

Horsemanship in Hand specifications

Horsemanship in hand is designed to be a test of ground work and the working relationship between a horse and its handler and is not a showmanship class. The division is separated into different levels based on the level of training of the horse and handler. The horse and/or handler may be of any age. The levels are defined as beginning, intermediate or advanced horsemanship. Each level contains several tests that are appropriate to that level and may be used in any combination to form a pattern which the exhibitors must perform. Not all of the tests need to be used in any given pattern but tests not listed as appropriate for the level shall not be used. Horses do not stand for close inspection by the judge, but rather execute a pattern similar to a trail or ridden Horsemanship class.

Horses should be shown in a plain leather or nylon stable halter without chains on the leads. Rope halters, especially the ones with "knots" shall not be used. Bridles, halters with bits, Arabian type show halters or browband cavesson type halters are not to be used even if they do not have chains on the leads or attached bits. Silver is permissible but not required.

Handlers may wear western, hunt or sport horse attire that is neat and conservative. Bling is discouraged. Shirts must be tucked in and a belt must be worn. Any appropriate shoes or boots that allow the handler to move comfortably are allowed. Hats or helmets are optional. Long hair should be tied back and should not cover the exhibitor number if worn on the back. Crops or riding whips may be carried and used as a visual cue for the horse only. Touching the horse with a crop or whip during the execution of a pattern is cause for elimination.

It is imperative that the horse and handler appear to work together as a team. Horse should be relaxed and responsive to the handler at all times.

Beginning Horsemanship in Hand. Tests from which judges may choose

1. Leading on a loose line at the walk or trot. Handler should be positioned between the horse's head and shoulder at all times. Never should the handler appear to be pulling the horse forward or using a shanking/tugging action to keep the horse in position. Neither should the horse get "ahead" of the handler so that the horse appears to be in control.
2. Stopping straight and square from the walk or trot without obvious shanking/tugging on the part of the handler.
3. Backing a minimum of four and a maximum of six steps in a straight line while handler is positioned in front of and facing the horse.
4. Standing quietly while handler is positioned at the end of the lead line in front of the horse at least six feet distant.
5. Leading willingly over ground poles at a walk or jog, no more than three consecutive poles.
6. Leading a serpentine or figure eight at the walk. Cones may be used as markers.
7. Performing a pivot (turn on the haunches) of 180 degrees or less to the left or right. Horse should move its shoulder away from the handler without the handler actually touching the horse as a cue.
8. Handler should be able to pick up any of the horse's feet without resistance.

Intermediate Horsemanship in Hand. Tests from which judges may choose

In addition to the tests listed in Beginning Horsemanship in hand

1. Handler should be able to lead the horse correctly from either the left or the right side.
2. Backing through an L. Walking forward thru the L before backing is permissible if the pattern allows.
3. Leading a serpentine or figure eight at the trot
4. Leading over elevated poles or bridges as in a ridden trail course (see trail horse rules for pole elevations and distances. Ground poles can now be 4 or more consecutive poles.
5. Performing a pivot of 360 degrees in either direction
6. Performing a turn on the forehand in either direction
7. Demonstrate a "ground tie" where handler drops the lead line and stands at least 10 feet out in front of horse for 10 seconds before returning to horse and retrieving the lead line.

Advanced Horsemanship in Hand. Tests from which judges may choose

In addition to the tests listed in Beginning and Intermediate Horsemanship in hand

1. While leading the horse, handler should be able to increase or decrease speed or gait and horse should follow suit without obvious cues on the lead line. For example slow walk to an extended walk and down to a slow walk, slow trot to an extended trot and back to a slow trot, both upward and downward transitions. Lead line should be loose at all times. Horse should move willingly along with the handler regardless of speed or direction.
2. Backing in unison. Backing in a straight line while handler is in the "leading" position. That is, both horse and handler are facing front, handler positioned between the horse's head and shoulder, both horse and handler back together without obvious tugging on the lead line.
3. Sidepassing either direction (may be over a ground pole) without the handler actually touching the horse.
4. Demonstrate a "ground tie" where the handler walks a complete circle around the horse.
5. Lead the horse over jumps at a trot. Where normal standards are used, jumps must be able to accommodate handler's ability to jump WITH the horse, recommend no higher than 18 inches. If stacking blocks are used to support the poles so that handler can run alongside without going over the jump with the horse, jumps may be higher at the discretion of show management.