

## Training Document for Horsemanship Judges

It is imperative that all Judges approach all judging objectively and without prejudice.

This judging is NOT based on high level dressage or equitation judging but is purely to score the rider and horse to help improve horse manners, handling, grooming and condition with the riders training and riding. At all times the criteria is for safely comfortably doing the distance with appropriate tack, conditioning and riding that assists in the welfare of the horse covering the distances. The emphasis is not on marking down the score but explaining in a friendly helpful way why and helping to educate rider. Adjust the tack if necessary at the judging to assist riders.

### Pre Ride Judging (30 points in total)

The rider must present the horse and themselves to you in full tack and dress as if they are leaving on the ride shortly afterwards

- Rider Wear: Either wearing shoes with a heel or if in takkies etc. they must have safety stirrups/caged stirrups fitted.  
An approved riding helmet  
Rider bib with number
- Tack and Equipment: The rules state that a saddle must be used and the horse must be under control. This gives the riders a lot of latitude and a variety of gear, with mixtures of Western, English and Endurance tack will be used. However proper fit and adjustment of tack, particularly of the saddle is very important to not cause galls and soreness through pressure and abrasion. Girth galls can easily be caused by a girth done up too tightly or too far forward. A Breast collar should be well adjusted and can interfere with breathing and drinking if too tight.  
Saddle must be clean and appropriate (must fit with a good clean girth and stirrups and leathers, stirrup leather's stitching must be in good nick – safety issue) Check that the numnah is not badly fitted and girth is appropriately done up  
Bridle is to be correctly fitted (check adjustments with nothing that can hurt or rub horse). Not too large or too tight/small  
Bit must be correctly fitted and no rubs etc. Check if bit guards fitted, chains, nose bands etc. are correct tightness and fit (2 finger tests)  
Martingales and breastplates must be correctly adjusted and not too tight or too loose. Check that horse can get head down when wearing breastplate and martingale does not get in way of legs etc.  
Score is out of 10 for both rider and horse tack.
- Mounting and Dismounting: The rider is to present the horse to mount. It is encouraged that a mounting block be used: a sand heap, log etc. or a portable mounting block at base. Check the horse stands appropriately still for mounting and if not how the rider handles this: empathy and calmness and if necessary a helper can be used. Score taken off for horse moving off, swinging hindquarters or throwing

head. More score deducted for rider shouting, getting angry, hitting horse or handler holding horse too tightly etc. No abuse of the horse will be tolerated and a rider or handler will be marked with zero if this occurs. Rider to land lightly in saddle and wait to queue horse to move off in controlled manner.

Dismount: Rider to dismount neatly and quietly and run up stirrups (if possible), loosen girth and lead horse off when asked to do so. Score out of 5

(Foothills) For walking horse being lead: Horse in hand must stand quietly and must move back and sideways when asked obediently.

For horse being lead by mounted rider: Rider must mount horse correctly without lead horse or the horse being lead moving.

- Ridden test: Ask the rider to walk off in a circle around you. Aids must be light and horse must respond obediently. No pulling in mouth to turn or halt and no rough continued kicking.  
After a few walk steps ask rider to trot the horse to ride a figure 8. Check aids once again, posting correctly and knowledge of diagonals. Score out of 10.

For horse being lead by walker: Walker and horse must walk off in circle and complete figure of 8. Check correct position (walker next to shoulder of the horse) of horse and walker, change of directions and also quality and obedience of halt.

For horse being lead by mounted rider: Both horses must walk off in circle obediently- correct position and aids to horse being lead. Complete figure 8 with following horse in correct position, correctly following aids and both horses balanced and rider on correct diagonal. Both horses judged as a unit

- Grooming/Lesions: Note existing lesions in comments, Grooming: horse is clean and has no ticks/bot eggs etc. Feet are well trimmed and clean if barefoot, correctly shod and clean if in shoes. Horse and handler stand still for presentation and allow feet to be picked up and various body parts to be touched. Score out of 5
- 5 no lesions and horse well groomed, 4 existing lesions and not clean (Do not think a horse should be marked down for existing lesions, unless it would affect the horse during the ride, rubbing chafing.)

### **Trail Equitation (5 points total for each leg of ride)**

You will position yourself on the trail where you can see the horse and rider negotiating the "obstacle" clearly and where you are visible so as to not spook the horse.

An obstacle could be a decline or incline, a water crossing, mud patch, clear smooth path or water point, or twists and turns in trail. The primary concern of proper equitation is to make the horse's job of carrying a rider over long distances as efficient as possible. The key is to ride balanced and light in the saddle at the walk, trot and canter. A vertical line should pass

through your centre of gravity and continue through your foot. Ideally, if the horse was too disappear from under you, you would land upright, on your feet. Leg contact with the horse should support you without tension or stiffness. If you are riding light, you will appear to be almost floating with the horse. Use your legs and ankles as shock absorbers. Don't sacrifice proper support from the lower legs by bracing them out to the side.

Use common sense when it comes to trail safety and courtesy. When approaching a water stop, don't crowd in, wait your turn unless the other rider(s) say it's okay. On the other hand, if you're the one watering your horse, don't prolong your time and crowd others out. If you want your horse to drink more, move away and come back in a few minutes. Some horses will stop drinking if crowded by a strange horse or if a horse ahead leaves.

Don't dip your sponge directly in a water trough. Carry a collapsible bucket or a container to fill with water then move your horse away from the trough to sponge.

At any trail "obstacle," judged or not, wait for the horse behind you to complete it before you move off down the trail. Otherwise the second horse might get in a hurry to "catch up with the herd."

Always let the person you're passing know that you are coming and on which side you will pass. Do not do an extended trot or canter past a horse that is walking or you might over excite it. Wait until you're well past to pick up your pace again. Always look back to check to be sure the horse you passed is not throwing a fit because you're leaving. Finally, if you need to pass another horse because your horse is faster paced, do not just pass by one horse length. Pass the horse and rider and get going down the trail. Riders will appreciate it if you get out of sight after you pass.

If your horse is particularly slow, find a place to pull off the trail and let others by. Sometimes this may take a while, but let people behind you know that you'll pullover as soon as you can.

When going through a gate, the first rider usually opens it and holds it for the others. After they have all passed through, they should wait until the gate is closed and the rider who opened the gate resumes his place in front. Occasionally, one rider will open the gate and ask the last rider in the group to close it. This is fine as long as you know the message was heard and the gate will be closed.

Above all, be safe. If you are asked to do something that you don't think you or your horse are ready for, just tell the judge that you'll pass on that observation.

### **Going Up and Down Hills**

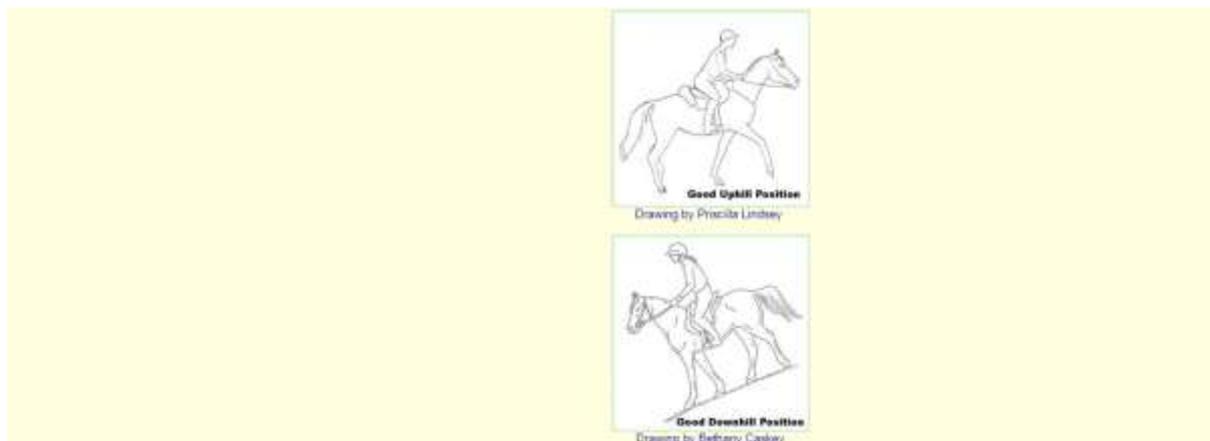
Sometime during every ride, you will be faced with doing a judged climb or descent. Regardless of whether it is a mountain side or a creek bank, the judges will be looking for the same things. The horse's job is fairly simple. He should do the slope with calm deliberation at a slow pace, carefully placing his feet and going straight up or down the trail when asked. The judge will usually fault the horse for "crabbing" sideways going down, rushing, crowding another horse, excessive nervousness, and head tossing.

For the rider, the ascents and descents present a multitude of ways to shine. Going up hills, there is a "window" of good upper body position. If you lean too far back or are too far forward over the neck, you will make the horse's job more difficult. If you are too far out of the saddle, you sacrifice stability and safety. You should fold slightly forward from the hips in an amount appropriate for the slope of the hill and the speed of the horse. Support yourself by rolling up onto your inner thighs so you can have your seat lightly off the saddle to make it easier for the horse to get its rear legs under him for upward push. It is all right to

take a handful of mane to steady yourself as long as it doesn't interfere with the rein control. The reins should be short enough to guide your horse easily, but long enough that he can get his head down for balance on the climb. Maintain your form and control to the top of the hill. It takes muscles and coordination that come only with practice. The judge will interpret how well you're moving with your horse.

Maintain your balance going down hills. Don't lean back; this makes it harder for the horse to use his hindquarters to brake himself. Don't grab the back of the saddle to stabilize yourself. Doing so puts you off balance and twists you in the saddle. One of the most common faults is "body sway" which is the rolling of your upper body from side to side as the horse descends. This not only makes it very difficult for the horse to stay in balance, it can cause saddle rubs.

Whenever you have an uphill/downhill combination obstacle, the judge is probably watching your transition. If you are balanced and moving as one with you horse, you should not get thrown off-balance or put behind the action of the horse as he makes the transition. If possible, take a moment in the middle to collect yourself and gather up your horse. Make sure you allow the horse ahead of you enough time to clear the obstacle before proceeding. Don't expect instant perfection; this requires excellent muscle control for both horse and rider. As with any other obstacle, you will be penalized for crowding another rider.



In the top drawing below, the rider going uphill is doing one of the most common mistakes: flanking her horse. Her lower body has pivoted around her hips, and her feet will be in the horse's flanks as he reaches forwards with his head feet. If her horse disappeared, she would land on her hands and knees.



Marks are deducted for obvious faults like incorrect seat position, rough hard hands, out of control and fighting horse in faster work, rough handling (kicking, shouting or rough hands while trying to cross water or mud), rushing up to a water point unsafely, not allowing horse

to drink, tail gating other riders, any dangerous or unsafe behaviour etc. 1 mark will be deducted for dismounting and leading horse quietly through or around an obstacle if it refuses.

## **Stabling/Containment: (5 points total)**

This score is done during the evening before or after the ride, or during the day between legs of the ride (rest periods)

Check the size and cleanliness and position of paddock etc. Does the horse have a comfortable space to eat and sleep lying down if necessary? Is there shade? Is there water and forage available in safe spots? Examples: water bucket not knocked over, full and enough water available, good quality forage available where the horse can safely access it? Is the horse blanketed if clipped or cold? Score out of 5. If situation is unsafe or no food or water etc. discuss with rider or grooms if available or call Ride organisers to trace responsible person to immediately handle the situation.

## **Horsemanship Judging – Final In Hand (5 points total)**

This judging will take place after the final vetting at the end of the ride, once the horse has been passed by the Vets.

Scoring will be based on the following criteria: Horse should stand quietly and willingly accept examination of feet and body, horse should be clean (no sweat marks etc.) and well groomed with clean feet, horse should lead easily on a free rein, handler should follow correct guidelines for safety while leading and handling horse, handler should be courteous to all officials, volunteers and peers, no new lesions from tack, bit etc.

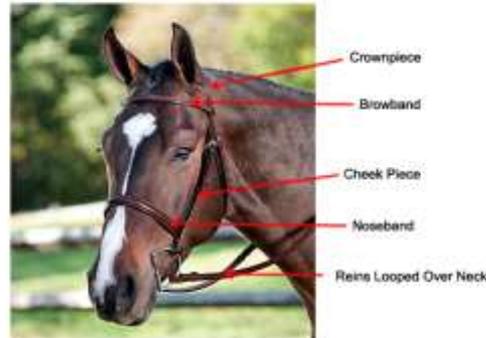
Check body condition on vet card – if vet has marked the body condition scoring low they will refer the rider to yourself. Please assist rider to understand the body condition scoring and how to influence it: Feed (24h access to good quality forage like teff, eragrostis or good grazing), balancer and minerals, the concentrate used with minimum sugar and good fat content (slow heating and slow release energy), salt, advantages of oils and flax seed. Good quality work to build muscles slowly and correctly, rest periods etc.) Condition should not have declined by a full score after a ride.

## **Information and Tips**

### **Bridle Fit Information**

If your bridle is correctly sized for your horse, adjusted properly and kept clean and conditioned, it will function properly as an aid to your riding. It will also be comfortable for your horse to wear next to the sensitive areas of his head.

## Parts of a Bridle



### 1. Adjust the cheek pieces and bit height.

With the bridle on your horse's head and the reins looped over his neck, as shown in the photo, adjust the cheek pieces to achieve the proper bit height. In general, with the cheek pieces appropriately buckled and the bit correctly sized, you should see one to two soft wrinkles appearing at the corners of your horse's lips as a starting point for adjusting the bit height. (For a Pelham or Kimblewicke bit, you'll only want to see one soft wrinkle at the corner of the lips.)

### 2. Check the browband.

The browband should rest lightly across your horse's forehead, just about 1/2 to 1 inch below the front of his ears. Be sure the browband is long enough so that it doesn't pull the crownpiece into the back of your horse's ears. Conversely, if it sticks out, forms a gap in front of the horse's forehead or wiggles when the horse moves, then the browband is too long.

Tip: Many styles of browbands are available separately. You can swap out your browband any time you'd like a new look for your bridle, or if your horse's bridle fits but you'd like another size browband.

### 3. Adjust the noseband.

**Please be aware that Flash or any type of noseband that constrains a horse's breathing or drinking and eating during distance riding is NOT appropriate. Please discuss with rider.**

The Rider may continue on the Ride for this once (especially if this is a safety concern for the rider, however they will be marked down and the reason for the marking down must be discussed with the rider- alternatives can be discussed as per bits, schooling , etc)

The placement and fit of the noseband varies very slightly depending on the type used. A standard noseband or cavesson should sit level at a point about 1/2 to 1 inch below the horse's cheekbone. As a general guideline, you can use two finger's width to measure the space from the bottom of the cheekbone to the top of the noseband.



One finger's width between the end of the horse's cheekbone and the noseband.

Some nosebands come with integrated hangers that adjust on both sides of the horse's face. Buckle the hangers by the horse's cheeks on this type of noseband in the same hole on each side. Two fingers is preferred as it is the standard in SA

If positioned correctly, the noseband will not interfere with the movement of the bit rings, pinch the lips or press on the soft tissue of the horse's nose in such a way as to hamper the horse's breathing. You should be able to place 2 fingers inside the noseband underneath the jaw, and yet it should be fastened snugly enough to prevent flapping during riding.

**Flash Noseband:** The cavesson part of the noseband should sit just under the cheek- bones without pressing on them. The flash attachment will then rest on the nasal bone and will not press on the soft tissue of the horse's nose. The flash should stretch comfortably down over the horse's jaws in front of the bit. Many people position the flash so that the buckle rests near the loop attachment for the flash rather than on the soft tissue near the lips. The keeper for the flash can be positioned so that it does not cause discomfort on the soft tissue as well.



Flash attachment sits on nasal bone. Flash not too tight and placed in front of bit but not where it can compress the nostrils. Flash keepers positioned so as not to pinch horse's lips.

***Jawband or Crank Noseband:*** The cavesson part of the noseband should sit just under the cheekbones without pressing on them. The buckle of this type of noseband is padded and designed to be tightened as needed by the requirements of the horse. The buckling system allows tightening with even pressure on both sides of the noseband. If the jaw band has a flash attached, then it should be fastened as described for a flash noseband.

***Figure 8 Noseband:*** The straps of this type of noseband need to be adjusted properly to be effective and to avoid hampering the horse's breathing. The padded disk should rest on the nasal bone so that the straps cross over this bone. The lower strap stretches down over the horse's jaw in front of the bit.

The upper strap may be positioned just under the cheekbones or on top of the cheekbones, depending on both the type of Figure 8 used and rider preference. Generally, if the straps of the Figure 8 attach to metal rings, many riders position the rings on top of the cheekbones so that this hardware does not press against the end of the horse's cheekbone.



Metal rings are positioned on top of the cheekbones. If positioned at the end of the cheekbone, the metal ring might press uncomfortably against it.

If the Figure 8 does not use metal rings, but rather has adjustable leather slides, many riders position the upper strap just under the horse's cheekbone and not be too close to the facial

nerve



A Figure 8 noseband that does not have metal rings can be adjusted below the cheekbones.

**Drop Noseband:** The nosepiece of this type of noseband should sit on the bony part of the nose, about four finger's width above the nostrils. The rings attached to the chin strap portions of the noseband should not come in contact with the bit. The chin strap should stretch down in front of the bit and be buckled under the jaw only snug enough that you can slip two fingers between it and the jaw bones. Take special care to be sure this type of noseband won't affect the horse's breathing after it is buckled into place.

#### 4. Adjust the throatlatch.

Buckle the throatlatch so that you can fit four fingers between it and the underside of jaw—but not more. The throatlatch is intended to keep the bridle in place if the need arises during a ride. If it is adjusted too loosely, the throatlatch cannot perform its function if needed. If it is buckled too tightly, it can hamper the horse's breathing. Some competitive riders prefer to have a slightly shorter throatlatch adjustment than the four-finger rule provides.



Adjusting the throat latch.

#### 5. Adjust curb chain if necessary.

If you're using a bit with a curb chain, adjust the curb chain and untwist any kinks in the chain so that it will lie flat against the horse's chin when the bit moves. As a general guideline, hook the chain at a length that allows you to put two fingers between the chain and your horse's chin. This guideline will have to be adjusted according to your horse's needs. Some horses require a very loose curb chain setting, while others need a more snug adjustment.

#### More on Cheek Pieces and Bit Height

All horses are different; some horses prefer a higher or lower setting for their bits. When following the cheek piece adjustment guidelines in this article, be sure to take into account your horse's preferences. Observe your horse's behaviour and his response to the bit and make adjustments accordingly.

Ideally, if your crownpiece and cheek pieces together are appropriately sized, the buckles of each cheek piece will be located about 1 to 1 1/2 inches above your horse's eye level, and you'll be able to use the same holes on both sides of your horse's face so that the buckles are positioned evenly. You'll also ideally have at least one hole left above the buckles in case the leather stretches over time and you need to shorten the cheek pieces or raise the bit later.

If the crownpiece and/or cheek pieces are too long for your horse, you may not be able to adjust the height of the bit in your horse's mouth correctly. It could hang too low in your horse's mouth, clank against his teeth, and become an ineffective riding aid. Some horses may require a horse size bridle with cob size cheek pieces to get a good fit. If the crownpiece and cheek pieces are too short, the bit could pull too high in the horse's mouth, which may cause discomfort or behavioural issues.

#### **Running Martingale fit**

To fit a running martingale correctly, place the neck strap around the horse's neck so that you can fit a hand's width comfortably between the strap and the horse. Put the saddle on the horse, pass the girth through the loop in the martingale and do up the girth.

With the girth tightened up adjust the length of the martingale - the rings should reach the horse's withers. If this length is made too short the martingale will come into action when it is not needed. Pass the reins of the bridle through the rings of the martingale. Be sure to have rein stops on the reins and that martingale is not so long it could get caught in a horses legs while moving or if head down

## **Bit fit**

You know it's important for your horse's saddle and bridle to fit correctly. But don't forget to make sure his bit fits, too. A bit that's too small can pinch the corners of the mouth, while a bit that's too big can move around too much and clunk against his teeth. Rubbed patches or thickened skin at the corners of the mouth are signs of bad bit fit, but it's better not to wait to see physical evidence that a bit doesn't fit well.



To test whether a bit is the proper size for your horse, you need only an ordinary piece of twine and a ruler or tape measure: Guide the twine into the horse's mouth and back toward the corners so that it is positioned approximately where the bit would lie. Pull it taut and use your fingers to grasp it at each corner of the lips. Remove the twine and use your ruler to measure the length between your fingers. The general rule is that a properly fitted bit measures a quarter-inch longer than the width of the horse's mouth. You can adjust the cheek pieces of the bridle to make sure that the bit rests properly in the bars of the mouth, creating one or two wrinkles at the corners. If the rider is having biting issues ask them to approach a trainer or specialist bit fitter to assist.

## **Breastplate/ Breast Collar Fit**

Breastplates (also known as breast collars) are essential items of tack for a horse whose body shape encourages saddles to slip and slide. But an improperly fitted breastplate isn't likely to help and may even make matters worse.



*Run your hand between the breastplate and the horse to check for areas that might rub or pinch. ©EQUUS Magazine*

To check the fit of a breastplate, first see if it's sitting in the correct position across the horse's chest. Single-strap models cross above the point of the shoulder, but they do not rest so high that a horse had trouble lowering or stretching his neck. On a Y-shaped breastplate, the centre of the Y will sit slightly above the centre point of the chest. Next, slip your hand between the straps and the horse at various locations. Ideally, there will be enough room for your fist, but not much more. A properly fitted elastic breastplate will be a bit more snug but will not have any "stretch" when the horse is standing still. If the breastplate has a strap that crosses over the withers or neck, pull straight up on it. It should easily rise three or four inches above the horse. Finally, check any straps that lead to the girth. Ideally, these will hang two or three inches below the skin, but not much more.

## **Numnah and saddle check**

1. There should be a clear margin between the edge of the saddle and the numnah or saddle pad to prevent pressure points (approx 1 inch/2cm all the way around the saddle).
2. The numnah/saddle pad should sit up into the gullet of the saddle to prevent pressure on the spine.

## **Diagonal at Trot**

Rising trot should be ridden on the outside diagonal, meaning that the rider sits as the horse's outside shoulder comes back and the inside hind leg hits the ground. Posting on the

correct diagonal helps your horse balance better through turns, because you are sitting when the inside hind is pushing on the ground, which is when that leg can best support your weight, and we rise when it is coming off the ground, so your horse can pick it up easier.

In the instance of rising trot, only ever rising on the same trot diagonal breeds a whole lot more than contempt. It can manifest as lameness, back pain and soreness in your horse. Being able to change your rising trot diagonal means that you don't place continual stress on the same side of the horse's body. In fact by changing your diagonal regularly, you're really encouraging the horse to use both sides of the body more equally. You'll also start to feel how differently they can travel when you change your diagonal. An example of this is in endurance horses where the rider may do rising trot for miles and miles yet never change their diagonal. At first there doesn't seem to be any huge consequence to that. If the rider is comfortable, the horse is comfortable, right? Unfortunately, the time comes where that one-sidedness creates asymmetry – somewhat similar to a bad wheel alignment in a vehicle.

## **Canter Lead.**

Always make sure if you are judging at a turn in the trail, that the rider cues the horse to canter on the correct (inside) canter lead around the corner.

## **Leading a horse in hand**

Visualize a horse with perfect leading manners. He steps forward when you ask him to-the first time. He walks beside you, and when you speed up, he does too. When you stop, he stops, unless you ask him to walk past you, such as to step up into a wash rack. When you turn to the right, he turns right, and when you turn to the left, he turns without crashing into you.

You don't have to fight with him. His neck is relaxed, and his head is at a normal elevation. That helps him to have an easygoing stride and makes working together fun.

When leading your horse, walk beside him—not ahead or behind. A position even with the horse's head or halfway between the horse's head and its shoulder is considered safest.

Always turn the horse away from you and walk around it.

Use a long lead shank and both hands when leading. If the horse rears up, release the hand nearest to the halter so you can stay on the ground.

It is customary to lead from the left (near side), using the right hand to hold the lead, near the halter.

The excess portion of the lead should be folded, figure-eight style. When leading, extend your right elbow slightly toward the horse. If the horse makes contact with you, its shoulder will hit your elbow first and move you away from it. Your elbow can also be used in the horse's neck to keep the head

and neck straight as well as to prevent the horse from crowding you. A horse should be workable from both sides.

Never wrap the lead shank or reins around your hand, wrist, or body. A knot at the end of the lead shank aids in maintaining a secure grip when needed for control. Never drape a lead shank or reins across your shoulders or neck..

## "Ponying a horse" or leading from a mounted horse

### Tips for Your Tag-A-Long

- Begin teaching a horse to be ponied in a round pen or other safe enclosure.
- Do your ground work, with an emphasis on sacking out, going forward, stopping, turning and lungeing.
- Allow the ponied horse to drag the lariat or lead rope so he gets used to it around his legs and trailing behind.
- When you first mount up, be sure to keep adequate distance between the pony horse and the horse being ponied.
- Think push, not pull. Drive (never drag) the ponied horse forward and then gradually reposition him alongside the pony horse.
- Practice moving the ponied horse in every direction with the lead horse, in a sort of dance on horseback.
- Drop the rope before you get tangled or in a bind.

### **Think Safety First**

But ponying isn't just a matter of jumping on one horse and having the other horse come along quietly. First and foremost, the horse you ride must be reliable, maneuverable and unflappable. In addition, you need to be an experienced rider. If something goes wrong-the ponied horse shies, rears, tries to kick the horse you're riding, gets the lead rope under his tail, tangled up in brush, or wrapped around himself-you'll need to be able to deal with the problems.

The third concern is making sure the horse you're leading is ready to be ponied. Some people think ponying a horse is somehow a substitute for training, that it can take the place of all the baby steps and foundation work needed to help a horse develop the right responses.

Sure, your horse can learn a great deal by being ponied off an experienced horse by a skilled rider-but only if you've prepared him to understand what's being asked of him. Taking a sink-or-swim approach to

ponying an untrained horse is a terrible idea. Even if you don't wind up having a wreck, you're likely to spend the entire ride dragging and coercing instead of asking and rewarding and building a good relationship.

Preparing a horse to be ponied involves some basic ground work. Then, once you have a good foundation of control on the ground, you'll want to work with him from the back of your pony horse in a safe area. Let's look at the specifics of each of these training phases.

### **Control on the Ground**

Some of the training needed to prepare a horse to be ponied is work you'd be doing anyway-starting with sacking him out. Sacking out a horse teaches him to calmly accept objects and touches, both familiar and unfamiliar, anywhere on his body. The ponied horse will be exposed to various things touching him, sometimes in unexpected places, so it's important for him to learn that it's no big deal.

Teaching your horse to accept contact with different objects is a gradual process. You want to start small and be careful that he's okay with each step before you move on. Eventually, he should be able to stand quietly as you touch him and pet him everywhere from head to tail, including face, shoulders, belly, barrel, back, tail dock and legs. Once he's comfortable with your hand touching him, you can start the process again, this time using a coiled rope or lariat.

Along with sacking out, you'll need to teach your horse some other basics:

- **Give to pressure.** If you give your horse's lead rope a quick tug, does his head go up or down? If it goes up, he needs more give-to-pressure practice so it becomes a conditioned response. Why is this important? Imagine that you put a little pressure on the rope when you're ponying a horse and he follows his natural instinct and pulls back. A tug-of-war is not what you want. You're certain to lose, and he could pull you right out of the saddle.

- **Go forward.** It's essential that the ponied horse understands and responds to your go-forward cue. You never want to drag a horse you're ponying, anymore than you do when you're leading him from the ground. Instead, you should be able to drive him forward. Initially, you'll tap on his hip to teach him to move forward when you ask. But before long, simply focusing on his hip will get the message across, so you'll be able to have him move forward from the saddle of your pony horse.

- **Lunge.** Once your horse has mastered giving to pressure and the go-forward cue, you can move on to lunging him. Being able to control your horse as you lunge him on the ground gives you the tools you need to control him from on board another horse.

When your horse is lunging well-relaxed in the neck and shoulder, traveling at the speed you ask, and not leaning against you—you can practice another lesson: dragging the rope. If you should need to let go of the rope when you're ponying (often the safest option if things get hairy), or simply drop it at some point, you don't want the horse to panic with the rope flapping along behind him. Your horse may not have a problem dragging a loose rope, but it's good to find out now and to help him overcome any fear he may have about it.

- **Stop.** A ponied horse must know to stop when you ask him. You're likely to encounter all sorts of situations where you need to stop the horse you're riding, and of course you want the horse you're leading to stop, too.

- **Back.** Being able to back up the horse you're leading is absolutely essential. It's easy to imagine all sorts of situations where this element of control will come in handy—especially if the ponied horse hasn't figured out his role in the ponying process. He might stay too close to the horse you're riding, either from insecurity or a need to exert some dominance. It could just seem to him like the right place to be, or a fun thing to try. Or he may have some aggression in mind, possibly getting into position to bite or strike the pony horse. In any case, if he will back up when you ask him, you'll have a good tool for working on the problem. You can show him where you want him and establish boundaries to help ensure his cooperation and everyone's safety.

- **Turn on the forehand/turn on the haunches.** You'll also benefit from having control over the ponied horse's shoulders and hips. Since you need to control his position to pony him successfully (and odds are you'll have to make frequent adjustments, at least for a while), it's important to be able to maneuver specific parts of his body to get the distance and alignment you need. For example, if he should wind up perpendicular to you, one way to correct his position would be to have him move his shoulders away a step or two until he's facing forward again.

### **Prep Work from the Saddle**

Once your horse is virtually spook-proof, giving to pressure, responding consistently to your cues to go forward and to move specific parts of his body in the directions you ask, and lunging well, you can

begin the next phase of training. Again, this doesn't mean hopping in the saddle and pulling him around until he gets the hang of it. You're still laying the groundwork for the ponying process to be as controlled, stress-free and successful as possible.

Working in a safe, enclosed area, start by lunging your horse from the ground. Make sure he will readily move forward in both directions with a nice give rather than braced or tugging on the lunge line/lariat.

The next step is to get on your pony horse-but do so at a fair distance from the one you're about to pony. This is going to be a strange, new situation for him, and you don't want him to feel any additional stress or pressure from the horse you're riding. Even if they're pasture buddies, you want to take your time getting to the point where they're side by side. Right now, all you want to do is let him get used to the situation and show him he can respond to your cues even though you're sitting on another horse.

This is a good time to remind yourself of the most important safety principle: If things get dangerous, let go of the rope. In an enclosed environment, you don't have to worry about him taking off. But even if you were out on the trail, the same rule would apply. Never try to hang onto a ponied horse if things turn dicey.

Now let's set the stage. You're sitting on your steady, experienced pony horse at a safe distance from the trainee. Put the reins in your left hand and the lunge line or lariat in your right. (Here's safety principle number two: Never tie the line or lariat to any part of your saddle or yourself or coil it up around your hand. Hold any slack in loops, not coils.)

Begin walking in a big circle, about 20 feet ahead of the ponied horse and offset about 45 degrees from him. If you were the middle of a clock face, the ponied horse would be roughly at 4 o'clock and you'd start moving clockwise. As you walk forward, you'll basically be riding toward the ponied horse's tail. Just as when you lunge him, this positioning lets you keep focused on his hip to encourage him to move forward.

When he's moving well at the walk, stop your horse and pull the lariat, taking the slack out of it. The ponied horse should stop and then turn to face you. As soon as he does, release the pressure from

the lariat and start walking again, driving the ponied horse forward by focusing on his hip. Go ahead and repeat these steps a number of times. This will help develop his responsiveness to you and eventually he'll begin to keep a little bend in his neck as he watches you. That bend will make it harder for him to resist you and will promote softness.

At some point, you'll begin to sense that the horse is following you instead of being pushed forward. Once he understands that he's the follower in this situation, you can begin to shorten the distance between him and the horse you're riding. Just keep riding in a circle and bringing him closer until he's traveling beside you.

If the horse decides to stop at some point (and he almost certainly will-possibly many times), don't try to pull on him and drag him along. Just ride toward his tail and drive him from behind to get him moving again. As you continue with this exercise, keep adjusting his position beside you so he develops a feel for where he's supposed to be. As a general rule, a good spot is to have his nose just in front of your knee-close enough that you could reach over and touch his ears easily.

## Safety Tips for Ponying

Even if you're riding the best-trained pony horse in the world and you've done all the necessary prep work to get your ponied horse ready for the experience, you need to follow some basic rules to keep everything as safe as possible:

- Begin your ponying work in a safe area, such as a round pen or other enclosure. This will give everyone a chance to get used to each other and their relative positions (a young horse might never have seen anyone sitting so high above him) and will help you ensure that you have good control before heading out to a more exciting or less predictable environment.
- Always hold the lead rope in your hand. Never wrap it around the saddle horn or fasten it in any way to you or your horse. You could easily get yanked out of the saddle; the saddle itself could get jerked sideways; or your horse could get pulled off balance.
- If you gather up any slack in the rope, hold it in loops, not coils. Just like when you lead a horse on the ground, coils can quickly wrap themselves around your wrist or hand if the horse pulls back or takes off.
- If you ever feel in danger, let go of the rope. Maybe he's bolting, bucking, balking, or even jumping into your horse, but hanging on could put you and your horse at risk. Letting him go could mean a

wreck, but that's a chance worth taking. And in many cases, he'll decide to follow you anyway because he doesn't want to be left behind.

## **A Few What-ifs**

To pony a horse successfully, especially one who's young or new to ponying, you have to be extremely alert to everything that's going on. It takes only a second or two for a bad situation to develop, and you need to watch for potential trouble (signs of the ponied horse becoming unnerved or showing hostile body language, scary distractions, etc.) as well as know the best ways to respond.

Although it's tough to generalize, here are a few simple strategies to keep in mind if you find yourself having to react to a problem-in-the-making:

- If the horse you're leading is crowding you (similar to running over you when you lead him on the ground), continually bumping into you, or trying to put his head in your lap as you ride along, one good response is to make a sharp right turn (assuming he's positioned on your right side). This essentially forces him to move back out of your space to avoid having you move into his space. If his head is in your lap, you may need to speed up so you get your knee in front of his shoulder before you turn.
- If the horse you're leading drops back and winds up on your tail, don't turn left. If you do, you'll just wrap the rope around yourself and the horse you're riding. Instead, think about moving him off to the right again. If you move your pony horse's haunches to the left, you'll be in a better position to move the ponied horse's head off to the right so you can bring him back up beside you. (Think of it as a dance!)
- If it looks like the horse you're leading is planning to rear or strike at your pony horse, keep enough distance between you so if he does lunge toward you, his front feet will land on the ground.

**The Horsemanship Scoring Card is available on the website**