

CONFORMATION

The horse is an athlete and conformation judging must relate to performance, or way of going, and the ability of the horse to stay sound as an athlete. Many factors affect the way a horse moves, but none are more influential than conformation. Some real differences exist because of the specialized use of certain breeds, but the fundamentals of good conformation of excellent performance horses are strikingly similar in all breeds. Therefore, it is essential to understand the concepts of good conformation in order to be a good judge. As a judge, you must evaluate the whole horse as a unit and not dwell too much on very fine points, however important.

The most important considerations in judging horses are structural correctness, balance, muscling and type. Major characteristics of a structurally correct horse (Figure 1) are long sloping shoulders (B); short, strong back (C); long underline (D); long, rather level croup (E); and straight legs (A and F).

If shoulders are long and sloping, they extend the stride, absorb shock, move the elbows away from the girth and raise the head. Prominent withers that extend well backward increase the stability of the saddle.

A short back and a long underline move the fore and rear legs farther apart and decrease possible leg interference. Also, a short back is stronger, it reduces the length of coupling and is usually more muscular.

A long, rather level croup accommodates more muscling and increases the leverage associated with long muscles. Leverage is also gained with maximum length from hip to hock and minimum length of cannon.

Straight legs distribute the shock of movement more uniformly through the bone structure and minimize the possibility of unusual strain and damage at any one point. Pasterns should be moderately short and set at about a 50-degree angle and feet should be

medium size, round, open at the heel and showing enough depth to afford good traction (Figure 2).

The structurally correct horse should also have an intelligent looking head with large bright eyes set wide apart to increase vision. Jaws which are strong and clean; nostrils that are large and flared, and a throat latch which is trim and clean assure maximum air intake to a working horse. The mobility of the head and balance of the horse is increased by a long and slightly arching neck with a high shoulder attachment. These factors that contribute to structural correctness facilitate the overall balance and movement of the horse and enable him to remain serviceably sound over a longer period of time.

Another important point in judging horses for conformation is to evaluate the overall balance of the horse. When viewed from a distance, the horse should look smooth and symmetrical. The body and legs should form an approximate square, and all

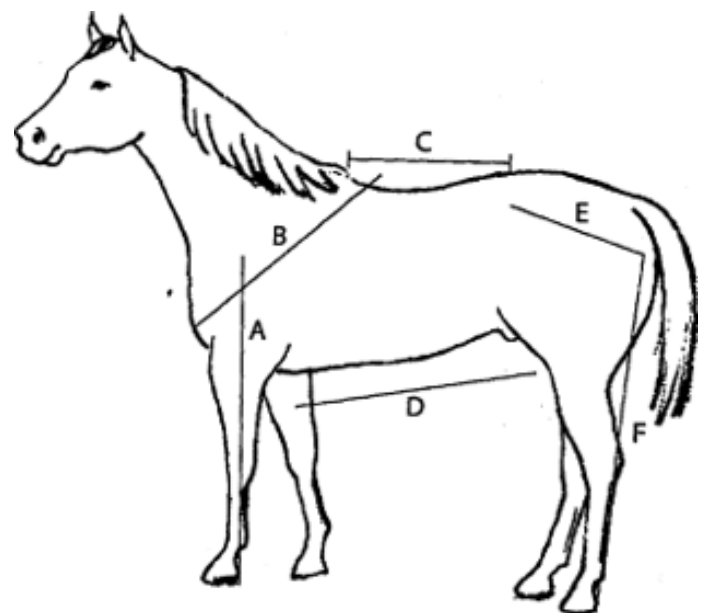
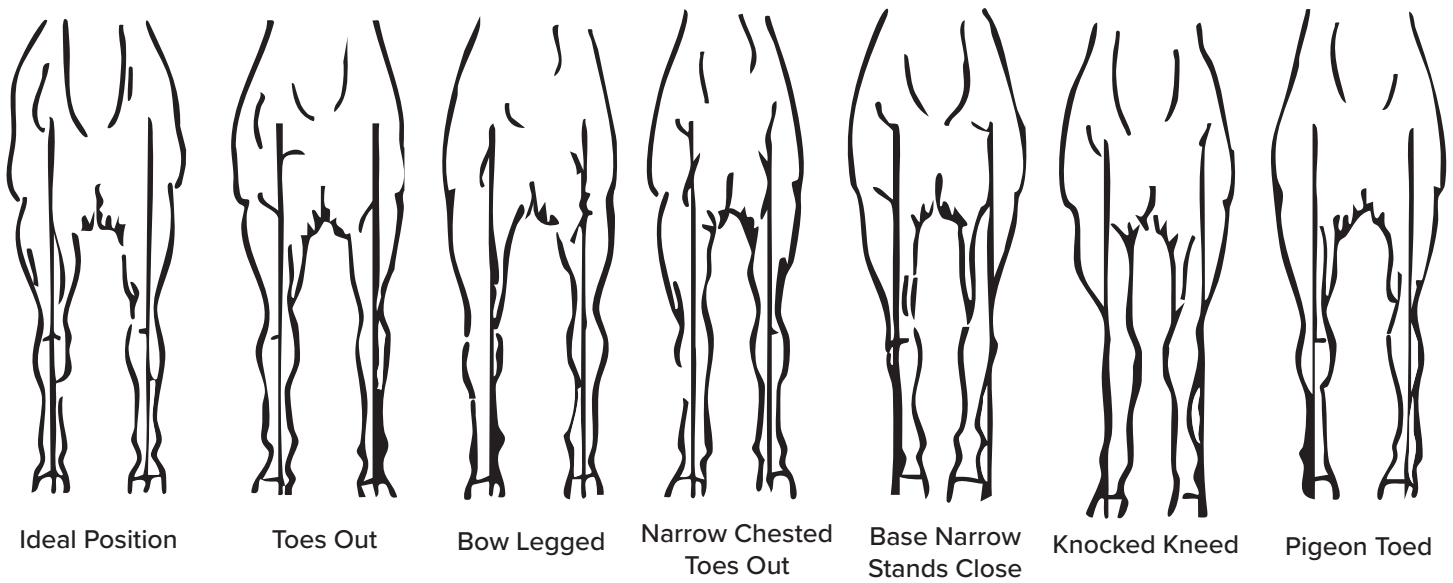


Figure 1

parts should blend in well with each other to enable the horse to move properly. Since the horse carries approximately two-thirds of his weight on his front legs, the pivot point of balance is directly under or slightly behind the shoulder. So the ideal conformation for balance is one in which the weight is shifted to the rear legs (Figure 3). A well-balanced horse's body can be divided into three parts. The long hip of the horse tends to carry a greater amount of weight directly on the rear legs, and the long, sloping shoulder tends to shift weight to the rear legs. With a relatively short back, the distribution of weight is ideal (Figure 4).

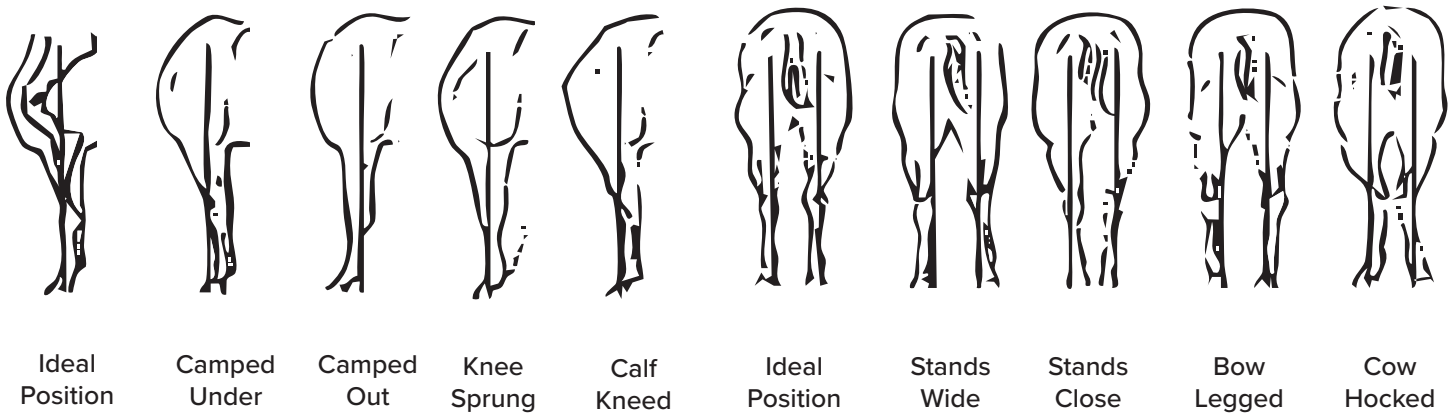
Although a horse may be structurally correct, the overall balance or symmetry of the horse may be undesirable. In general, a horse with good shoulders will have a short back and a long neck, and a horse with good hindquarters will have strong loins. But this is not always true, so it is essential that the judge evaluate the overall balance of an animal to determine its functional efficiency.

LEG DEFECTS



Vertical line from point of shoulder should fall in center of knee, cannon, pastern and foot.

Vertical line from point of buttock should fall in center of hock, cannon, pastern and foot.



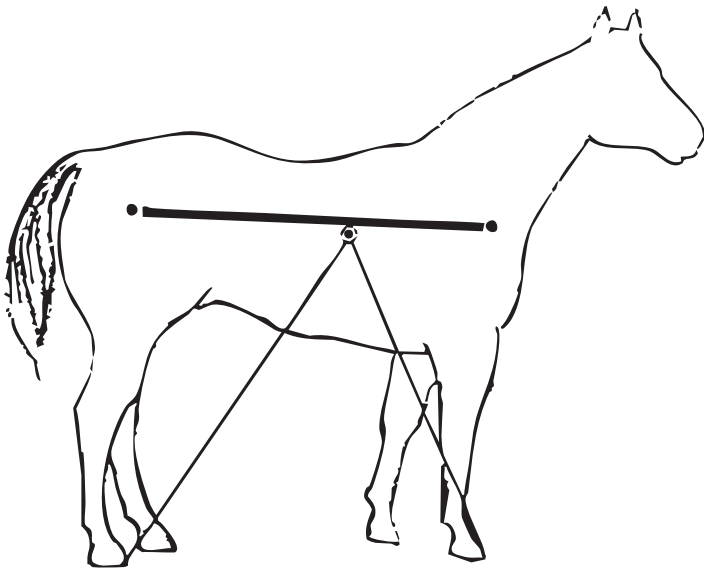


Figure 3

The good horse should be powerfully muscled to enable him to move quickly (Figure 5). He should be deep chested, big barreled, and have heavily muscled hindquarters. The chest should be wide and the muscling in the inner forearm should form an inverted “v” just below the chest. The arm and forearm should be bulging with muscles that are tied in high and extend well down into the knee. The back should be short and well-muscled, and the loin strong with muscling. There should be a great deal of depth of body and spring of rib in the well-muscled horse. The rear quarters should be deep, broad and heavy when viewed from either side or rear, and muscled so that

they are full through the thigh, stifle and gaskin, and down to the hock. The hip muscling should be long, extending down into the stifle. The stifle should tie well to the gaskin, and the gaskin muscle should extend down into the hock joint, both inside and out. When viewed from the rear, the stifle should be the widest point of the horse. Muscling is important to working ability, but the value of muscle mass or bulging muscle has often been over-emphasized in the show ring. The good judge must realize that the length of muscle is more important than thickness, because long, smooth muscles that tie in low on the leg improve the efficiency of the horse’s movement in contrast to the short, bunchy muscling commonly found in the show ring.

Type is another factor that affects judging. Type is related to muscling and overall size of the horse (Figure 6). Thick, heavily muscled horses are generally considered the old-type horses. These horses were usually shorter legged, lower set horses. The modern type horse is a taller, longer bodied, longer muscled horse, more in line with the modern type race horse. The middle of the road type horse is probably the most ideal for horsemen and 4-H’ers. This type horse combines muscling and speed to produce a working type horse and gives a little more flexibility as to function than some of the other extremes. To summarize the primary points of concern when judging horses for conformation are structural correctness, balance, muscling and type. The oral reasons given on a class should emphasize these main points. Therefore, a good judge should place their emphasis on the length and slope of the shoulder, the shortness and strength of the back, the length of the hip, and the structural correctness of the feet and legs. This is placing primary emphasis on structural correctness.

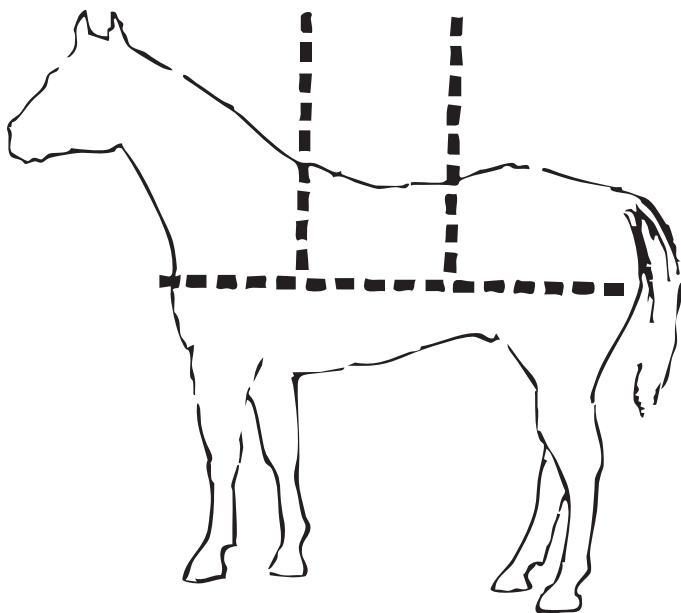


Figure 4

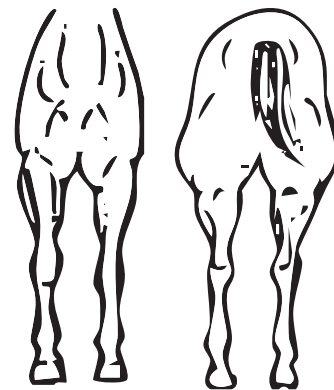
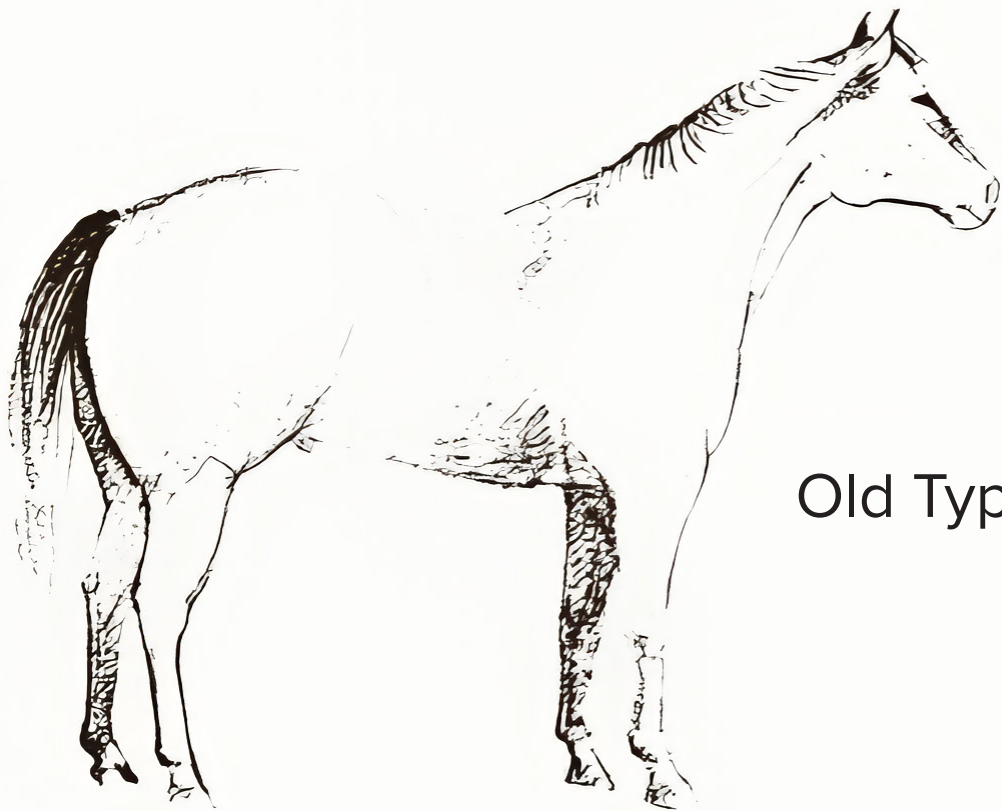
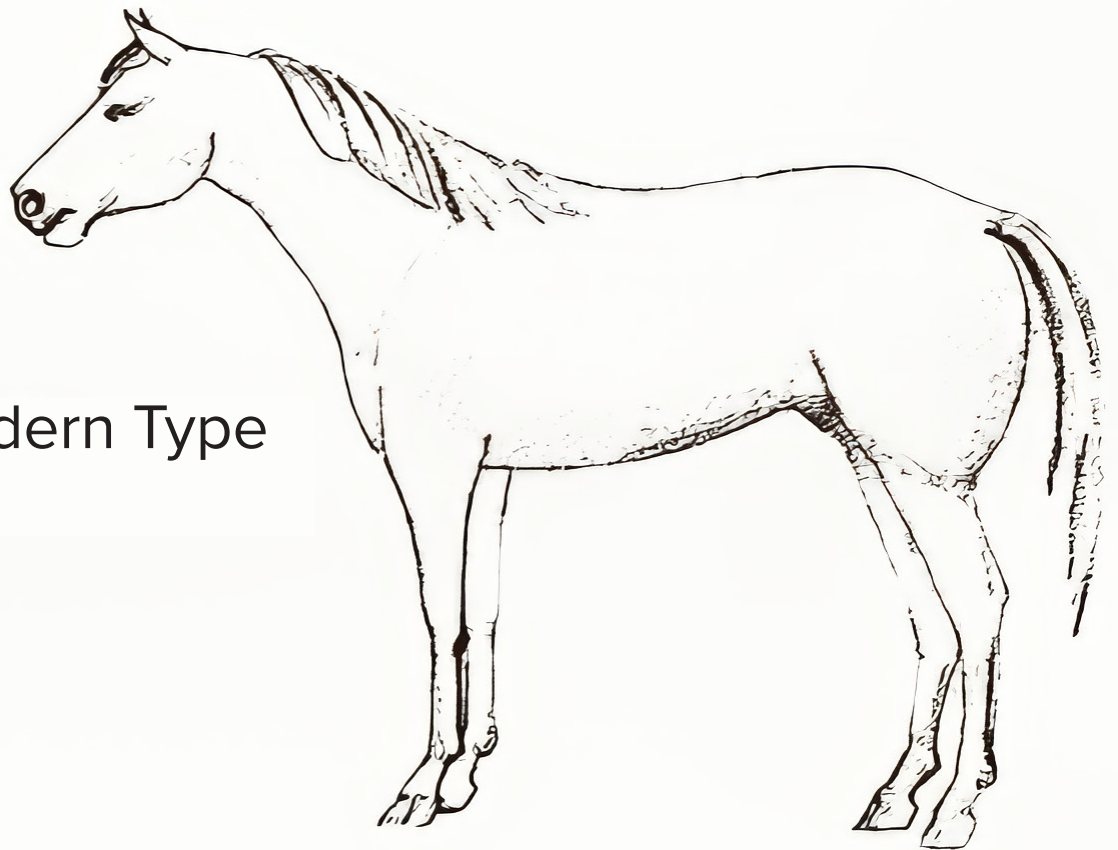


Figure 5



Old Type



Modern Type

Figure 6

The smoothness and overall symmetry of the horse is the next factor that will affect the placing a great deal. The muscling should be long, smooth muscling that ties in low on the legs, and this should be given lesser emphasis. The structural correctness and balance should always take precedence over size and muscling, as long as the size differences are not too great.

In classes where the structural correctness and the quality are essentially the same, the size differences are important, and will affect the placing to a great extent. However, one should never sacrifice quality for size in the modern horse.

TERMINOLOGY

The following sample reason sequence will probably never fit any horse exactly, but will provide a sequence to help build terminology and eliminate duplication and unnecessary wording.

The Structurally Correct Horse

I placed “1” at the top of this class because he was the most structurally correct gelding in the class. One had a longer, more sloping shoulder, shorter back and longer rump. He stood on straighter, more structurally correct feet and legs, was shorter in his cannon, and had a more desirable angle to the pastern. One was also cleaner and trimmer in the throat latch. and had a longer, trimmer, neater neck which attached higher on the shoulder. One stood wider than any horse in the class and had a longer, truer stride.

The Most Powerfully Muscled Horse

I placed “2” at the top of the class because she was the largest, most powerfully muscled mare in the class. She was wider through the floor of the chest, had a bigger barrel, showed more natural muscling over the back and loin, and had a fuller, deeper, more powerfully muscled hindquarter. She showed more bulge in the forearm, a more prominent “V”

up front, and was a deeper bodied mare. Two was wider through the stifle and showed more expression of muscling in the inner and outer gaskin and stood straighter on her feet and legs.

The Most Stylish Horse

I placed “3” at the top of this class because she was the most stylish mare in the class. She was a cleaner, trimmer, better-balanced, more athletic type of mare, which stood on more length of leg. She was especially cleaner and neater about her head, and had a longer, trimmer, neck and a higher shoulder attachment. She showed more refinement in her feet and legs, stood with her feet more correctly placed under her, and moved with a longer, truer stride. Three was smoother and more symmetrical throughout.

The Poorly Developed Horse

I placed “4” at the bottom of this class because he was the smallest lightest muscled, most structurally incorrect gelding in the class. Four was a plain-headed, straight-shouldered and long-backed gelding. He was also the most incorrect on his feet and legs in that he was calf-kneed, splayfooted, cow-hocked and the poorest moving horse in the class. He lacked the size, muscling and structural correctness to place higher in this class.

EXAMPLE OF REASON ON HORSES QUARTER HORSE MARES

(1) Sorrel, (2) Dun, (3) Bay, (4) Buckskin

These reasons are an example of a class with a placing of 2-1-3-4 in which a higher quality, better balanced mare (2) was placed over a larger, heavier muscled mare (1). The larger, heavier muscled mare (1) was in turn placed over a smaller, more athletic mare (3). The bottom placed mare (4) was an off-type, poorly balanced mare.

SAMPLE NOTES

Placings 2-1-3-4

	Compare	Grant	Criticize
2/1	Type Balance Symmetry Correct Movement	Muscle Size	Low neck attach Coarse Bunchy muscle
1/3	Size Scale Muscle	Athletic Movement Trim neck	Small Cow hock Short rump
3/4	Athletic Balance Type	Larger	Light muscle Coarse Long head Straight shoulder Long back Poor stance and movement

SAMPLE REASONS

I placed this class of Quarter Horse Mares 2-1-3-4. I placed 2 at the top of the class and over 1 because she had the most desirable combination of Quarter Horse type, balance and structural correctness of any mare in the class. Two was a cleaner, shorter headed mare with a more prominent eye and smaller muzzle. She had a cleaner throat latch, and a longer, trimmer neck which attaches higher on her shoulder. Two had a longer, more sloping shoulder, more prominent withers, a shorter back and a longer rump. Her muscling tied in smoother and lower on her legs. Two stood and moved wider than 1 with a longer, truer stride. I grant that 1 was a larger, heavier muscled mare but I criticize her because she was a coarse, bunchier muscled mare with a lower neck attachment.

However, I placed 1 over 3 because she was a larger, more powerfully muscled mare. One was

wider through the floor of the chest showing a more prominent v, and more bulging forearm. She was a deeper chested, bigger barreled, longer rumped mare, as viewed from the side. One had a more powerfully muscled hindquarter being wider through the stifle and showing more expression of muscling in the inner and outer gaskins, and stood on straighter legs. I grant that 3 was a more athletic, freer moving mare with a trimmer, more stylish head and neck, but I criticize her because she was a smaller, lighter muscled, shorter rumped, cow-hocked mare.

In my bottom pair I easily placed 3 over 4 because she was an athletic, better balanced, more stylish mare. She had a typier, more desirable head and neck, a longer more sloping shoulder, and shorter back than 4. Three stood with her feet more correctly placed under her and moved with a longer, truer stride.

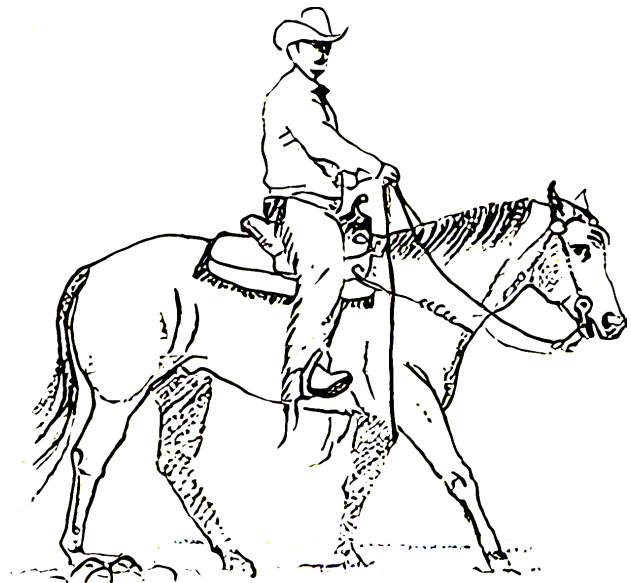
I placed 4 at the bottom of this class, realizing that she is a larger, more upstanding, longer hipped mare than 3, but 4 was the coarsest, lightest muscled mare in the class. She was a long-headed, straight-shouldered, long-backed mare. Four was also a narrow-chested mare which showed no expression of muscling through her stifle and gaskins, camped out behind and was the narrowest moving horse in the class. Four lacked the balance, type, muscling and structural correctness to place higher in this class.

WESTERN PLEASURE

Pleasure horse classes are judged on performance with emphasis on manners. This means that not only must the pleasure horse perform all the gaits well, but he must do so willingly and without objecting in any way. He must not throw his head, pull at the bit, prance, move sideways, kick at or threaten other horses, break gait or show any other kind of disobedience or contrary behavior. He must have a soft mouth and respond immediately but smoothly to his rider's slightest cues.

The major considerations in judging a western pleasure class are the way of moving, consistency and correctness of performance. The judge is basically selecting the best moving horses. These horses are alert and moving with a clean, easy stride in all gaits. The walk should be flat footed but not sluggish with a reasonably long stride and an alert expression. The jog should be slow, smooth and clean and an even two-beat gait that does not appear to drag. The good moving horse should have a definite clean lope with a soft, easy stride. The lope should be fairly slow, smooth and, of course on the correct lead. All gaits should be true, relaxed and natural. Of the horses that are consistent and correct in their performance, the best moving horse should be the one that wins the class.

Consistency is another factor which affects the placing of a class considerably. To be consistent a pleasure horse must be rated—that is the horse goes the same speed constantly (uphill or downhill) on a reasonably loose rein. The horse should exhibit a businesslike manner, with a steady head carriage and no lateral movement. He will stay on the rail as desired and respond smoothly and immediately to all cues. A pleasant, attentive attitude should be maintained throughout the performance.



Correctness of performance is essential for a horse to avoid being eliminated in a western pleasure class. The pleasure horse must be correct in his leads and maintain the gait requested at all times. He must stop quietly and easily, and back readily with his nose tucked. He should stand attentively in the lineup and rein easily when required to do so. Horses that make mistakes in the correctness of their performance, such as breaking gait, missing leads or showing some signs of disobedience, should usually be penalized heavily. Inconsistent horses are not penalized as heavily as incorrect horses, and poor moving horses are penalized in accordance with their way of moving. Horses showing these faults should be criticized accordingly in your oral reasons.

The most important things to consider in placing a pleasure class are:

1. A quiet and alert walk
2. An easy square trot
3. A long, smooth, floating stride at the lope
4. Correct leads
5. Consistency
6. Loose rein
7. Attitude
8. Stands quietly and backs readily with nose tucked
9. Responds to cues instantly

The Best Moving

I placed 1 at the top of this class because he was the best balanced, highest quality, lightest, truest moving horse in the class. His movement was more natural, relaxed and effortless throughout his work. He was more alert and brisker at the walk, squarer at the jog (trot) and had a longer, cleaner, more definite stride at the canter. He was also a breedier, more stylish gelding, with more flexion at the poll and a more natural head set. He stood squarer on his feet and legs in the lineup and backed quietly and comfortably.

The Most Consistent

I placed 2 at the top of this class because he was the most consistent, responsive and efficient horse in the class. He exhibited a slower, more consistent cadence and a steadier head carriage throughout his performance. He was also more responsive to the cues, making smoother, prompt changes in gait and had a more businesslike manner. He was a softer mouthed gelding, which was more collected at a walk, trot and canter, and was ridden on a looser rein. He also stood and backed quietly and willingly, and with a more pleasant attitude.

A More Correct Performance

I placed 3 over 4 in my bottom pair because he was more correct and complete in his performance. He was more correct in exhibiting the gait requested and was correct in his leads. He maintained a more correct position on the rail, reversed correctly when asked, and exhibited his ability more completely than did 4.

The Unbroken Horse

I placed 4 at the bottom of this class because he was highly excited, inconsistent and incorrect throughout his work. He required continuous checking, pranced and moved sideways, kicked, and was ill tempered. The speed at which he cantered was excessive and variable. He broke gait twice, missed his left lead and cross fired when moving to the right. In the lineup, he bobbed his head continuously, jawed the bit and backed crooked when asked to back. He lacked the correctness and consistency to place higher in this class.

The Poor Moving Horse

I placed 4 at the bottom of this class because he was the poorest moving gelding in the class. He was a loose-jointed, heavy-footed, poorly balanced gelding with a short, choppy stride. He was sluggish in his movement and tended to drag his feet. He was also a narrow moving horse who tended to rope walk with his front legs and had excessive hock movement when trotting. He carried his head excessively low with his nose extended. He lacked the balance, cadence and athletic ability to place higher in this class.

 **SAMPLE REASON**

I placed this class of Pleasure horses 1-2-3-4.

I placed 1 over 2 because he was a longer strided, freer moving more responsive gelding. He had more length and spring to his stride at the walk, was squarer at the jog, and was ridden on a looser rein than 2. He was more alert and attentive and took his leads smoothly and without hesitation. He stood and backed quietly and smoothly and was more consistent throughout his performance than 2. I grant that 2 was a more nicely balanced, more athletic gelding, but I fault him for being ill tempered and inconsistent.

In my middle pair, I placed 2 over 3 because he was a more nicely balanced, more athletic, better moving gelding. He had a lighter, smoother stride and was a truer moving gelding than 3. He had a more even jog, was more responsive to the cues and picked up his leads more quickly. He backed straighter and truer without being forced. I grant that 3 was more consistent at the lope, but I criticize him because he was a choppy, short strided, heavy moving gelding. He was slow to respond to his cues and backed crooked and with his mouth open.

Referring to my bottom pair, I placed 3 over 4 because he was a more consistent, more collected, better mannered horse. He was ridden on a looser rein and was more responsive when asked to change gaits or back, I grant that 4 was a higher quality better moving gelding, but I faulted him and placed him at the bottom of this class because he was unresponsive to the cues, inconsistent at the jog and lope, missed the left lead and refused to back.

ENGLISH PLEASURE (HUNT TYPE)

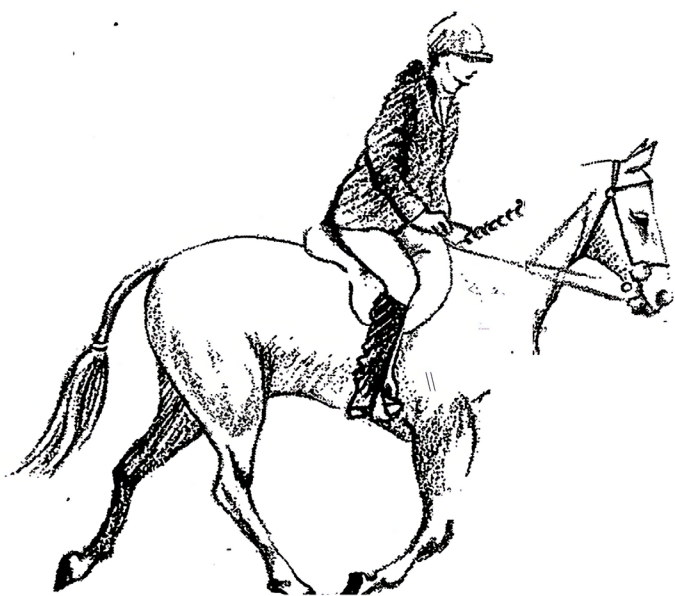
A hunt type pleasure class (also called “Hunter Hack”) is a test of the type of horse suited for a long cross-country ride, or more exactly, for hunting. His head is carried low and all his gaits should be long and low with no wasted effort.

A hunter’s walk is relaxed and free, with no prancing. His trot is long striding and smooth allowing the rider to post easily. The canter is a comfortable, almost effortless gait, the long strides making it seem fast by comparison with other types of horses, though the cadence is fairly slow. All gaits should be efficient and ground covering.

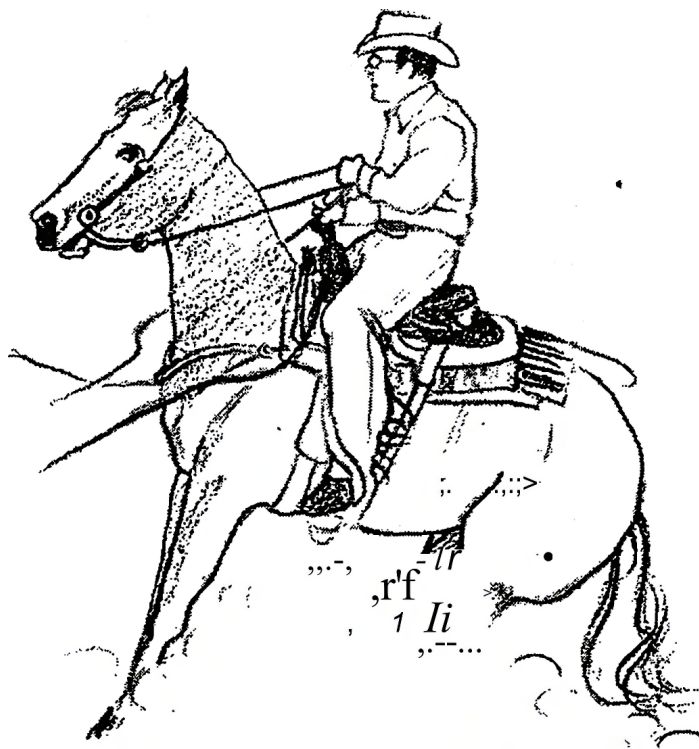
A hunter should work on gentle rein contact. While he will not bring his haunches under him to stop as the western horse would, he should still pull up promptly and in balance when a halt is called for. He should stand quietly and back easily.

Hunt type pleasure horses may be required to show a slow trot or jog (sitting trot), an extended trot and a hand gallop. At all gaits, the motion should be relaxed and effortless, comfortable for both horse and rider.

The important considerations in placing an English pleasure class are similar to those for western pleasure. The only difference is English pleasure horses are ridden on a tighter rein and more emphasis is placed on the length of stride. Oral reasons should be similar to those given for western pleasure.



REINING



Judging reining is rather simple and easy, provided that the judge is thoroughly familiar with each test that is included in the reining patterns. The judge needs a clear mental picture of a good working horse and how each movement should be performed. With this knowledge, each performance can be evaluated and scored according to the overall quality of the run.

Form is a key word in reining. Each movement is executed in form and in response to a signal. A light horse is one that obeys a signal quickly and willingly. The total performance should be smooth, light and in proper form.

Every reining pattern consists of a few simple elements—straight lines, circles, stops, turns, back-ups and changes in speed. The following discussion of an ideal run will be a description of AQHA pattern Number 1 but will generally apply to all patterns. In pattern Number 1, the horse is asked to lope or run in a straight line. A good reining horse should move straight and willingly with no anticipation, tail wringing or charging. Stops should be prompt, smooth and sliding, with the hindquarters dropping well under, and the horse balanced lightly on his front feet. The good reining horse will have his neck raised, head tucked and jaw relaxed. A 3-foot slide in good form should

🐾 SAMPLE REASONS - REINING AQHA PATTERN #1

receive more credit than a 6-foot slide in poor form in response to a heavy hand. Backing should be willing, collected and fairly fast. The circles should be exactly round with the lead changes occurring exactly in the middle. The horse should neck rein easily and his entire body should be slightly bent toward the center of the circle.

The first figure eight in pattern Number 1 is supposed to be small and slow and the second is large and fast. Horses which fail to show this size and speed difference should be penalized. The lead changes should be precise, smooth and quiet with no anticipation or charging. Upon completion of the eights, the horse should be moving at a rather brisk pace and should continue at this pace or faster for his rollback. For a good rollback, the horse should again move straight and willing with no anticipation, tail wringing or charging. In the rollback, the horse's hindquarters should drop down deep in the ground and slide just like he would in a stop. Just as he reaches the end of his slide, he should pick up his front end lightly and turn right back through himself and leave in the same tracks he came in. This will be executed at both ends of the arena with the first to the left and the second to the right. This is followed by another stop which should be long, smooth and sliding. The last elements of the pattern are the pivots. The horse should turn quietly, smoothly and low to the ground. He should be stopped and turned back the other way in the same manner. The horse should execute a pivot the same as he would a spin. He should continue to turn until he is stopped. He should not be jumped back and forth.

In summary, remember that a good reining horse is supple, light and precise in his movements. Don't be dazzled by speed and force, and do give credit to the horse and rider that work smoothly as a team.

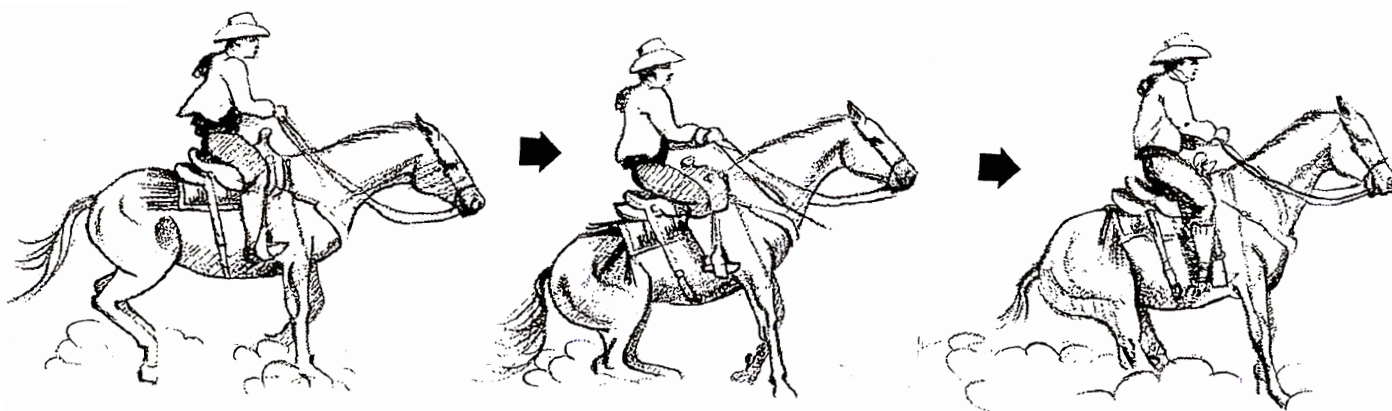
I placed this class of Reining horses 3-1-4-2.

I placed 3 at the top of this class and over 1 because she ran a smoother, more complete pattern and displayed more precision, ease and calmness throughout. She had longer, smoother, more relaxed slides, backed straighter and easier, showed more precision in her lead changes and greater differences in the size and speed of her eights. Her rollbacks were quicker and more precise. I grant that 1 ran with more speed, but I faulted her for being harder mouthed and rougher lead changes.

However, I placed 1 over 4 in my middle pair because she was a harder stopping, quicker turning mare, which ran her pattern at a much greater speed and showed greater differences in the size of her eights. I grant that 4 changed lead smoother and more precisely, but I criticized her for bouncing on her stops, backing crooked and anticipating her stops.

In my bottom pair, I placed 4 over 2. Four ran a more complete pattern than 2. She stopped quicker and quieter and changed leads with ease and neatness. Her circles were more exact, and her rollbacks and pivots were more stylish.

I faulted 2 and placed her at the bottom of this class because she lacked the style, precision and form required to place higher. She stopped poorly with her head up and mouth open, was reluctant to back and failed to change leads in her small eight. She displayed improper form on her rollbacks and lacked precision in her pivots.



Comparative Advantages**General Terms**

More breed character type
More nicely balanced, more symmetrical
More stylish
Heavier, longer muscled; more powerfully muscled
Smoother, higher quality
Sounder

Muscling

Heavier, longer muscled, more powerfully muscled, smoothly muscled, longer, cleaner, more defined muscling throughout (or through the arm, forearm, quarter, stifle and inside and outside gaskin)

More powerfully muscled through the “v”, more development of “v” muscle, more prominent “V”

Heavier muscled over the top
Heavier muscled over coupling or loin
More powerfully muscled about the jaw

Head and Neck

More breed character about head and ear
Stronger or more massive jaw
Shorter and more active ear
Cleaner chiseled and defined about the head
Shorter face and head
Wider between the eyes
More alert, larger eye
Cleaner, leaner neck

Neck blends more smoothly into the shoulder
Trimmer neck
Smoother blending of neck and withers

Criticisms

Lacks breed character
Poorly balanced
Plain
Light muscled
Rough, low quality
Unsound

Light muscled, short and bunched in his muscling, lacked definition of muscling throughout (or through quarter, etc.)

Flat in the “v”

Lacked muscling over the top
Lacked muscling over the loin
Small jaw

Plain headed
Small jaw
Long, mule ear
Coarse headed
Long headed
Narrow between the eyes
Sleepy eyed, pig-eyed
Coarse throated or coarse at throat latch

Rough in the shoulder
Coarse, thick neck
Ewe-necked, high in the withers

Shoulder

More prominent, cleaner withers
More desirable slope to the shoulder
Deeper shoulder

Low, flat, mutton withers
Steep shouldered
Shallow shoulder

Chest, Barrel and Top

Deeper hearted
Wider chested
Deeper barrelled
More spring of rib
Shorter back
Stronger back or stronger topped
Shorter coupled
Longer, leveler, more nicely turned over
Deeper in the flank
Longer underline

Shallow in the heart
Narrow chested, fronted
Shallow in the barrel
Flat-ribbed
Long in the back
Weak topped, low backed
Long in the coupling
Short, steep croup, flat croup
Wasp-waisted, shallow flank
Short underline

Feet and Legs

General

Shorter and flatter in the cannon bone

Long cannon, round cannon, tied in at the cannon

Knees and hocks set closer to the ground
Cleaner and more defined about the joints (or knees or hocks)
Heavier boned, more substance of bone
Higher quality bone or underpinning
More definition of tendon
Deeper knee or hock
More correct angle to the pastern

Long cannon
Coarse, puffy about the joints
Fine boned
Coarse, rough bone
Lacked definition of tendon
Shallow knee or hock
Steep short pastern, long weak pastern (coon footed)

Cleaner about the hoof head
Rounder, more desirably shaped hoof
Waxier, tougher, more durable hoof
Deeper at the heel
Wider at the heel

Puffy about hoof head
Mule footed
Cracked, brittle hooves
Shallow heel
Narrow heel

Front legs

Stood wider in front
Stood straighter on front legs (from front)
Stood straighter on front legs (from side)

Stood narrow in front
Knock-kneed, pigeon-toed, splay-footed
Buck kneed, calf kneed

Hind Legs

Stood straighter on hind legs (as viewed from rear)

Stood straighter on feet

More correct set to the hock (as viewed from side)

Action

Truer action

Longer stride

Freer, easier, prompter, snappier moving

More coordinated stride

More flexion of knees and hocks

Moves straighter in front

Moves straighter behind

Cow hocked (close at hocks), bowlegged (out at hocks)

Toed out, toed in

Sickle hocked (too much angle), post-legged (not enough angle)

Faulty action

Short, choppy stride

Sluggish, stiff

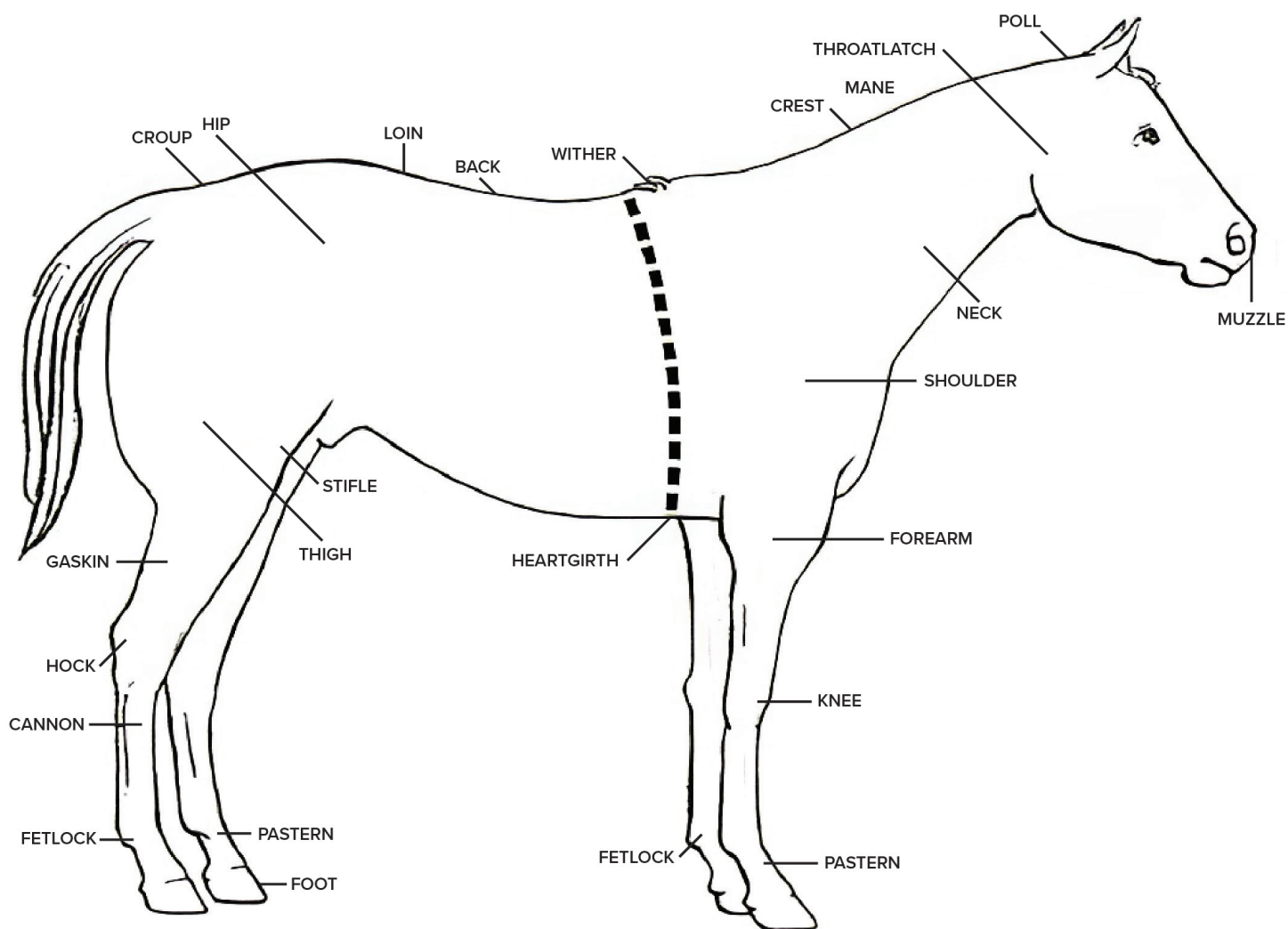
Uncoordinated in gait

Lacks flexion

Paddles, (wings-in, moves close, rope walks)

Wings-out, wings-in, moves wide at the hocks, rolls the hocks, moves close at the hocks

THE PARTS OF A HORSE





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