

A Judges Perspective

by [Elizabeth Graves](#)©

So the big day has arrived and you're heading to the show. I myself have been an exhibitor for many years; I know what it feels like to be in those very shoes.



Liz as an Exhibitor

You have put many hours in the saddle.

Found all the right tack and cloths.

Put in lots of good old elbow grease in cleaning and shining up your horse.

As a judge the biggest problem I see is when people are not really prepared for what is about to take place.

The nerves take over; just riding in front of someone given the title of "**The Judge**" seems to make people tighten up in body and mind.



Liz and Hugh Richardson, Judging a show in Carson City, NV.

I would like to put this a bit more in prospective to help alleviate some of this. Judges' are an employee of the show. They have been hired to place horses during a show according to the governing body's rules and show criteria. We are not there to scare you and the last thing I want is for an exhibitor to tighten up when they enter a ring where I am judging. I want you to have every possible chance to ride in comfort, as you would at home. If you are able to do this, you and your horse will have much better results in your performance and errors that would not

normally happen will be avoided. Relax, Relax, when nerves take over it will affect your horse. As a judge I often see the horse take the blame for a poor performance when it is more often a rider error that causes the problem. Be there for your horse; don't worry about where the judge is (except not to run them over). Know what else is going on in the ring so you can keep your horse in the best position to be seen.



It is our job to follow the rules, keep the show moving along and judge each class separately as if we have never seen that same horse in another class. Each class is a new one. It is very normal to see a horse get better as the day goes on and the opposite is possible to, some start to fizzle out.

Below is a list of things that we, as judges, look for.

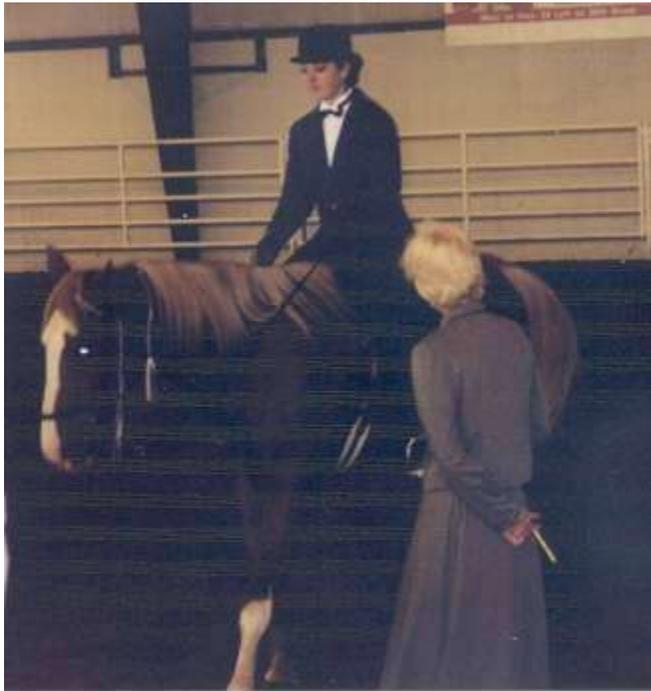
- Which horses are in compliance with tack and attire requirements for a given class?
- Which execute all the required gaits when called for in a class, smoothly up in to and down out of them.
- Which horses maintain consistency in the given gaits, both ways of the ring; this also means holding the correct gait through the corners.
- Is a horse doing the required gait at all? Such as, is the horse doing a running walk or stepping pace, rack etc. . . .
- Is there a definite change of speed from walk to the called for gait?
- Has the horse reversed correctly for that given class such as English to the rail and western to the center?
- Is the horse pleasant and mannerly in the ring? No pinned ears, wring of the tail, gapping of the mouth, an overall glad to be doing its job look.
- Does a horse meet the requirement for a given class such as a trail pleasure horse verses and plantation horse, English type verses western?



As a judge, it is much easier to judge a class of all great horses, than a class where we are trying to keep up with “who made the least amount of errors”. This often does happen though, as we are given nothing else to go by and this means no one doing the correct gaits a well. This does happen, and often.

Many errors seen are:

- Not doing the called for gaits
- Breaking gait
- Horses traveling sideways along a rail.
- Head tipped to the rail
- Poor performance in the back up
- Rider getting stiff and becoming an ineffective in supporting their horse.



Just because you enter the ring does not mean you will win a class. It is your responsibility to have your horse ready, know the rules and know when you make an error. You are your own biggest competition in the ring, not everyone else. I see people lose to them self's all the time. Don't get mad and take it out on your horse or those around you, just be honest with yourself and go home and work on what you learned at the show. If the same person won at every show there would be no reason to have them. Leaving the ring holding a ribbon really is not the most important factor of showing but doing a good job and the best you can at that time.

The rewards and ribbons will come in time. There is always another show to work towards. Just because you spent money to show does not mean you win, everyone else did too.

I see often where people have worked their horse to be ready for a specific show in a given amount time, but you must be honest, is the horse really ready? If not, know this is the case and take the horse for experience. Be happy when you may get that surprise ribbon but never quit working to get that perfect ride in a class where everything goes great.

What we as judges see from the center ring may be very different than what one on the outside of the ring may see. We see things you don't and you can see things that we do not, this is all part of the process.