

# The Basics of Showing

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Sandstone Farm Show-EverReady Riverside Jill Diemar

Two years ago, the country shut down, and many parents were left scrambling to find their kids something to do. Many found horseback riding to be a safe option to get their children involved in a competitive sport during the pandemic. During the past two years shows were largely non-existent. Now, however, with showing back it may be a good time to move your new equestrian to the next level and get them involved in the competitive world of showing. For new equestrians this world can be confusing and overwhelming. This article is meant to provide you with the basics of the showing world. For official definitions of terms and rules, please refer to the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) rule book at usef.org, the national show association which presides over most competitions. In addition, the United States Hunter/Jumper Association (ushja.org) oversees the sport as part of USEF.

## About Horse Shows

Horse shows are gatherings of hundreds, sometimes thousands of horses and riders to compete. Most horse shows are held on one day. These are called local shows or "B" shows if they are associated with USEF/USHJA, the national horse show associations. Riders, horses and trainers rise early to travel and compete at these events. They generally travel in a horse trailer to compete and leave the same day.

There are also multi-day competitions, usually given a rating of "A" or "AA" by USEF. At multi-day shows, riders, horses and trainers travel to a showground and stay for two or more days. The horse show management sets up temporary stabling where the horses will live during the competition, while competitors and trainers stay at nearby hotels or motels, or sometimes in their trailer.



Rider at Turner Farm Events Competition

Often hunters and jumpers show in "divisions" or a series of classes where horses accumulate points to win a championship. These divisions can be divided by many criteria, including but not limited to horse/pony size, rider age, horse's training level, jump height, etc. A typical division has three or more classes. In every class, ribbons are assigned point values with first being the most. The points earned from the classes accumulate towards the championship, and the horse and rider with the most wins the championship.

Horses and riders can compete in a jumping, or over fences, class or a flat class. In over fences classes, the horses compete one at a time and demonstrate their skills over a series of jumps. In flat classes, all of the horses are gathered in the ring and judged in a group at different paces- walk, trot, and canter.



Turner Farm Events Competition Ribbons

## Awards and Ribbons

At one day horse shows, usually class ribbons are awarded for first through sixth place. At multi-day "A" shows, ribbons are generally awarded for 1st through 8th place. In special classes, ribbons can be awarded beyond 8th place. Trophies are often given, but they vary from show to show. Traditional trophies are generally engraved silver cups, bowls, plates and trays.

In the United States blue is first place, red is second place, yellow is third place, white is fourth place, pink is fifth place, green is sixth place, purple is seventh place, brown is eighth place, grey is ninth place and baby blue is tenth place. Championship ribbons are tri-colored: Champion is blue, red and yellow; Reserve champion (essentially the championship runner-up) is red, yellow and white.



Turner Farm Events



4-H Open Horse Show Frederick County Fairgrounds

## What is a hunter class?

Hunters classes are where the horse is judged subjectively by one or more judges. In both jumping and flat classes, each horse is judged on: "Performance and soundness [whether or not the horse appears to be lame]..." (US Equestrian Article 2423).

In some classes the horses are judged on more specific features, such as "conformation, suitability and manners." (US Equestrian Article 2423). Confirmation refers to how a horse is put together, i.e. whether he has a desirable and functional physique.

Suitability refers to the horse's natural capabilities for the tasks being asked to perform. For example, a horse which jumps unsafely would not be considered a "suitable" hunter in a hunter over fences class.

Manners refers to the horse's temperament, and how he responds to a rider's instructions. For example, a horse that kicks out when asked to begin trotting would not have good manners, while another which perks his ears alertly and is obedient will be considered to have good manners by the judges.

Hunter divisions at horse shows are divided into numerous categories. Some include "green" hunters for inexperienced horses, conformation hunters where horses are judged on their performance with extra emphasis placed on the horse's physical build, performance and working hunters with large fences for experienced horses, and pony hunters for ponies (horses under 14.2 hands tall) only. Other divisions can be divided by the status of the riders who pilot the horses around the course, such as junior hunters for riders 18 and under, amateur-owner hunters for non-professional adult riders or short stirrup hunters for young children just learning to ride.

A typical hunter course is 8-10 fences consisting of natural-colored jumps, set on straight lines at various points around the ring. Some of the fences are set at related distances and are meant to be ridden as a set with a specific number of strides, or canter steps, in between them.

Hunter Derbies are often offered at horse shows. These special classes are independent of regular divisions. They are generally held on large rings or fields and usually consist of longer, more complex courses. Derbies are usually two rounds, with the winner determined by the cumulative scores from both rounds.

## What is a jumping class?

Jumping classes are judged objectively. This means that they are not judged on style. As a horse jumps around a course, the goal is to jump all of the fences without knocking any rails over. A horse incurs 4 faults for every refusal, 4 faults for each rail knocked off a jump, and 1/4 fault for every second past the time allowed they were given to complete the course. Basically, the jumping run can be pretty or ugly, but if all the jumps are left standing the horse has been successful. There are many different types of jumper classes.

In some classes, if the horse has a "clean" first round, (that is, they had no rails or faults), then they may continue directly to the second round, or shortened jump-off course; other "speed"

classes are automatically judged on the fastest time with faults converted into seconds added onto the time. In other classes, the horses that were clear will exit the ring and return after the close of the first round for the jump-off.

All courses are timed, and in both rounds, time is the tiebreaker with the faster horse given preference. In a jump-off, if two horses have 0 faults, then the one with the fastest time will win.

Like hunters, the various jumper divisions are divided by categories. Some include "young" jumpers for inexperienced horses. Other divisions can be divided by the status of the riders who pilot the horses around the course, such as junior jumpers for riders 18 and under, amateur-owner jumpers for non-professional adult riders or pony jumpers for children.

A typical jumper course is 8-12 fences consisting of natural as well as brightly colored jumps. Unlike hunters, jumper courses tend to twists and turn. Some of the fences are set at related distances and are meant to be ridden as a set with a specific number of strides, or canter steps, in between them. In jumpers, the horses also often are asked to jump water ditches and other more difficult obstacles.

## What is an equitation class?

Equitation classes are a hybrid between hunters and jumpers. It is similar to jumpers in that riders often have to compete over jumper type courses, but it is more like hunters because it is also subjectively judged on the rider's style. While the horse itself is not being judged, it can greatly influence how the rider looks and is perceived by the judge.

The majority of equitation classes offered are for junior riders. This stems from the fact that equitation is considered a good teaching tool in preparation for the upper-level jumper divisions. It helps riders to learn to position themselves and ride correctly over difficult courses.

Equitation classes begin at the lowest levels of competition, with short stirrup and lead up to the USEF Talent Search Final, used to seek out the most talented young riders for future international competition. Equitation is one of the most popular junior divisions, with major national finals drawing hundreds of riders every year.

When equitation classes began to be offered in the United States in the 1930s, riders were awarded medals for their achievement in winning a class. The nickname for equitation classes as 'Medal Classes' has stuck years later. That nickname, along with the newer phrase, 'the big eqs' refer to the classes which riders show in to qualify for several national

championships, especially the historic and coveted USEF Medal and ASPCA Maclay Championships. Those championships as well as several newer national year-end competitions are referred to as 'Finals.'

Equitation divisions at horse shows are popular not only for junior and pony riders, aged 17 and under, but also for amateur adult riders 18 and over. The evidence of the growth of the division has been seen in the creation of many new equitation championships, both on a regional and national level.

Originally, junior riders focused their energy on just the two major 3'6" medal classes: the USEF Medal and ASPCA Maclay. That all changed with the creation of numerous new championships, including the United States Equestrian Team Talent Search Final in 1982 and the Washington International Horse Show Equitation Classic in 1994, which have both become top tier national finals. Amateur riders simply had no national medal classes to ride in at all until the 1990s. The Capital Challenge Horse Show tapped a new market for equitation offering 3'0" finals for children (National Children's Medal starting in 1994) and amateur riders (National Adult Medal begun in 1995).

A "children's" medal class is a level below the "junior" classes according to fence height. They available to junior riders who are competing over fences that are 3' tall. Generally younger kids under 14 compete in them. A "junior" medal is usually six inches higher, at 3'6" and some are even 4' tall. Similarly, young kids ride in "pony" medal classes on their ponies before moving up to the children's medal, and then eventually the junior medal level. Adult amateur medal classes are generally 3'0" or lower in height. Professionals don't have an equitation division: they are using their equitation skills already in showing upper-level hunters and jumpers.

Competing in equitation classes requires extensive training and practice with an equestrian professional. Many riders begin training in their youth, spending years in the saddle to gain the experience necessary to compete at one of the year-end finals. Though the cost of competing is high, there are opportunities for all riders to compete more today than ever before. There are literally so many finals being offered, that riders can pick and choose based on their geographic location or their level of skill. Many regional horse show associations offer beginner medal classes through junior and amateur medal classes. At the highest levels of equitation, junior riders tend to always seek qualification for the prestigious USEF Medal and the ASPCA Maclay, but beyond that they have the option of choosing whether to do the USEF Talent Search, North American Equitation Championships, the Washington class or any of various local or regional 3'6" medal finals.

## How to get into horse showing

The best way to get into horse showing is to take riding lessons and find a barn that offers horse show coaching as part of its services. Horse shows offer divisions for every level from beginner on up, thus all a rider needs is a barn which has show horses and show services available to customers. Many stables even offer local one-day horse shows on their farm. There are many opportunities for riders of every background to get involved and compete. Finding a barn and trainers that will work with you and your budget is important. One way to locate a barn in your area is to contact any of the local horse associations or barns advertised in this publication.

## Just for fun/Schooling shows

Many riding barns and local clubs will offer just for fun shows or schooling shows. These shows do not accumulate points and afford the new equestrian or horse and opportunity to practice showing without the pressure of points. These shows are often offered at as little as \$10 a class and are the best way to get accustomed to being in a show arena.

## Watching a horse show

Another good way to get involved in horse showing is to go and watch some shows. Over time one can learn all the subtleties of showing, why one rider wins over another, or why one horse wins over another.

## How are riders categorized in different divisions?

Every rider that shows must be classified by age or professional designation:

- Junior - riders ages 17 and under.
- Young Rider - riders 12 and under, professional or non-professional
- Amateur - riders aged 18 and over, non-professional.
- Professional - riders 18 and over who rides, trains or in some way makes money working with horses. (See USEF website for specific definitions of amateurs and professionals.)

## Typical Hunter/Jumper Breeds

Jumping capability is quite individualized to the horse, so any breed is suitable so long as the horse is good at jumping. The majority of showjumpers are Warmbloods and Thoroughbreds.

## Typical Horse Sizes

Human height in the U.S. is measured by feet and inches. Horses, on the other hand, are measured in a different way. They are measured in units called "hands." A hand is 10 cm or 4 inches. A popular assumption might be that a horse is measured by how tall his head is. In reality, horses are measured by the height of their "withers," a part of the spine at the base of a horse's neck, just in front of the area where the saddle is placed. Ponies are 14.2 hands and under, while horses are 14.3 hands and above.

## Horse Show Circuits & Series

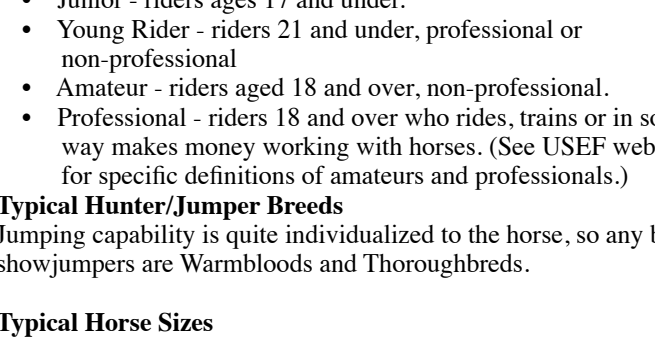
Sometimes several horse shows are held in one location over a period of weeks. These are called "circuits." Some examples of circuits are: The Winter Equestrian Festival in Florida every winter, or the HITS Desert Circuit held in California. Regional show associations or horse show companies might also offer a "series" of winters, where riders accumulate points for year-end awards, though the shows might not fall in succession each week.

## Why participate in horse shows?

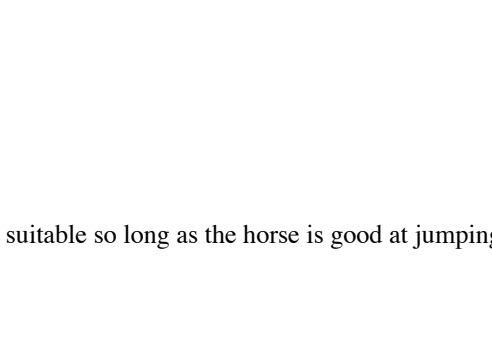
It's fun! Win or lose, it's fun to go to a show and test one's skills. Many horses and riders spend hours each week honing their skills at their training stable in riding lessons. Showing is a good way for riders to evaluate their progress individually and ability relative to their peers. Some riders find satisfaction in showing for practice and experience.

For some, horse shows create temporary communities, and the social aspect of competing and spending time with friends is a draw. Others show to qualify for championships or year-end finals and awards. Trainers bring sale horses to shows to market them. The reasons for showing are diverse.

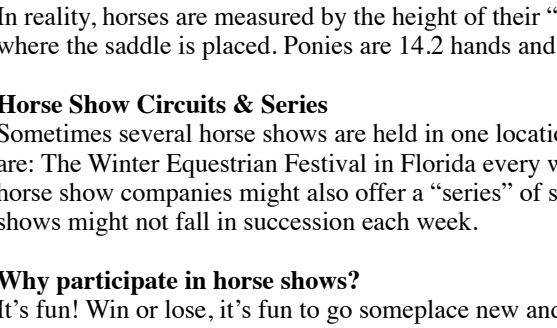
To find a horse show near you check out our calendar of events at that back of this magazine. Just maybe we will see you at the next show!!



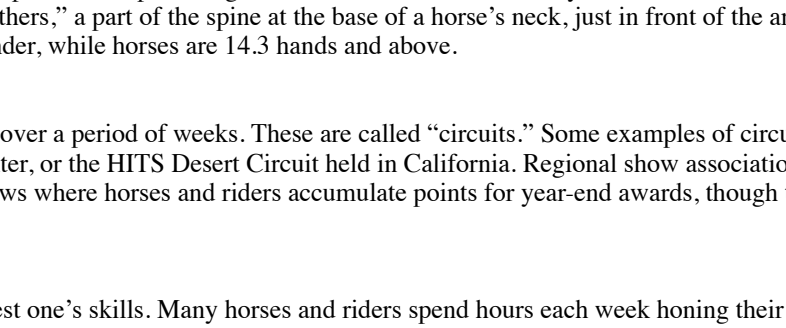
Sierra Neal & Mitzzy at Rocky Spring Ranch Mini Show



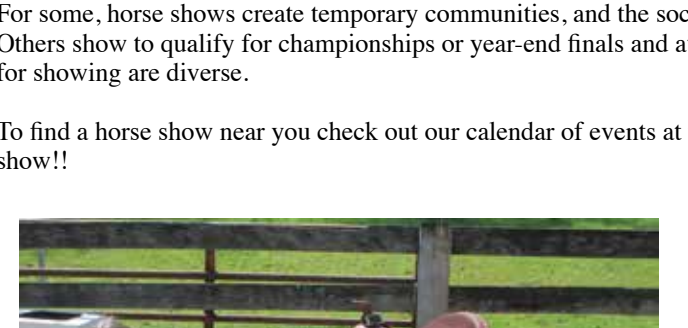
Rider at Redgate Farm Competition



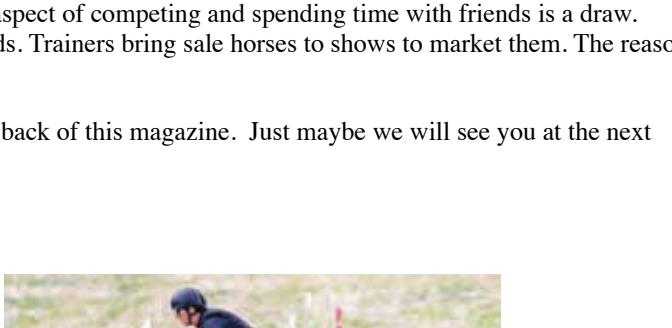
Rider at Summerduck Competition



Riders at 4-H Club Open Horse Event



Rider at Redgate Farm Competition



Rider at CVSJA Competition



Riders line up at Sandstone Farm for Ribbons