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PREPARING A

4-H Horse Judging Team

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The value of knowing horses

Being able to appraise the comparative excellence of two or more horses is what horse judging is all about. A good looking cow doesn't necessarily give more milk but a good looking horse that is sound of limb always has lots of admirers and will sell for several times the price of a mediocre horse.

While thousands of adults and 5,000 4-H horse members in Minnesota own, ride, and show horses, few have the experience or confidence in themselves to actually judge. Thus when they buy a horse they may make poor decisions and too often when they show and don't win they wonder why. A horse is a special thing to its owner, but that doesn't mean the owner should wear blinders. He will enjoy his horse and showing it more if he learns to recognize the good and bad points of his horse's conformation, type, action, and soundness.

Many horse people have less knowledge about horse judging than the average cattleman has about cattle. This is because many professional horse judges, for one reason or another, are never asked to tell why they lined up a class as they did. This is not so with meat animal producers. They understand nomenclature, what is desired, where to look for it, and how important it is. They must, it's their livelihood.

Horse judging is involved

Admittedly horse judging is more complicated than judging meat animals. The desired type of one breed of swine is the same as another. Not so with horses. The desired type and traits of an Arab are quite different from a Quarter Horse, and stock type differs from English pleasure type, further, more is involved. An unsightly blemish on a cow is of little concern. However, an unsoundness that either does or is apt to interfere with a horse's action is more serious. Finally, the structural conformation and soundness, and how a horse stands affects, to a great extent, whether a horse will travel straight or even be able to perform certain desirable athletic feats, like a roll back, sliding stop, or even be able to rack.

A GOOD HORSE JUDGE:

- Knows what to look for; knows the ideal type for the breed; recognizes good action, correct set of feet and/or legs; and knows the significance of an unsoundness or other fault.
- Knows how to look, to examine critically, and where to stand to see certain things. In short he is a keen observer of the whole horse and all his parts and has become so through his own efforts and training.

- Knows the importance of various faults or virtues that a horse possesses, therefore, knows how much weight to put on certain factors. The horse with the fewest faults is not necessarily the winner. The degree of difference and the importance of a fault to the overall performance or worth of the horse often is what decides the placing.

How can you improve your proficiency and confidence?

ACQUIRE A WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF THE IDEAL TYPE OF HORSE BY:

Studying breed pictures

- Looking at live horses and asking a knowledgeable person to point out faults and good points of breed type, conformation, set of legs, action, and unsoundnesses.
- Practicing. Concentrate and train yourself to look critically. These points and the following clues may help you zero in on the problem.
- A top horse has eye appeal. Eye appeal includes desired type, balance of parts, quality, muscling, and appropriate size.
- Remember a horse should be an athlete and his athletic ability is affected by his conformation, set of his feet and legs, the soundness of his feet and legs, and his ability to move freely.

The scorecard shown will help you, in a general way, to learn the amount of emphasis to put on various points. A more flexible scorecard would include the following: (detailed scorecard on page 11)

Type, muscling, balance, conformation	50%
Feet and legs	25%
Action	25%

Actual judging

WHERE SHOULD YOU LOOK?

The best view of a horse is a side view from about 20 to 30 feet away. From this view you can observe the overall type, balance, conformation and relative size. Does he have a trim throat latch, a long supple neck, a high prominent wither, a long sloping shoulder set at about 48°, a short back, a heavy muscled coupling, and a long level croup with depth and muscling through the stifle region? In addition, you can see how he stands on his feet and legs and determine whether he is too short and straight in the pastern or whether he has too much set (sickle) to his hock or possibly is too straight and post-legged. Is

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he buck kneed, or even worse, back on his knees (calf kneed)? Are his tendons and bones clean and well defined, or do his legs appear round, fetlock full and puffy with coarse hair?

By moving behind the horse (8 to 10 feet) you can get a good indication of the amount of muscling that he has through his stifle. This is the muscle region that propels the horse and thus it's very important regardless of the breed being judged. You can also see whether the horse is cow hocked (hocks too close together and his feet spread wide and usually with the toes turned outward). Look for unsoundness of the rear legs such as a bog spavin or a bone spavin about the hock, a thoroughpin, curb, or capped hock.

A front view from 8 to 10 feet provides an indication of width between the eyes, the balance of his head, the distance from his eye to his muzzle, and finally, whether he stands straight on his front legs. Is he too narrow in the chest, are his knees too close, does he turn his toe out or turn it in, and does he stand too wide or too narrow? All of these points would not only have a bearing on whether he would remain sound but on the way he goes or his action.

PREPARATION, PRESENTATION OF AN ORAL SET OF REASONS

It's fun, educational, and satisfying to be able to judge a class of horses and then present a logical set of reasons defending your judgment. The essentials of an impressive set of reasons follow.

Presentation of yourself

- a. Confidence—as reflected by the way you walk, good posture, voice tone, volume and facial expression.
- b. The reasons

Organize in your mind the main points and present them so they provide a clear picture of the two horses you are comparing. A good start is a job half done.

The terms should be primarily comparative—"taller, straighter-legged, typier" rather than "he was tall with straight legs." However, descriptive terms may be used to create a general picture of the class i.e. "1 and 2 were of similar type or there was an easy top and close bottom pair, etc." After such a general statement you should provide evidence in the form of comparative terms telling why you thought there was an easy top or a close bottom pair. Another effective place to use descriptive terms is with the bottom pair. You might finish your reasons with two or three descriptive terms about your bottom horse. For example, "the gray horse I placed last was off type, exhibited coarseness about her head, tendons, and joints and moved very wide behind with a short choppy stride."

c. Points to include

Start with the significant points. Points you are most certain are correct, points that made you decide and points that you and the judge are most apt to agree on. The way to win a debate is to get the other person to agree on some of the early points you make.

Include pertinent points. Remember a horse is judged on the basis of type, conformation, balance, quality, feet and legs, and action. Failure to mention one of these main areas, like action, suggests to the judge that a.) you didn't know action was a factor to consider; b.) that you didn't know anything about action and therefore didn't mention it; or c.) you didn't look or didn't detect any difference. If you don't know, attempt to create a sense of knowledge by saying "both horses lack flexion and length of stride (you would be right by most standards on most heavy muscled stock type horses), or "both horses were comparable in action and way of going." Or finally be honest and say "I didn't detect any significant difference in the way these two horses traveled." You have at least conveyed the thought that you realize action is an important factor.

"Give the devil his dues." If your second place horse excels the top horse in some respect, grant or admit the fact. By doing so you provide evidence of having carefully observed both horses, that your decision is based on weighted evidence. And, finally, the judge may have placed your second horse on top. If you had mentioned the good points of this horse, your placing score on that pair reflects a difference in emphasis that you placed on the points and not on your failure to see or mention significant points. Actually your reason score should not suffer.

Denote the degree of difference between the two horses with effective and expressive adjectives that convey a clear picture with the correct degree of emphasis. If one horse is 4 inches taller and appears to be heavier muscled and weighs 300 pounds more than another, merely saying he's a larger horse doesn't provide a very concise verbal picture. Why not say "he is decidedly taller over the withers," and if he appears to weigh 300 pounds more "he is much deeper and wider through the heart girth, likely longer in the underline and heavier muscled and more powerfully made through the stifle region." Use horse terms, mention color, sex, or condition (the fat horse). They suggest that you are knowledgeable and are speaking about a horse that you saw and remember.

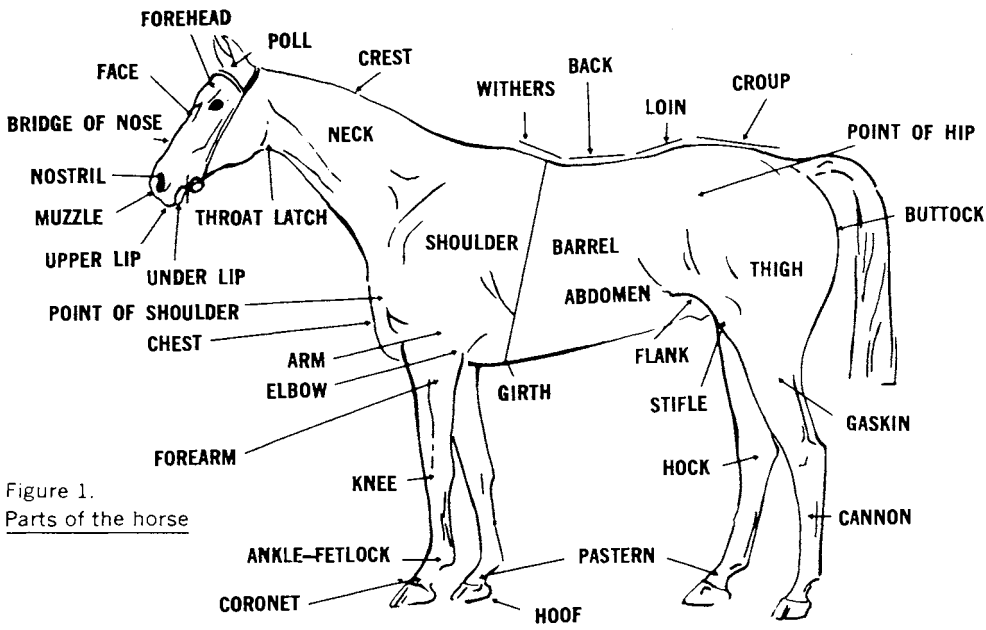


Figure 1.
Parts of the horse

Figure 2.
Desired horse traits

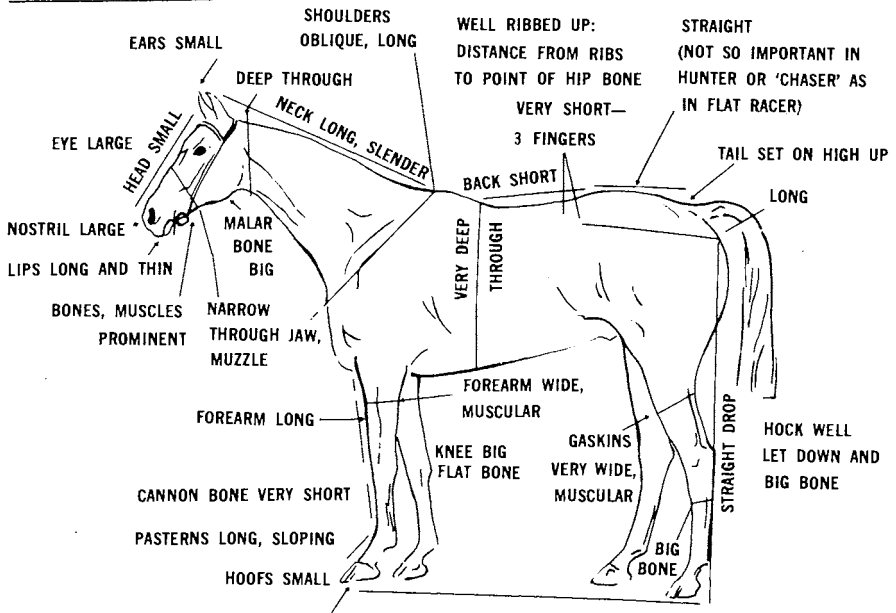


Figure 3.

A horse with many faults

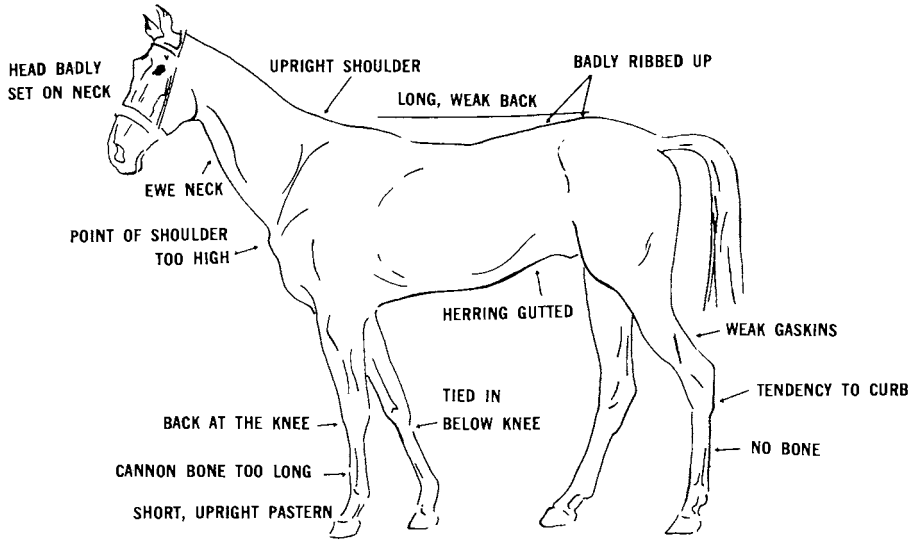
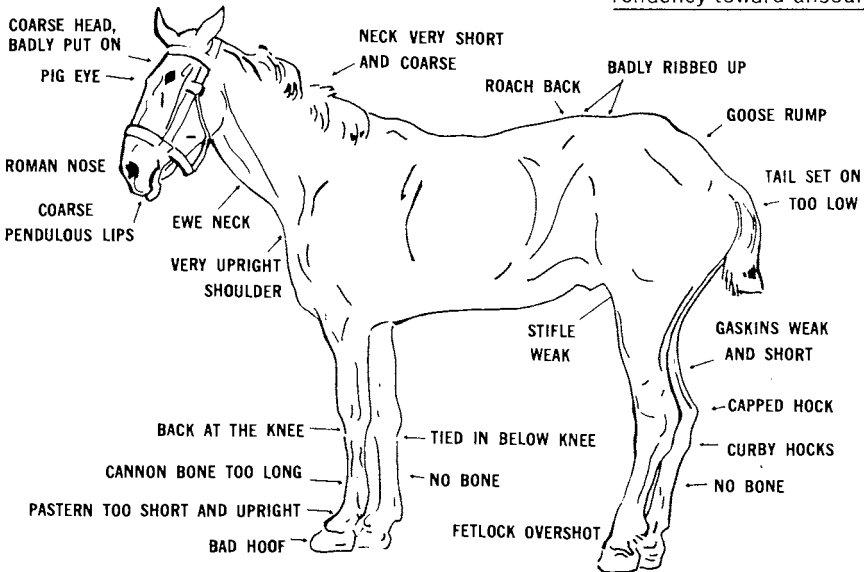


Figure 4.

Tendency toward unsoundness



DETRACTORS FROM YOUR REASON SCORE

Indicating by word and action that you are inexperienced, uncertain, and uninterested is a bad way to get started.

- a. Expressions like “I liked his color, he seemed more friendly, he had a nice look about him, or he was fatter and prettier,” do not instill in the judge that you know very much about horse judging.
- b. False statements. Are you making them up, didn't you look carefully, or don't you care?
- c. Incomplete. Failure to mention points vital to the worth of the horse, like type or action, will cost you points.
- d. Too long a set of reasons particularly if they consist of long pauses, lots of and's and ah's, are repetitious, and belabor small, inconsequential points, detract from an otherwise good set of reasons.
- e. Reading your reasons from prompting cards or asking the official judge how you placed the class. If you can't remember how you placed the class no one will have much confidence in your reasons.

Terminology for Oral Reasons

GENERAL

- Has the best combination of type, balance, quality, and feet and legs. Is more structurally sound, has more breed type and character with a more massive jaw.
- More powerfully made with longer and more definite muscling in the arm, forearm, and through the stifle and gaskin.
- Greater size and substance with more evidence of doing ability.
- Excels in type and conformation with a nicer balance and blending of parts.

FRONT END—NECK AND SHOULDERS

- More style and breediness about the head with a more pleasing earset and a larger, more expressive eye.
- More desirable head and neck carriage.
- Cleaner about the throat latch.
- Higher, more prominent wither, a longer shoulder with more desirable angle, smoother shoulder and blending of it into the body with greater evidence of muscle development.
- Deeper, more spacious chest, deeper rib, cinches up better.
- Wider, deeper chest with more evidence of inside and outside muscle in the forearm.

TOP AND REAR QUARTERS

- Shorter, stronger back, closer-coupled, heavier muscle over the kidney area, smoother hip, more desirable turn over the hip and croup, longer underline, deeper flanked, easier keeping kind, longer croup, longer from hip to hock, heavier muscled through the stifle and gaskin area with greater evidence of power and drive, more athletic in his form, conformation and way of going.

FEET AND LEGS, STANCE

- Heavier boned, more substance of bone.
- Flatter, cleaner, more dense appearing bone.
- Stronger, shorter pastern with a more desirable slope.
- A deep, spacious, hard hoof with greater width and depth at the heels.
- Stands straighter and more correctly in front with no tendency to be pigeon-toed or splayfooted; critical terms—a long, weak pastern



Painting of ideal Quarter horse.

carrying a severe angle deviation between pastern and hoof—coon footed, off-set or bench-kneed, knock-kneed, calf or buck kneed, shows evidence of splint, windpuffs, questionable knee joint, as viewed from behind he is cow hocked, too wide behind, bow legged, curby, has a thoroughpin, is stocked up.

ACTION

- Longer stride with more hock and knee flexion, travels straighter and truer with more collection.
- Has more power and drive.
- Shows more brilliance and animation.
- Critical terms—paddles, rope walks, interferes, rolls at the shoulder, has a labored and pounding way of going, spraddles behind, leaves his hocks behind, is strung out, lacks flexion, wide behind, lacks spring, short stride, lacks aggressiveness.

University of Minnesota Extension Bulletin 340, "Livestock Judging" and Extension Bulletin 351, "Selecting Your Horse," provide additional material on judging and preparing oneself for judging contests.

Saddle Horse at Halter

	1	2	3	4
WEIGHT, 900 to 1,200 POUNDS				
Height, 14.3 to 16.1 10				
Extremes undesirable				
FORM 25				
Saddle horses should possess beauty, refinement, symmetry, and style				
Body: round, full-ribbed, heavily muscled with well-sprung ribs				
Back and loin: short, wide, and well muscled				
Croup: long, level, and muscular				
Quarters: deep and muscular				
Gaskins: heavily muscled				
Withers: prominent, showing good saddle base				
Shoulders: deep, well laid-in (sloping 45 degrees)				
Chest: fairly wide, deep, and full				
Arm and forearm: strongly muscled				
FEET AND LEGS 20				
Feet: proportionate to size of horse, good shape, wide and deep at heel, dense texture of hoof				
Legs: correct position, front, side, and rear view				
Pasterns: long, sloping, 45 degrees				
Cannons: clean, flat, with tendons well defined				
Knees: broad, tapering gradually into cannon				
Hocks: deep, clean-cut, and well supported				
HEAD AND NECK 15				
Head and neck: alertly carried, showing style, character, and good breeding				
Neck: long, nicely arched, clean-cut, gracefully carried, throat latch clean				
Head: proportionate in size to body, with clean-cut, lean features, straight face-line, and large, prominent eyes				
Ears: medium in size, pointed alertly, and well carried				
QUALITY 10				
Bone: flat with tendons well defined; joints clean and sharply defined				
ACTION—Walk, Trot, Canter 20				
TOTAL 100				

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