

# Horse fact sheets – In Hand Showing

## Ringcraft

The object of the exercise is to show your horse in the best possible way so that the judge cannot fail to notice it. The most important thing you have to remember is that from the moment you enter the ring and for every moment you are in it your horse is on show. Anyone who has ever judged will tell you that there may only be one judge in the ring but there are at least ten more looking on. There may even be someone watching who will be judging your horse next time out.

Although the competition is judged according to the performance and impression of the horse on the day in the opinion of that particular judge, judges are only human and can be influenced by past impressions too. An efficient and well-turned-out exhibitor can contribute to this impression just as much as the look of the horse, so remember to dress neatly and correctly for the particular class you are entering.

The main system of showing in Australia, is based largely on the traditional British comparative method, where the competitors are judged in comparison with each other, the European system of showing, however is where the judges occupy different positions in the arena and the horse is sometimes lead around three sides of a triangle and marked by each judge, independently of the others, against an ideal standard, with the one gaining the highest marks 'winning'. The procedures in the ring are different for the two methods, so I will stick to the method most commonly used in Australia.

With all systems of judging the competition can be broken down into a number of distinct phases.

### 1. Before entering the ring

*The art of show ring presentation:-* your horse should be in the right frame of mind, having been quietly led around to settle, if excitable, and looking as good as you can possibly manage. Before you enter the ring leave enough time for the last minute touch up, wipe your horse over with a soft clean cloth, remove stray hairs and dust, and touch up the hoofs.



You will have been casting an eye over the opposition in the meantime and if you have the chance will have chosen the competitor to follow when you are instructed to enter the ring. If you have a free-going horse you may want to lead if your horse lacks presence you may want to follow one that particularly lacks it, or alternatively follow one that looks as if it is excitable or badly behaved in the hopes that some of the enthusiasm rubs off (taking care not to get kicked). The ring steward will collect your entry ticket, and it is now that presence is important, the well-known 'look at me' factor that everyone wants in a show horse. First impressions are very important and the minute you enter the ring the judge will be looking for the outstanding animals and getting a feel of the class generally with a view to choosing the first line up.

As you enter the ring make sure that your horse is leading well with the degree of activity that suits it best, that you are level with its shoulder and have a good contact with its head, that your lead rein is held securely and tidily with no trailing ends.

### 2. Entering the ring

In nearly all in-hand classes the leader goes on the outside of the ring and the horses circuit the ring in a clockwise direction. Allow plenty of space between your horse and the horse in front so that you are not forced to check your horse behind a slow-moving horse and so that you don't get kicked. After about two circuits of the ring you should keep an eye on the ring steward next to the judge for further instructions.

Once the class is in progress some of the phases of the competition described below may be left out at the judge's discretion.

### 3. The trot

In pony classes particularly, competitors may be halted on the track and asked to trot individually past the judge to the rear of the competitors. A lot depends on where the judge is standing and any faults that your horse may have as to how you deal with this.

Regardless of the type of class, at this stage the judge will be looking at the action in profile, for such things as knee action and engagement of the hocks, but the judge may be able to see the straightness of the action depending on the angle of view. Ideally you should ensure that your horse is alert and active the second you start to walk forward, the horse should be rounded and hopefully showing a reasonable length of rein rather than being over bent. At the trot it is more important than at the walk to maintain the contact with the horse via the rein. A beautifully balanced horse can trot on a loose rein without any problem, providing it has good manners, but generally it is nice to have the horse going into its bridle and trotting with you. When you start to trot balance is everything, so you should still be level with the shoulder and able to run fast enough to keep pace with the horse, rather than hanging back and pulling the horse's head around you, which can make it look as if the horse is throwing the offside foreleg.

All being well you should trot on fast enough to show off the extension of the trot without becoming unbalanced or breaking into a canter, continue around the ring so that the judge can have a good look, then return to the walk calmly before you return to the line up with the other competitors.

### 4. The line up

Usually the judge will call in the best first but not always. You will be expected to line up, off the track, and to remain halted until it is your turn to show your horse to the judge. If there are a lot of competitors don't be lulled into a false sense of security and let your horse go to sleep with hind legs resting, even if you think the judge may not appear to be watching they actually might be. On the other hand it is very unwise to keep nagging at a horse, because it can only concentrate for so long. Some judges find this irritating too because it is fussy and unnecessary. Teach your horse to stand properly as a habit and then allow it to relax briefly until it is its turn to exude presence. At the signal from the steward or judge walk your horse forward smartly.

### 5. Standing up for the judge

When called, you should walk forward away from the distraction of the other horses and halt in front of the judge. You will have a few seconds to stand your horse up so that the judge can look at the general conformation. The English traditional method requires the horse to stand with all four legs visible at once when viewed from the side. The feet should all be facing forwards. As the judge walks around to see the other side there is no need to rearrange the horse's legs.

Making the horse stand correctly is very much a matter of training and always insisting that it stands properly at home. This will develop the muscles and ligaments concerned and become more comfortable and easier to sustain. If the horse is used to having its stance adjusted one leg at a time by slight pressure on the shoulder (on the same side as the leg in question) pushing it backwards, standing it up correctly in the ring should not pose too many problems. It is better to nudge the horse backwards than to drag it forwards by the lead rein which can be misinterpreted as the signal to walk on. It also balances the horse better, bringing the hocks under the body rather than pulling the horse on to its fore, and so makes for a better outline. Once the legs are right the horse should be encouraged to reach forward slightly to show off the length of rein and then to prick its ears and look alert: the presence factor, again! This cannot be underestimated and is all the more important for a plainer horse. If the horse is utterly beautiful it just needs to be standing correctly without its head on the ground, and providing it is taking an interest in things, will show itself without needing to be fussed over.

Keeping horses alert at this stage is an art in itself and a variety of methods are used. The most popular is to pick a blade of grass, and encourage the horse to take an interest in it, this will cause the horse to focus on the grass instead of gazing around or fidgeting, you can then dictate how much it stretches its neck and the

## Horse fact sheets – In Hand Showing continued

height of the head. Just as a tip when I train our stallions for showing at home, I have a sweet/lolly wrapper in my pocket and also a small treat, (apple or carrot) I offer the treat and ruffle the wrapper at the same time, after a couple of treats they associate the noise of the wrapper with a treat, eventually on hearing the (wrapper rustle) they prick their ears and extend their neck looking for the treat, in the show ring I carry the lolly wrapper and rustle it at the appropriate time. No doubt it works every time.

### 6. The individual show

When the judge has seen enough at the halt you will be asked to walk away, turn and then trot back past the judge and return to the line. The judge will be looking to see if the action is correct. As you walk away he will be standing behind you to watch the hind legs for cow hocks and sideways movement in the hocks, as well as wide or close action. When you turn and trot back he looks at the action in front for dishing. As you go past the judge can check the earlier impressions of knee action and hock engagement, and as you go away the judge will stand behind you and look at the hind leg action at the trot and if you trot on right round the corner he can see the action again in profile.



This is where the assessment of your horse's weaknesses and strengths really comes into its own because your horse has the judge's undivided attention. How you lead your horse is of paramount importance. Always remember to turn the horse away from you so that it remains balanced and cannot tread on you.

Bad behaviour can sometimes disguise action but if the judge is prevented from seeing your horse move you may well be asked to do it again, and subsequent failure will mean that you cannot be placed.

### 7. The final walk round

If the judge has difficulty deciding or wants to check something, some of the competitors may be asked to walk round the judge in a smaller circle. As before you should give yourself enough space so that your horse is not impeded or distracted by the others. At this stage you should be watching the steward beside the judge like a hawk, particularly once you have seen them conferring.

### 8. Calling in and the final judging

When the steward calls you in, you should walk smartly to where you were previously lined up and halt. Keep an eye on the proceedings, if you are not called in first so that you line up on the correct side of the horse called in before you. Stand your horse up immediately and concentrate on the presence factor for all you are worth while the judge walks down the line. Even if you are not the apparent winner you should not let up for a second because a pleasing aspect can sometimes result in a last minute change of place.

### 9. Presentation of ribbons

Whatever your final placing, when you are handed your ribbon you should thank the judge politely and look reasonably pleased even if you are disappointed. There is nothing worse than a sore loser. Male competitors should remove their hats. You can now give your horse a pat. It is common practice to leave the ring in the order in which the class was judged with the first place getter in the lead.

*Original article By Mark Hanley, Archvale Pony Stud, VP Albury Show Society Inc., as published on the PCAV web site*

