Horse Judging Guide

By Neal Smith
Extension Area Specialist – 4-H
Module 1

Introduction to Horse Judging
Judging Steps

Four Steps in Judging Horses
- Information
- Observation
- Comparison
- Conclusion
Judging Steps

- **Information**
  - Know the intended use

- **Observation**
  - Carefully observe each individual
  - Note how it meets or fails to meet requirements of use

- **Comparison**
  - Compare individuals with all others
  - Establish differences & similarities

- **Conclusion**
  - Arrive at a logical placing
  - Be able to defend the placing
Parts of the Horse

The First Step
Learn:
- Correct terminology
- Colors
- Markings
- Breed names
- Genders
  - Mare
  - Gelding
  - Stallion
  - Yearling
Conformation

Judging Criteria (Ranked by order of importance)
- Balance
- Muscling
- Structural Correctness
- Quality
- Travel (Way-of-Going)
- Breed & Sex Character
Balance

- Most Important Attribute
- Divide Horse into Three Parts
- All Three Parts are Proportional
Horse Lacks Balance

Long-backed, shorter hip
Muscling

Indicators of Muscling

- Forearm
- Gaskin
- Stifle
- Pectoral Area
- Shoulder
Muscling

**Front View**
Powerfully muscled forearms; Wide chest; Bulging pectoral area, Inverted “V”

**Rear View**
Powerfully muscled gaskins; Muscle definition in hip; Wider in lower hip/stifle area
Structural Correctness

- Terms are same across breeds
- Different terms associated with:
  - Different views
  - Different parts of the animal
- Compare deviation with ideal
- Correct versus Incorrect
Structural Correctness

- Feet & Legs
- Angle of Shoulder
  - Neck
  - Back & Underline
- Croup
Feet & Legs

- Different Terms Related to Different Views
  - Profile view
  - Front view
  - Rear view
- Deviation in skeletal structure
- Deviations can cause possible
  - Performance issues
  - Lameness
- Form follows function
Profile View

(Drop imaginary line from top of the shoulder)

- Correct
- Pastern to straight
- Weak pastern; also too long
- Calf
- Buck
- Knee
- Bone

(Drop imaginary line from point of the buttock)

- Correct
- Sickle
- Hocked
- Post
- Legged
- Camped
- Under
Camped Under

Sickle-hocked
Calf-kneed  
Buck-kneed
Weak Pastern or Coon-footed

Post-legged
Front View

(Drop imaginary line from point of the shoulders)

Correct
Splay
Pigeon
Knock
Base
Base
footed
toed
kneed
narrow
wide
Pigeon-toed

Splay-footed
Rear View

(Drop imaginary line from point of the buttock)

Correct  Cow hocked  Cow hocked & splay footed  Pigeon toed  Base narrow  Base wide
Cow-hocked
Angle of Shoulder

- Related to skeletal structure
- Ideally 45 to 50 degrees
- Allows for long, smooth stride
- Neck
  - Longer top & shorter bottom
  - Ties high & smooth into the shoulder
- Back & Underline
  - Shorter back & longer underline
**Steep-shouldered**
Top and bottom of neck close in length, and long back compared to underline

**Ewe-necked**
Neck ties in low and course to top of shoulder
Croup

- Croup should be:
  - Long
  - Relatively level
- Stock horse breeds:
  - Quarter Horses
  - More slope in croup
- Pleasure breeds:
  - Arabians
  - More level in croup
**Stock-type**
Long, heavy-muscled croup

**Arabian**
Long, level croup
“Quality” describes horses with refinement and style

Sites to Evaluate Quality

- Head
  - Ears
  - Eyes
  - Nose/Face
  - Jaw
- Throatlatch/Neck
- Withers
- Hair Coat
- Mane & Tail
- Feet & Legs
Quality

Head
- Ears
  - Small, Erect
- Eyes
  - Bold, Bright, On side of head
- Nose/Face
  - Short, Flat
- Jaw
  - Prominent, Well-shaped
Undesirable Traits in Stock-type Horses

Roman-nose

Pig-eyed, long-faced
Quality

 Neck
   Balance mechanism
   Long & clean
   Attaches high and smooth into the shoulder
   Undesirable
     Short, thick & cresty

 Throatlatch
   Clean – free of fat & waste tissue
   Allows for flex at the poll
   Undesirable
     Thick & wasty
     Can restrict air movement
Quality

- Withers
  - Prominent & well-defined
  - Tallest part of horse’s topline
  - Undesirable –
    - Flat or wasty
    - Mutton withers
    - Hip taller than withers
    - Running downhill

Prominent withers
Quality

- Hair Coat
  - Shiny and slick
  - Clean
  - Well-groomed
- Mare & Tail
  - Free of debris
  - Clean and shiny
  - Trimmed
  - Well-groomed
Quality

Feet
- Tough, well-rounded
- Roomy with deep open heels
- Set directly under knees & hocks
- Straight when viewed from front & rear
- Shod or Barefoot
- Hooves trimmed
- Free of major cracks

Legs
- Straight
- Sound conformation
- Free of blemishes
Way of Going

Way of Going
- Also referred to as Travel or Action
- Determined by conformation & skeletal design
- Motion should be:
  - Straight & true
  - Long well-conditioned elastic stride
  - “Athletic mover”
- Look for:
  - Length of stride
  - Softness of stride
  - Trueness or straightness of stride
Way Of Going

A – Normal
   straight movement

B – Toed-out or Base-wide
   Feet move forward in inward arc
   “Winging”

C – Pigeon-toed or Base-narrow
   Feet move forward in wide outward arc
   “Paddling”
Breed & Sex Character

Breed Characteristics

- Traits unique of a particular breed
- Traits such as:
  - Body type
  - Color pattern
  - Gaits and way of going
- Horse’s head
  - Good indicator of breed type
Test Your Skills

Identify the Breed

A  Arabian
B  Thoroughbred
C  Quarter Horse
Sex Character

Sex Characteristics

Stallions:
- Masculine
- Massive jaw
- Heavy muscled
- Large rugged bone
- Acceptable neck

Mares:
- Femininity & refinement
- Not as course or as powerfully muscled
- Cleaner and more refined head & neck

Geldings:
- Fit somewhere in between
Test Your Skills

A

Mare

B

Gelding

C

Stallion
In Review

Conformation is determined by:
- Beauty (style, quality & balance)
- Structural correctness
- Blending of body parts
- Muscle design

Each breed has their:
- “Ideal”
- Standard of excellence
In Review

- Develop a Systematic Approach to Evaluating the Class
- Know What a “Good One” Looks Like
- Learn the Parts of the Horse
- Learn Correct Terminology
- Judge Positively
- Learn Breed Differences

“When judging, simply place the good ones on the top and the least desirable ones on the bottom. And, don’t worry about the close placings.”
Questions?
Sample Classes

Following are sample classes. Following each class slide, will be a slide listing the official placing and cuts.
Stock-type Geldings
Official Placing: 2-3-4-1  Cuts: 1-3-3
Reasons
In this class of Stock-type Geldings, I placed the class 2-3-4-1. In a very close top pair of quality heavy muscled geldings, I chose 2, the bald-faced sorrel, over 3. Two had a more refined head, with a shorter chiseled face and muzzle. Two had a leaner neck that tied in higher in the chest than 3. From the profile view, 2 was more expressive in his muscle volume and dimension in his forearm and the lower part of the hip.

In the middle pair, I placed 3, the blazed faced bay, over 4. Three was a heavier muscled gelding from end to end, showing more muscle volume and expression in the forearm, gaskin and hip. I do grant that 4 was cleaner in the throatlatch, had a longer cleaner neck and a more refined head. However, 4 was out powered by a higher volume, thicker made and better balanced 3 gelding.

In the bottom pair, I placed 4, the red roan gelding, over 1. Four was a higher quality, more eye-appealing gelding that exhibited better balance and more refinement throughout. Four had a longer, leaner neck and showed more quality about the head. Four had a more correct angle to the shoulder and was deeper through the heartgirth.

I placed 1, the sorrel gelding, at the bottom of the class because he lacked style, balance and symmetry to place any higher. He was course through the neck, had a steeper angle to his shoulder and was plain headed. He appeared to be the shallowest bodied, smallest framed gelding in the class.
Stock-type Geldings
Official Placing: 3-1-4-2  Cuts: 3-2-3
Reasons

In this class of Stock-type geldings, I placed the class 3-1-4-2. In my initial pair of 3 over 1, I started the class with heaviest hipped gelding in the class. When analyzing the gray number 3 gelding, I found him to be heavier muscled from end to end. Three was more expressive in his forearm, gaskin and hip. He had a shorter back in relation to his underline and was more level over his croup. I do grant that 1 was a longer patterned gelding, with a longer cleaner neck. However, 3 was a better balanced gelding and carried more volume of muscle through the stifle area.

In my intermediate pair of 1 over 4, I used the thicker made, heavier-boned black gelding. This gelding appeared to be a larger-framed, deeper-bodied gelding. Four did show more quality and refinement through his head and neck, and was cleaner in the throatlatch. But, this doesn’t change the fact that 1 was a more rugged gelding with a shorter back, more powerful loin and a longer hip.

In my final pair of 4 over 2, I chose to place the bald-face, stocking legged sorrel in third. Four was a higher quality, nicer balanced gelding. He showed more eye appeal in the head and neck and had a more correct angle to the shoulder. I do grant that 2 was shorter in his back and stood on a heavier column of bone.

But, I faulted 2 and placed him at the bottom of the class because he lacked balance, being heavy fronted, common headed and lacking the quality and style to place any higher today.
Stock-type Mares

1

2

3

4
Official Placing: 2-1-3-4   Cuts: 3-2-4
Reasons

I placed this class of Stock-type mares 2-1-3-4. I placed 2 at the top of the class and over 1 because 2 combined quality, refinement, muscling and structural correctness to a higher degree than 1. Two was much cleaner and neater about the head, having a shorter chiseled muzzle, was cleaner through the throatlatch and had a longer, leaner neck which had a higher shoulder attachment than 1. Two displayed more definition, bulge and ripple to the forearm and shoulder muscles. Furthermore, 2 had a shorter back, a stronger loin and a deeper heartgirth. Two was especially deeper and wider throughout the hindquarters and powerfully muscled in the gaskin.

In a fairly close middle pair, I placed 1 over 3. I found 1 to be a better balanced mare that was shorter in her back compared to her underline. I grant that 3 had a more correct set to the hocks. However, I faulted 3 and left her third because she was long backed and weaker in the loin.

In the bottom pair, I placed 3, the black mare, over 4 in a relatively easy placing. Three was a higher quality, nicer balanced mare that was leaner and cleaner in her neck. The black mare carried more volume and definition of muscling in her forearms, gaskins and hindquarter. Four was shorter in her back. However, 3 stood on a more structurally correct set of feet and legs.

I placed 4 at the bottom of the class because the dun mare lacked balance, being heavy-fronted with a thick cresty neck and lack of muscle volume in the hindquarter.