

Form Follows Function

Spotted Saddle Horses

With Guest Judge Elizabeth Graves

Judging a class of Spotted Saddle horses is always a delight for me. The first reason being the variety of fabulous colors and markings, the second being the variety in types of horses one sees in these classes.

The registration of the Spotted Saddle Horse demands correct coloring and any four-beat gait. At one time it seemed the running walk and rack were the gaits of choice for this breed and Walking Horse type was more acceptable. We now see the fox trot, stepped pace, corto and stepped rack. The lateral pace and trot are unacceptable in that they are two-beat.

It is a judge's responsibility to recognize that many different gaited breeds are now influencing the type of Spotted Saddle Horses we see. These days, a judge should not lean towards any "type" as a preference, but be open-minded and judge each horse as an individual.

A judge should consider the following questions.

1) Do the characteristics of each individual meet the standards of good basic sound structure regardless of specific breed influence?

2) Does an individual balance and flow from front to back, does the front attach well to the barrel, does the barrel hatch well to hind, or does the horse look like more than one horse put together? Are the different parts of the body in proportion to each other?

3) How are the front and hindquarters going to influence each other when a horse is in gait? Are they going to produce a smooth efficient four-beat gait when working together regardless of the gait?

In looking at these three pictures we are limited in what we can really see, but these are three very nice horses. It is always enjoyable for a judge to have a class with nice horses. This really makes a judge work and utilize every bit of knowledge one has accumulated. I like separating each horse by who has the most correct points, not by who has the least incorrect faults in conformation. A class of consistently nice horses makes this possible.



Photo courtesy of SSHBEA.

Horse #1: In looking at Horse #1 I see a neck that is set medium out of the chest and shoulder, making for a horse that could possibly have a lower or higher head set as desired. The neck on this horse is a nice length in relation to the length of the functioning back. The top line of the neck flows nicely into the back. In this picture the front right leg looks to be just a bit behind at the knee. The shoulder looks to be of nice length and the humerus looks to be a bit short and flatter in its angle, possibly making this horse shorter in reach and lower in lift and fold of the fronts in its gait. This horse looks to

About our Guest Judge: Elizabeth Graves has been training all gaited breeds since 1978 and judging nationally since 1982. She has held many gait related judge's cards through the years and has held a Masters card with the SSHBEA. In 2001 she reached 18,000 entries judged.

Elizabeth travels nationwide, conducting all-breed gait related clinics, specializing in gait analysis and natural development. She resides on her ranch "Shades of Oak" in Clear Lake, MN and continues to train horses and teach people, averaging 74 training horses, of all breeds, per year. To learn more about Liz visit <http://egraves.gaitedhorses.net/>

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Placement: 1st Place: Horse #2

2nd Place: Horse #3

3rd Place: Horse #1

My reasons for these placements are as follows: Horse #2 showed the most balance and flow in total structure, with correct muscle to support the structure. I like the hindquarter structure on this horse seeing lot of strength to help get the most of the front quarters. Horse #3 seemed a bit camped out behind. Even though that may add to reach behind, it can be stressful to the structure of a horse making it more work for a horse to coil at the loins. The neck being a bit short can make for more work in achieving a frame of gait with out extra support of the horse on a the part of a rider. Horse #1 was placed 3rd in relation to being a bit back at the knee and high in the rump, either of which could effect efficient execution of gait and stress to over all structure. I would also have liked to see a bit more length of pelvis on this horse to help over-all balance.