

Horse Judging Contest

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GENERAL INFORMATION

The Horse Judging contest provides an opportunity for youth enrolled in 4-H horse projects to demonstrate deductive reasoning and public speaking skills as they evaluate quality horses and explain their decisions. Horse judging contests are an excellent tool for youth to prepare to get their judging certification for local horse shows. This competitive contest allows youth to learn and grow in a setting where friendliness and fairness prevail.

1. A team consists of three (3) or four (4) contestants. The top three contestant scores will be counted towards the team totals.
2. Teams will compete in their 4-H age divisions.
3. Junior and Intermediate teams may be comprised of mixed 4-H ages. Mixed teams will compete in the division of their oldest member (3 juniors and 1 intermediate will be considered an intermediate team). Senior teams must only consist of senior aged youth for 4-H teams.
4. Each class will be placed on a standard placing card.

Contest Rules

1. Contestants shall wear no clothing, accessories or other marks of identification that may reveal their identity or club represented. Hats are prohibited in the judging arena.
2. While the contest is in progress, there shall be no conferring between the contestants and anyone else except as directed by the Contest Superintendents or their representatives.
3. No cell phones or other mobile electronic devices will be permitted into the judging contest or reasons contest areas.
4. Contestants are responsible for their own writing instruments and notepads for the purpose of taking notes for reasons classes. There will be no prohibition against contestant use of pre-printed materials during the contest, including but not limited to rule books, judging manuals, and score sheets. The officials will utilize the current years' rule book that best fits each class.
5. Classes will be designed to prepare youth for competition at the National Western Roundup. Contest officials will prepare classes as they deem fit for each contest and will include one to four (1 – 4) halter/conformation class and two to five (2-5) performance classes for a total of at least five (5) classes.
 - The following breeds maybe represented in the halter classes: American Saddlebred, Quarter Horse, Appaloosa, Arabian, Paint, Morgan, Draft Breeds and Miniature Horses. Contestants will give oral reasons on 1-2 halter classes as determined by the officials.

- All halter classes will be judged as sound of limb, eye, wind, mouth and reproduction.
 - The performance classes will be chosen from Trail, Western Pleasure, English Pleasure, Hunter Under Saddle, Hunt Seat Equitation, Saddle Seat Equitation, Western Riding, Reining, Ranch Riding, Western Horsemanship and Hunter Hack.
6. Horses in performance classes will be judged as sound. Officials may excuse any horse from a class if they deem it to be lame. In this event, the excused horse should be placed last on the contestant's card. The remainder of the class will continue to be judged once the lame horse has exited the arena.
 7. Oral reasons will be given on 1 – 2 halter classes, and 2 – 3 performance classes as determined by the officials.
 - Juniors and Intermediates will do 2 questions classes and 2 oral reasons classes (with the use notes)
 - Seniors will give oral reasons on 4 classes (no notes).
 - An automatic 5-point penalty will be assigned for senior contestants who elect to use their notes for oral reasons. This penalty will be assigned to each class where notes are used.
 8. The horses/riders/handlers will be designated by numbers 1-2-3-4.
 9. Horses will not be handled by the contestants, but time will be provided in halter classes to observe the horses at a walk and trot.
 10. Fifteen (15) minutes will be allowed contestants to judge all classes including reasons classes. Contestants should make their observations, take notes and fill out their placing cards during this time, as reasons classes will not be announced prior to the start of the contest.
 11. Two (2) minutes will be allowed for each contestant to give oral reasons to the judge. Contestants are not permitted to use notes while giving reasons. Contestant's placing card will not be offered to them upon entering the reasons room.
 12. All tack and attire will be considered legal providing it is used properly.
 13. Contest Superintendents will reserve the right to replace one or more classes with original, professionally produced video classes in the event weather or other emergencies make it impossible to have the minimum number of live classes required for the contest.

JUDGES

1. Classes will be placed in accordance with the rules of the respective breed association rules.
2. The judges shall place the classes while the contestants are working in the arena. The judges shall enter their placings on the placing card, indicate the cuts to be made, and file that card with the Superintendents for final review and approval. Referee judge(s) may be used at the discretion of the Superintendents.
3. When the contestant has finished giving reasons, the reason listener will place the reason score upon the contestant's computer sheet for tabulation.

DESCRIPTION OF CUTS

Cuts, as specified in the NHJTCA Handbook:

1. Horses are extremely similar; no obvious reason why one should be placed over the other; or, both horses have numerous faults, and none supersedes the others; placing is strictly a matter of personal preference; placing varies among official judges.
2. Horses are very close, but one horse has one or two qualitative or quantitative advantages; many official judges would not switch the pair, but half of the contestants could logically switch the pair.
3. Horses are of unequal quality, but there is a logical placing in favor of one horse; either one horse has several faults or several advantages; all official judges would agree on the placing; no more than one third of contestants would be expected to switch the pair.
4. Horses are not of similar quality; one horse has several decided advantages based on many points; all experts would quickly see the placing; no guesswork or personal preference required to make placing; no more than 10% of contestants would be expected to switch the pair.
5. Large number of extreme differences between the horses; placing is obvious to everyone on first, quick observation; careful study not required for the placing; pair consists of an inferior horse vs. consistent winner; only very inexperienced, uninformed contestants would switch the pair.
6. Horse not even comparable; differences reflective of a champion quality horse or performance vs. a horse or performance that is not of show quality.
7. Largest cut; differences reflective of a world-class halter horse vs. an extremely poor quality or lame horse; or a world-class performance vs. a disqualified performance.

DETERMINATION OF RATINGS

1. Fifty (50) points shall constitute a perfect mark on placing and 50 points shall constitute a perfect mark on reasons/ and or questions.
2. Priority order for breaking ties:
 - If tied for a division award in Halter or Performance, the contestant or team having the highest reason score in that division will be listed first.
 - If tied for an award in reasons, the contestant or team having the lowest placing score on the reasons classes will be listed first.
 - If tied for individual or team overall award, the contestant or team having the highest overall reason score shall be listed first.
 - If still tied for either (a) or (c) above, the contestant or team having the highest score in placing reason classes shall be listed first.
 - If still tied, the contestant or team with the highest overall placing score will be listed first.

- If still tied, the contestant or team with the highest single class reasons score will be listed first.
- If contestants are still tied from above, the youngest contestant or team shall be listed first.

PROGRAM WIDE POLICY

Please be sure to refer to the Wyoming 4-H Policy manual for overall Competition, Events and Activities Policies.

CONTEST AWARDS

Awards will be provided in the following categories for individuals (Jr. Int. Sr.):

- Placings
- Reasons/Questions
- Overall

Team awards will be provided in the following categories (Jr. and Sr Teams):

- Overall

The 1st place Senior Team will earn the choice of one of the following trips:

- Western National Round-Up – Denver CO, January 2027
- All American Quarter Horse Congress - Columbus, OH, October 2026
- Arabian Horse Contest – Tulsa, OK, October 2026

The 2nd place Senior Team will choose from the remaining two trips, and the 3rd place senior team will win the remaining trip, if eligible.

*** If you are interested in supporting the Wyoming 4-H Program, please contact:

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