hind legs should reach well under the horse while maintaining a distinct and cadenced gait.

___Cadenced: Each foot moves distinctly and in rhythm within each stride so the number of strides within a set distance or time is consistent. (Think: members of a marching band moving in step).

___Balanced: Moves with collection so that the weight of the front and hind quarters are centered under the rider as the horse moves. Stride of front and rear legs are near equal in length.

___Frame: The appearance of the horse's body while moving. When in-frame the horse moves with collection while carrying his head and neck in a relaxed manner. The poll (top of the head) is 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 steady rather than having a lot of up and down movement in the head, neck or hips.

Thoughts and discussion: Describe the difference in movement that is desired when moving from a trot to an extended trot. Should an extended trot be completed by lengthening the distance covered in each stride, or an increase in the number of strides in a given time period? Head carriage refers to how high or low the horse's head is in relation to its withers. Discuss how an overly high or low head carriage might affect stride length, balance of stride and collection.