

ENGLISH PLEASURE (SADDLE TYPE)

The good English Pleasure horses have a brisk, animated stride that allows them to comfortably move forward with authority, grace and elegance. Their gaits result from a balanced, cadenced motion that emanates from impulsion created by the hindquarters. It is this impulsion that generates the energy for the strong, elastic movement in their shoulders and front legs to implement the range of motion that takes place. Their natural conformation allows them to carry the head and neck in an upright position and serve as a balance arm.

The *ideal* English pleasure horses are bright, confident, responsive and perform all of the gaits correctly. They should be balanced in all aspects: conformation, gait and disposition. These individuals are athletes with the physical talent to do their tasks with strength and finesse, the good temperament to do them willingly and the inherent ambition to do them well. They have the spirit of a show horse and give the appearance they enjoy their job which makes them attractive and pleasing to the eye. Ultimately, these horses have a great deal of power and charisma, giving the impression of being exciting and a real *pleasure to ride*.

The English Pleasure horse's carriage and way of going should be based on established elements forming the criteria, and well thought out written rules that combine to make an ideal English pleasure horse. To determine what is the ideal, it helps to understand the criteria and requirements of the class.

SUITABILITY

The English pleasure horse must be an upright horse with a naturally high set neck and head carriage, breaking over easily at the poll allowing for the head to be carried easily in position. This horse must move with power and strength emanating from the hindquarters, naturally lifting its shoulders, arching its neck and stepping well underneath itself reaching for ground with powerful strides, elevating and bending at the knees and hocks. This horse must use its shoulders freely, lifting its front legs and snapping them up while reaching forward. This horse must be bright and alert.

MOVEMENT

"All gaits must be performed with willingness and obvious ease, cadence, balance and smoothness."

WILLINGNESS AND OBVIOUS EASE

Willingness and obvious ease means the horse is naturally and athletically capable of doing the requirements of the class easily. The horse should not need to be urged and prodded continually to go forward, nor should the rider continually need to restrain the horse with a tight hold or a constant bumping on the bridle.

The horse should have the strength and balance necessary to propel itself forward with strong, reaching, ground-covering strides. Bending the hocks, lifting and reaching well up underneath its belly, using its back and hindquarters for impulsion. The horse's shoulders should be elevated, steps free-moving with reach, elevation and bend at the knees. The overall expression of the horse should be pleasing.

CADENCE

Cadence expresses the quality of locomotion in which the steps follow in a uniform sequence, rhythm and measure. Cadence is the sequence of well-regulated steps. The steps are resolute, lively, even and progressive in purpose. When strides are cadenced, they are pronounced, clear, decisive and elastic. They are even and regular.

BALANCE

Balance is the horse's bodily poise, the state of equilibrium or equal relationship front to rear. The equality of movement between the front end and rear end is of great importance. The English pleasure horse must never give the impression of traveling downhill or on the forehand. The rear legs must never trail behind. The shoulders should be light and free with easy motion and lift. There should be proper engagement and impulsion from the hindquarters to carry the horse.

Balance and cadence are sacrificed and gaits become impure and inconsistent when the horse is pushed too fast or forced to collect or elevate beyond its own natural capabilities.

SMOOTHNESS

Smoothness comes from a relaxed, supple back and the horse's own easy way of going. A supple back allows the horse to propel itself upward and forward from the hindquarters without resistance in the back and neck. Resistance results in a stiff horse. If the horse's back is stiff, the neck and mouth will become rigid, resulting in tension between the horse and rider; uneven, stiff and choppy gaits. Relaxation, ease of movement and suppleness in the back and neck allow smoothness in the gaits and transitions.

ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is the connection from the horse's hindquarters through the back and neck to the bit and rider's hand, with light contact on the bit. Engagement gives the horse's forward movement a sense of energy. The hindquarters should be nicely engaged with the hind legs working well under the horse's body with considerable power, not strung out behind or trailing behind. This engagement is the energy created by the hip, stifle and hock. How deeply the horse reaches its hind legs under the body depends on its conformation, training, confidence and relaxation in the back. Lack of engagement results in short, uneven steps, rear legs following rather than stepping under and pushing.

MODERATE COLLECTION

When properly collected the horse's back is supple and rounded allowing both hind legs to step further under the horse's center of gravity. The hindquarters are then able to carry more weight and propel the body powerfully upward and forward. Because the center of gravity is shifted back the haunches or hindquarters carry more weight. This shift of weight allows the horse's hind legs to step under and push the horse's forehand upward, lightening, and freeing the shoulders. The forehand is lightened enabling the horse to elevate with its neck arched and the head carried elegantly. With the hindquarters carrying the weight, the forehand is lifted and the knee elevation increases with the degree of collection and the horse's own natural talent and strength.

GAITS

"Judges are required to consider the performance of each gait equally when adjudicating this class."

WALK

"A four-beat gait: brisk, true and flat-footed with good reach."

At the walk the horse must propel itself forward with long, reaching steps. The horse's neck and back are relaxed as the horse moves from one foot to the other with no period of suspension, unevenness or jog. "Brisk" should indicate forward movement, not a sluggish, inhibited "almost walk." The horse should move forward with even, deliberate, reaching strides.

NORMAL TROT

"A two-beat gait: to be performed at medium speed with moderate collection. The normal trot must be mannerly, cadenced, balanced and free moving. Posting is required."

The trot is a two-beat gait in which opposite fore and hind feet hit the ground together. The trot must be balanced, cadenced, free-moving and easy with rhythm and drive. The trot should show elegant carriage with strength and impulsion from the hindquarters, lift and elevation through the horse's whole front end, not just the front legs. The trot should show equality of movement front end and rear end. The trot should never look forced, labored or artificial.

Impulsion is created by a stronger or more powerful drive or thrust from the hindquarters. The degree of impulsion and collection is a major difference between the country English, English pleasure, and park trot.

STRONG TROT

"A two-beat gait: this trot is faster and stronger than the normal trot. It is performed with a lengthened stride, powerful and reaching, at a rate of speed which may vary between horses since each horse should attain his own strong trot in harmony with his own maximum natural stride. The horse must not be strung out behind. He should show moderate collection without exaggeratedly high action in front. He must present a willing attitude while maintaining form. The strong trot must be mannerly, cadenced, balanced and free-moving. Posting is required."

While maintaining cadence, balance and ease of movement, the horse further engages the hindquarters which increases the degree of impulsion. This results in a lengthening of stride. The strong trot should be powerful with the horse balanced over its hindquarters reaching with long, powerful strides elevating the forehand, stepping up to its ultimate stride, never pushed beyond. The horse should never lose cadence or balance. The strong trot must come from the powerful thrust of the hindquarters and a softness in the front end. Speed should not be the determining factor. The quality of the strong trot with cadence, balance front end and rear end, strength and ease of movement are factors to consider. The strong trot must never lose its purity of gait, and should not look forced, labored or artificial.

CANTER

"A three-beat gait: smooth, unhurried, with moderate collection, correct and straight on both leads."

The canter should show impulsion, balance and engagement. The horse's back must be supple and relaxed allowing the hindquarters to reach under and work with moderate power and drive. The canter should show moderate collection allowing the English pleasure horse's hindquarters to step further underneath itself, elevate its front end, giving a lofty appearance to the canter.

The canter should be uninhibited, showing reach and not short or choppy steps. The canter should be moved into easily and be straight and comfortable for both horse and rider.

HAND-GALLOP

"The hand-gallop is performed with the long, free, ground covering stride under control. The amount of ground covered may vary between horses due to the difference in natural length of stride. The hand-gallop is not a fast collected canter but a true lengthening of stride, correct and straight on both leads. Extreme speed to be penalized. There shall be a distinct difference between the canter and the gallop."

The hand-gallop should show a longer stride because of greater impulsion or thrust from the hindquarters propelling the horse forward. The greater thrust from the hindquarters results in higher elevation in the shoulders. The horse should show a willingness to go forward while remaining light, calm and maintaining cadence and balance.

ENGLISH PLEASURE CLASS SPECIFICATIONS

MANNERS

Manners are the conduct or behavior with which the horse performs. Manners include obedience and responsiveness to the rider, with safety being of utmost importance. The horse must exhibit a willingness to be guided and controlled. Manners also include acceptance of the surroundings and other horses in the arena. Manners are often first in order of priority because the safety of the rider and others in the arena are of prime importance.

PERFORMANCE

Performance is the physical act of doing all of the required gaits and transitions from one gait to another. It is the execution or accomplishment of carrying out all of the requirements of the class.

ATTITUDE

Attitude is the horse's mental approach to performing. Attitude is also the willingness to perform in a relaxed, pleasant approach to the class requirements. Soft eyes, alert ears, quiet mouth and tail, an overall pleasant look express a good attitude.

QUALITY

Quality is the strength and athleticism required to perform the tasks of an English pleasure horse in a graceful elegant manner. It is the degree of excellence, condition, presence, carriage, athleticism, balance front to rear and strength required to perform effortlessly and with finesse. A quality horse is pleasing to the eye.

CONFORMATION

Conformation is the horse's correct structural form as it relates to functions and performance of an English pleasure horse.

PRESENCE

Presence is that dignified air, the "special" look, the "look at me" attitude, the special spirit that gets your attention. The bloom, shine, depth of conditioning and muscle, athleticism and finesse that sets an individual apart from the others exemplifies presence in the English pleasure horse.

FAULTS

BAD MANNERS

Bad manners includes wringing tail, pinned ears, rigid, open, bad or gapping mouth, cutting to the center of arena, balking, bolting, rearing, kicking, bucking, not responding to the rider. Bad manners must be severely penalized as they are a risk to the rider and others in the arena.

BAD PERFORMANCE

Bad performance includes wrong leads, break of gait, resistance, rough or abrupt transitions, heavy on the rider's hands, and lack of response to the rider's aids.

BAD ATTITUDE

Bad attitude includes sour ears, swishing tail, avoiding contact with the bit, fussy mouth, rigid mouth, not performing with ease, smoothness and confidence, stress, agitation or showing resistance.

UNTRUE GAITS

Untrue gaits includes uneven gaits, skipping, pacing, racking, loss of cadence, and moving too fast to maintain balance and cadence.

POOR MOVEMENT

Poor movement includes out of balance front to rear, falling out of form, forced, labored or artificial looking, choppy or rough.

HORSE NOT SUITABLE TO RIDER

A horse not suitable to rider is too much for the rider to control or handle comfortably, a horse not willingly guided or controlled, a horse that spooks or bolts, rears or bucks, and a horse which jeopardizes the rider's safety or the safety of others in the arena.

CREDITS

*Credit the horse that performs brilliantly with a pleasant attitude and polished manners, showing a desire to perform and an eagerness to please.

*Credit the horse that is responsive to the rider and performing the class requirements with willingness, ease and confidence.

*Credit the athlete which is able to perform in a balanced and cadenced movement with strength and finesse showing quality and presence.

Judging is not an absolute. It is a matter of observation and evaluation. Judging is based on certain established criteria and rules. However, in judging performance everything is relative. Each horse must be judged against the performance of the others in the class. Other criteria, such as manners, attitude and quality, must also be considered. All of the faults should be considered according to their severity and the depth of competition. Good judging depends upon correct observation of the finer points and the selection of the best horses for the purpose of the class. The best horse, performing the most correctly as established by the class criteria and specifications, should be the winner.

Reprinted from: "English Pleasure" judging standards prepared by the Education/Evaluation Commission, IAHA.