

SO MANY WAYS TO SHOW A HORSE?

By Jessie Haas

Horse shows come in hundreds of stripes. There are local, provincial, regional, and national shows, as well as special youth shows and shows for every conceivable discipline and every breed under the sun.

ENJOYING A SHOW EVEN IF YOU DON'T OWN A HORSE

Showing is one way to enjoy your horse; for some people, it's the whole reason for owning a horse. But what if you don't have a horse? Showing can still be for you. Consider volunteering at a show.

Shows are a huge amount of work, and there's always a job for a willing body to do. Volunteering puts you behind the scenes, close to horses and with a ringside view of the competition. You can learn a lot, make valuable horse contacts, and earn a lot of points with hard-working show officials that may help you achieve your horse goals. And you'll be part of making everybody's fun day possible, which is a good thing all in itself.

Volunteer opportunities vary depending on the size and type of show. You may be able to help at the secretary's office; open and close gates; assist a ground crew in replacing jump poles; be a runner for a judge. In fact, being a runner is your most likely role. A horse show is a long day and people's feet get tired. The people in charge will be grateful to anyone who can save them a few steps by bringing a drink or delivering messages across the show grounds.

WHAT KIND OF SHOW IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

There are as many kinds of shows as there are kinds of horses, maybe more. As a spectator, you can enjoy them all. As an exhibitor you'll need to go to the kind of show that matches your horse's breed or discipline and your own skill level.

Open shows are the most common kind to be found. Any breed of horse can enter, and you don't need to belong to the sponsoring organization to compete. Open shows offer a range of classes, and competitors are divided by age.

The youngest riders compete in walk-trot classes; no cantering allowed. Youth competitors are divided between juniors and seniors. Adults compete separately, as do English and Western riders. In a large, open show the English riders may be divided between hunt seat and saddle seat.

Breed shows may include many disciplines, but the only horses allowed to compete are horses belonging to the specific breed, such as Arabian, Quarter Horse or Morgan. Some breeds with small numbers may combine with another breeds.

Gymkhanas are more casual shows that are all about games. Some have a Western emphasis – barrel races, pole bending. Others feature Pony Club games.

Performance shows allow you and your horse to compete in specific disciplines like dressage, hunter-jumper, three-day eventing, cutting, or reining.

FIGURING OUT TYPES OF CLASSES

Within each show you can enter a variety of different types of classes. Some are based on the rider's

performance, while others focus on the horse. Classes are often divided by age and level of experience as well. Though most riders compete in either English or Western, there are many classes that are common to both disciplines. The following classes take place in both English and Western shows, and at most breed shows.

Pleasure classes judge the horse's suitability for pleasure riding; gaits, manners, and looks are considered.

Equitation classes judge the rider's form in the saddle and their ability to handle the horse.

Halter classes, also called Fitting and Showing, judge the condition and cleanliness of the horse and tack, and the handler's ability to show the horse to best advantage.

Trail classes include obstacles and judge the horse's suitability for trail riding.

Horse shows can get serious, all too serious. One class where you can let loose and be silly is **costume class**, where you and your horse dress up. Your imagination and the tolerance of your horse are the only things limiting you here. Have a ball!

CLASSES IN ENGLISH COMPETITION

Some classes are only seen in English competition. These include the following:

Dressage is all about the relationship between horse and rider. You and your horse enter the arena alone and complete a test that includes all three gaits, transitions, halting, backing, and lateral movements. There are many levels to these tests. You begin at the bottom, preelementary, and rise up through the levels as you and your horse become more accomplished.

Working Hunter judges the horse's jumping ability and manners, as well as the rider's skill. The horse needs to have steady paces and a good mouth. The rider's turnout is important, and in hunter equitation you'll be judged on your own form, both on the flat and over jumps. Hunter courses are simpler than jumper courses, and have a low-key, natural look.

Jumper classes are more about the horse's jumping ability, focusing on time and points. A clear round in the shortest amount of time wins, no matter how your horse looks or how hard it was to keep him under control. Jumper courses are tough and twisty, with brightly patterned jumps of many different types.

CLASSES IN WESTERN COMPETITION

Western shows include the following classes:

Reining is often called Western dressage. Horse and rider lope and gallop through a pattern of circles, spins, and sliding stops. As in English dressage, they are judged on smoothness, flow, and invisibility of aids.

Cutting classes test a horse and rider's ability to select and move individual cows out of a larger group.

Working Cow Horse is the Western equivalent of the Three-Phase Event. It includes reining, cutting and fence work, which involves controlling a cow's movements at speed along the long side of the arena.

Barrel Racing sends rider and horse in a cloverleaf pattern around three barrels at top speed.