

British Skewbald and Piebald Association 2007

Everything for the Coloured Horse Enthusiast



JUDGING SPORTS HORSE CLASSES

by Celia Clarke

Judging Brightwell's Sport Horse and Pony Classes

The what, why and how of assessing performance potential in-hand

What are we looking for?

- To compete with success in any one or more of the three Olympic disciplines a horse or pony must have:
 - Correct conformation for the discipline
 - Three athletic, balanced paces
 - A workable, rideable but bold temperament
 - In all cases **FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION**

Why are these requirements so vital?

- Conformation
 - Correct conformation ensures minimum stress on joints and limbs when in work
 - Minimum stress on joints and limbs ensures that the animal stays sounder for a longer time
 - The longer an animal stays sound the more highly it can be trained
 - Producing a highly trained successful animal is rewarding both personally and financially
- Athletic balanced paces are essential:
 - In **DRESSAGE** to maintain rhythm and expression throughout
 - In **SHOWJUMPING** to maintain rhythm between the fences /related distances to ensure good approach, take off and landing
 - In **EVENTING** to do both the above plus cover the ground between the elements as effortlessly as possible
- Temperament
 - A **workable temperament** ensures that the horse or pony is easy to handle in early training (e.g. handling as a foal / lunging / loose schooling)

- ❑ A **rideable temperament** ensures that the horse is able to develop increased sensitivity to the aids as training progresses to a higher level
- ❑ A **bold temperament** ensures that the horse is able to face repeated training (dressage), higher fences (showjumping) and longer courses (eventing) as it moves to higher levels of competition

How do we assess all this??

- By **LOOKING** at the conformation, paces and overall suitability of type and **SCORING** each out of 10 according to a standard scale
- By **MARKING** for positives rather than fault marking
- By **RECOGNISING** the difference between sports horses and show horses

Using the 10 marks most effectively

- **Based upon British Dressage marking system**
- **10 EXCELLENT** Outstanding sports potential in all respects – as near ideal as possible – combined with superb presence
- **9 VERY GOOD** Almost a 10
- **8 GOOD** An animal scoring 8's across the board must really be of good potential as a breeding animal – or if a gelding of equivalent conformation, paces etc as would be required of a successful stallion. Supple and swinging through back in all athletic correct paces
- **7 FAIRLY GOOD** Acceptable overall but with one (not more) minor negative long-term pre-indicators limitations (e.g. in conformation base narrow or wide or slightly long in loin and short in croup but limbs correct). Paces rhythmical and straight but could be more elevated
- **6 FAIR** Showing one major negative long-term indicators (e.g. offset cannons, dishing, plaiting etc) or two or more minor faults. Paces straight but restricted and lacking athleticism
- **5 ACCEPTABLE** Showing two major long-term negative indicators but otherwise sound. Not of breeding quality

- **4 NOT ACCEPTABLE** Diverse major negative long-term indicators. Not sound in paces
- **3 FAIRLY POOR** Major multiple major negative long-term indicators
- **2 POOR** Will usually be in general poor condition in all respects
- **1 VERY POOR** Mostly awarded when a specific pace is not shown in hand
- **0 NOT SHOWN** As above

Judging sports horse/pony conformation

- Look out for
 - ❑ Evidence of stiffness in poll
 - ❑ Hocks camped out behind when standing still
 - ❑ Wear and tear on joints but do not penalise scars, bumps etc that are traumatic in origin
 - ❑ Broken lines from fetlock joint to point of toe
 - ❑ Over-weight, over-developed young horses and fat 'show condition' mature adults
- Remember that:
 - ❑ Potential show jumpers can be slightly short in the back
 - ❑ Potential dressage horses should be square and must be built naturally uphill
 - ❑ Potential eventers can be slightly long in the back



Ideal proportions in a show jumper

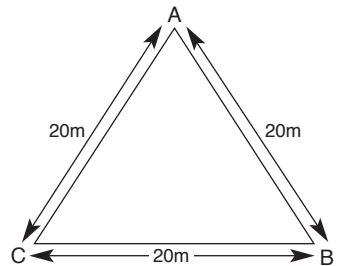


Ideal proportions in an Eventer

- ❑ Many warmbloods are narrow across the chest until they are at least 4 years old
- ❑ Warmbloods are not mature until they are 6 years old and ones that look mature at 3 years old will be coarse and heavy (too old fashioned) when fully developed

Judging the triangle: what to look for

- The purpose of the triangle is to enable the judge to see straightness of paces (going away and coming back) and athleticism /elevation side on (i.e. B-C)
- Best to see horses do complete triangles in both walk and trot
- The shape of the triangle is a guide only and exhibitors need not keep slavishly to the edge / rail



Judging the triangle: hints for handlers

- Dress so that you can run fast!!!
- It can be helpful to take a half-halt at the corners to balance the animal and get it back on its hocks before the next side



Ideal proportions in a Dressage horse

- Double bridles, pelhams etc are not acceptable as they inhibit forward movement
- Colts and entires must be fully under control at all times
- Do what the judge / steward tells you to do on the day, not what you have done at other gradings/shows in the past

Judging the walk

- The walk should be a clear 4-beat pace.
- If the horse shows tension/reluctance on the triangle the walk mark should only be finalized during the final judging when the animal is more relaxed
- Dressage horses must over track behind in every step but not excessively
- Event horses are often freer in the elbow and shoulder than dressage horses
- Show jumpers tend to be more restricted in walk than the others but must still over track
- In each case **THE QUALITY OF WALK ALSO INDICATES THE QUALITY OF CANTER**

Judging the trot

- Trot must always be a clear two-beat pace and horses must swing through the back /bring hind toe in front of stifle joint in each hind leg step
- DRESSAGE horses and SHOWJUMPERS must show good flexion of knee and hock at all times
- EVENTERS may show less flexion but not be a daisy cutter or show flicking toe

Judging Overall Impression

■ Ask yourself:

- ❑ How athletic / well suited is the horse /pony for the discipline that the owner thinks it is intended?
- ❑ If it is not suited for that one, is it suited well for another one (If it is mark it for that and tell the owner during the prize giving)
- ❑ Is it harmonious (do the parts fit together in the correct proportion and angulation)?
- ❑ How well developed is it?

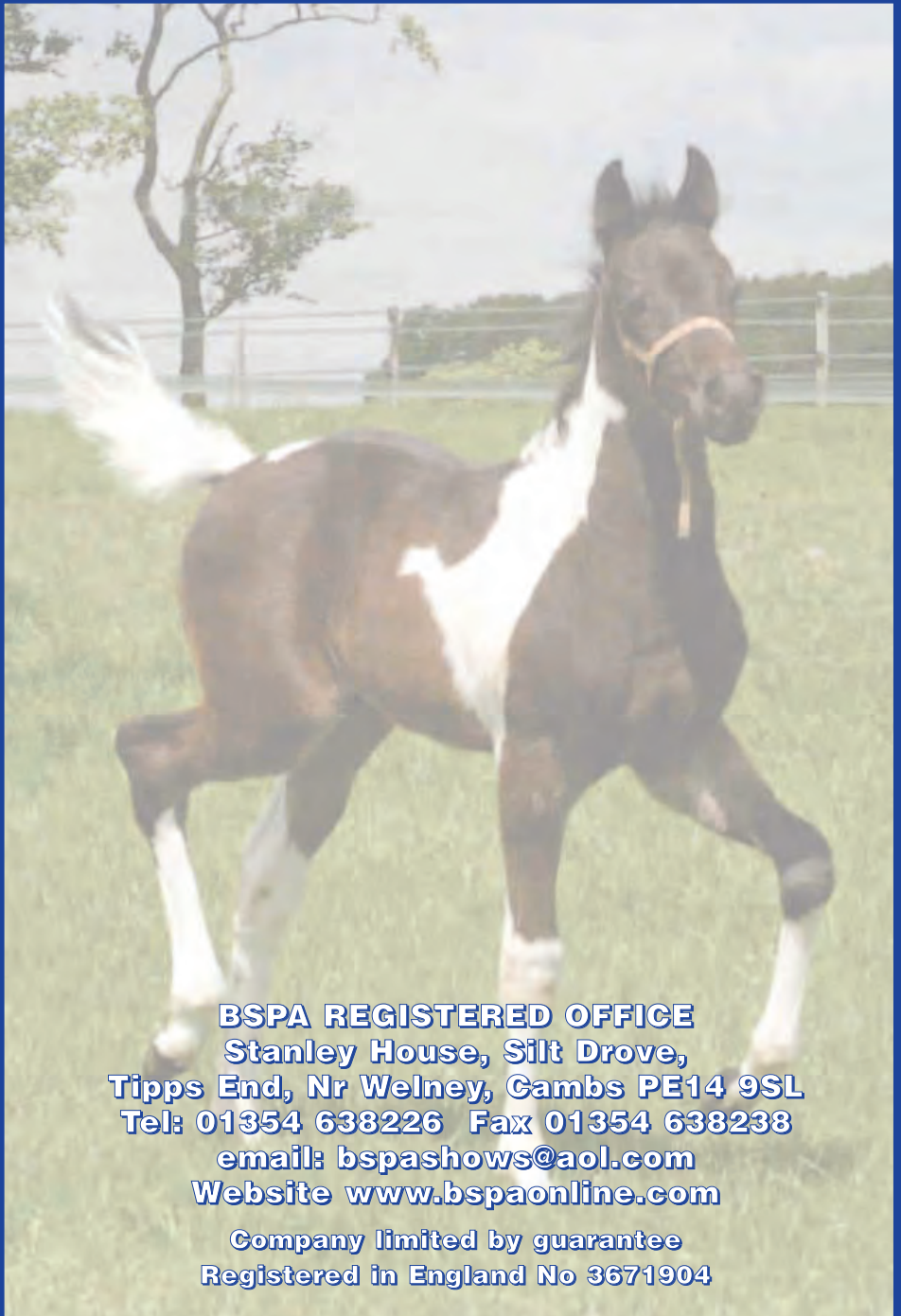
Judging Presence and Paces

■ Remember that

- ❑ This is really a collective for walk, trot and overall impression and your mark should reflect this
- ❑ Stallions will always appear to have more presence than mares or geldings and allowance should be made for this so that marks are not automatically skewed in their favour.
- ❑ Judge foals as foals, yearlings as yearlings etc not one against the other as older (but not necessarily better) horses would otherwise have an advantage.

Some Final Points

- If you can, before you start to mark, ask the handler what discipline the animal is intended for/competes in. NB: 'Showing' is not an Olympic discipline!
- Don't be bullied by apparently experienced sports horse / warmblood handlers (usually dressed in whites!) who try to tell you its always done another way!
- And finally: Remember its meant to be fun!



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