

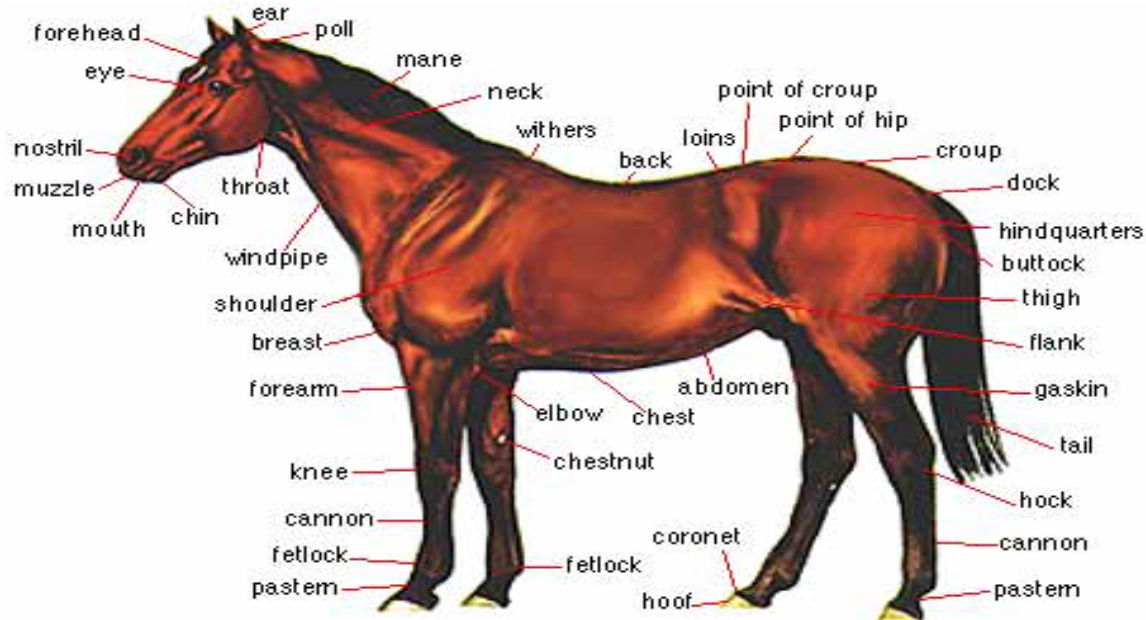
## **Halter**

### **CLASS DESCRIPTION**

The halter class is a class where the horse is judged based upon its conformation, overall appearance, and usefulness. Conformation is defined as the physical appearance of a horse due to the arrangement of muscle, bone, and other body tissues. Keep in mind that very few classes will possess the “ideal” quarter horse. Also, the horse that may win the class isn’t necessarily a high quality horse, only the highest quality of the horses in that particular class. Thus, the purpose of the halter class is to preserve and reward the ideal type by selecting individuals in order of their resemblance to the breed ideal and select those that have the most positive combination of the following factors:

1. Balance and Quality
2. Structural Correctness
3. Breed and Sex Character
4. Muscling

When evaluating a halter class, the above four factors should be used (in that order) to select and rank the horses being judged. Further, proper horse judging begins with understanding the parts of the horse. Before progressing through each section of the halter section, it is important to familiarize yourself with the parts of the horse.

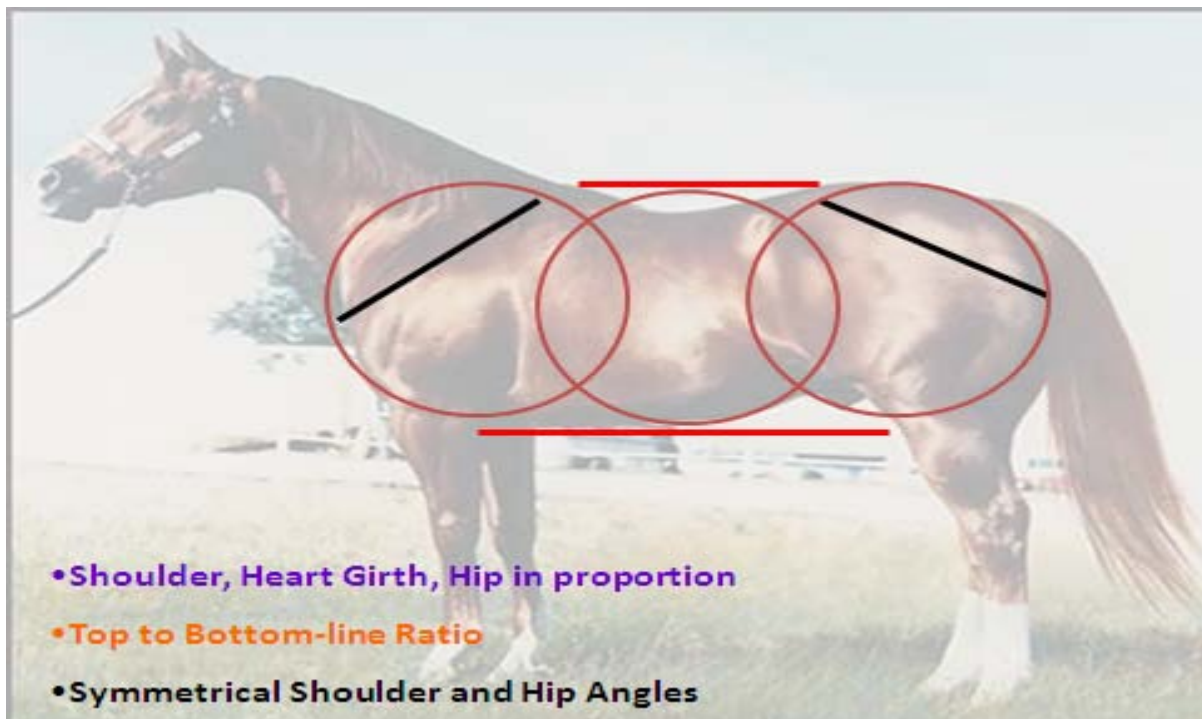


## 1. BALANCE AND QUALITY

*Balance is the single most important criteria for judging the halter horse.*

Balance refers to the structural and aesthetic or smooth blending of body parts, and balance is influenced almost entirely by skeletal structure. Normally when describing balance, horses are referred to as being balanced from front to back and from top to bottom.

A correctly balanced horse from front to back should be equally divisible into three parts of length of shoulder, length of top line, and length of hindquarter. Also, balance from front to back is largely dependent on the angles of a horse's shoulder and hip. Slope of shoulder changes when the angle of the shoulder is increased or decreased. This can be easily visualized if you draw an imaginary trapezoid on the side of the horse with the top and bottom of the trapezoid being the back and underline and the sides of the trapezoid being the slope of the shoulder and hip. If a horse is steep in the shoulder and hip, then the top line of the trapezoid becomes longer and subsequently the back of the horse is longer. If the horse is more laid back in the shoulder angle then the top line of the trapezoid becomes shorter and the horse has a shorter back. Another thing to remember about assessing balance from this aspect is that most of the time when a horse is incorrectly balanced, they will be long in the back. Rarely do you ever penalize a horse for being too long in the hindquarter or shoulder. Normally, the long-backed horse will also be short in the hindquarter. It is ideal to have a short top line and a long underline of the body. A long back coincides with the short neck of the straight-shouldered horse. In addition to overall balance, slope of shoulder influences length of stride.



*Balance should also be evaluated from the top to bottom of the horse. This simply means that a correctly balanced horse should have the same length of the front leg as the depth of the heartgirth.*

The heart girth is measured from the top of the horse's withers to the bottom of the chest behind the horse's elbow when viewing them from the side. In other words, the heartgirth is measured where you would position a girth or cinch if you were saddling the horse. Horses that are incorrectly balanced from this aspect are termed shallow hearted. Consequently, as was observed in the front to back balance, rarely would you ever call a horse too deep in the heartgirth. Normally, an incorrectly balanced horse from this aspect is shallow in the heartgirth.

*Quality is the overall attractiveness of a horse.*

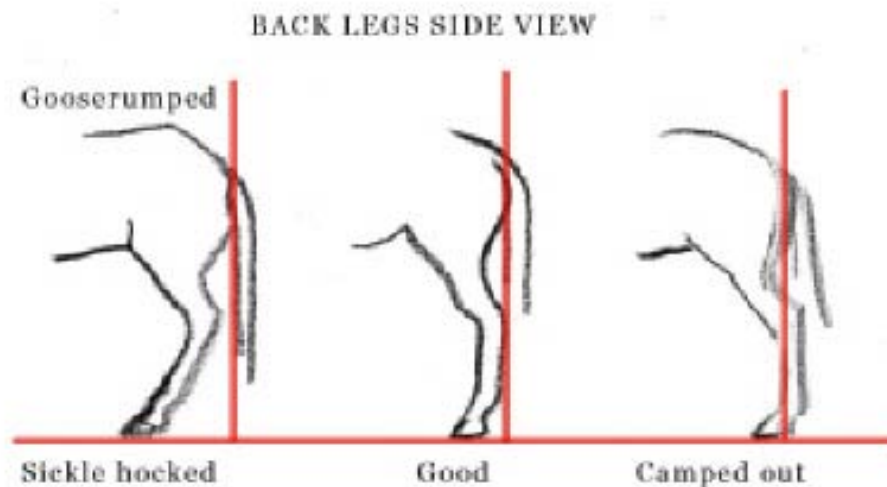
A high-quality horse displays a great deal of ring presence. When quality is evaluated, emphasis is placed on the horse's head, neck, hair, hide and bone. A high-quality head is triangular in nature, with a prominent jaw tapering to a refined muzzle. A high-quality head has large eyes that are set far apart on the sides of the horse's head. This allows the horse to have a great deal of peripheral vision. A high-quality head also has short, trim ears and a large nostril. All of the traits of a high-quality head have specific functions. For example, large nostrils allow a horse to breathe easier when performing. A high-quality neck is long and trim in nature. A high-quality neck ties high into the point of the shoulder and is also trim in the throatlatch. Horses that are of poor quality often will be thick in the throatlatch, may display a crest over the neck, and be low tying in the neck (the neck ties low into the chest). A high-quality horse will display a slick hair coat that shines and gives the appearance of a healthy horse that is fed in a high plane of nutrition. However, just because a horse may have a thick hair coat or a winter coat does not necessarily mean that the horse is of low quality. There are many factors that contribute to a horse being of low quality and as in all aspects of horse judging, each attribute of horse is relative and should be compared fairly. Further, a high-quality horse will also display skin that is stretched tightly over the body. The joints and face will appear dry (free of inflammation). It should also be noted that a high-quality horse will have flat, clean bones that appear chiseled in nature.

## **2. STRUCTURAL CORRECTNESS**

*Structure refers to the alignment of a horse's skeletal system. Structural correctness is an important aspect of judging halter horses because of the old adage "**form is related to function.**"*

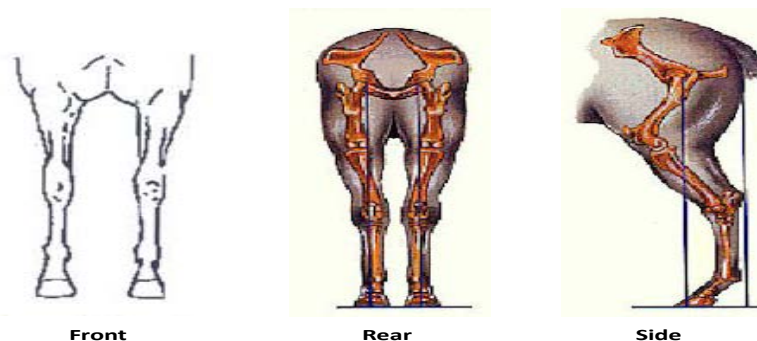
If a horse is not correctly formed, then that horse will most likely not be able to function as correctly as an ideally formed horse. This also refers to a horse's longevity. Horses that are not structurally correct are more likely to break down than horses of superior structural correctness. Simply put, a horse with structural problems will most likely not last as long as the horse that is free of any structural abnormalities.

When assessing structure in horse judging, one should evaluate the horse from the front, rear, and side views. When analyzing structure from the side view, one should drop an imaginary line from the tail head to the ground. In a correctly balanced horse, this line will touch the back of the hock and should run down the back of the leg from the hock to the fetlock and then down to the ground. Two of the most undesirable deviations from this view are often termed sickle hocked and post legged.



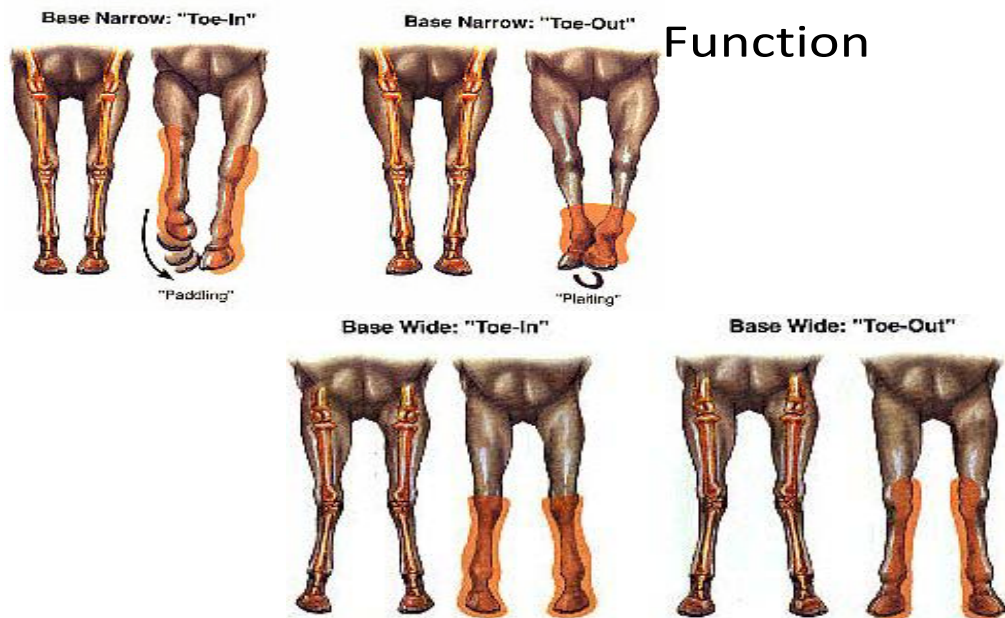
Horses that are sickle hocked have too much set or angle to the hock. In these horses, their hocks will touch the imaginary line but their fetlock will often be forward of the line. Horses that are post legged simply don't have any angle to their hocks. Their back leg appears to be as straight as a post. These horses will often appear to waddle as they move.

### Ideal Leg Structure



From the front view, an imaginary line should be dropped from the point of the horse's shoulder to the ground. In a correctly structured horse, that line will run down the center the horse's front leg with an equal amount of the leg on each side of the line. Horses that deviate from this ideal may be in at the knees, bow legged or bench kneed. In horses that are bench kneed, the bones appear not to line up in a straight line. Also, horses may toe in or toe out.

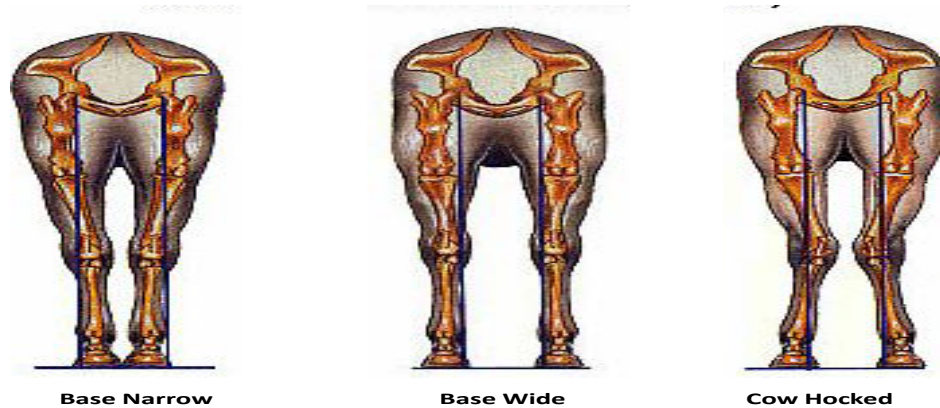
Horses that toe in may be called pigeon toed. Additionally, horses that toe out are called splay footed. **Pigeon-toed horses will paddle out when traveling and splay-footed horses will wing in when traveling.**



Often, halter horses may bend forward at the knee. These same horses will often shake at the knees. This is a deviation from the ideal. Additionally, horses from this view may be back at the knees. This is often called calf kneed. This is a far more severe structural defect and should be penalized severely.

Structure of the hind legs should also be analyzed from the side and rear view. Just like the front view, one should draw an imaginary line from the point of the hip to the ground when analyzing structure of the hind limbs from the hind view. Any deviation from this line should be considered a defect in structure. Often, horses may be in at the hocks or out at the hocks. Both deviations are undesirable. Horses will naturally toe out slightly from the rear view and that should not be penalized for doing so.

## Rear View



Structure is a very important aspect of evaluating halter horses, but it is important to remember not to use a single trait select horses. When evaluating halter horses, you must take all of the criteria into consideration before making a judgment. Just like in judging all classes, the traits of the horse are all relative and should be compared to the other horses in a positive manner. For example, you probably wouldn't want to place the most correctly balanced, heaviest muscled and highest quality horse last because it was in at the toes when viewed from the front. In reality, this horse should be moved down one place.

### 3. BREED AND SEX CHARACTER

*Breed and sex character are closely related to quality and some individuals would argue that they are the same thing.*

Quality and sex characteristics describe many of the same traits, but sex character is important enough to warrant its own attention. Breed character simply implies that a Quarter Horse should look like a Quarter Horse and not an Arabian, and additionally an Arabian should look like an Arabian and not a Welsh pony. Each breed has its own physical characteristics which distinguish it from other breeds, and it is important for that breed to display its prominent characteristics. For example, Arabian horses are normally dished in the face; however, you certainly wouldn't want a Thoroughbred to be dished in the face. Likewise, Thoroughbreds normally have a longer muscle pattern in contrast to thicker, heavier-made Quarter Horses.

When discussing sex characteristics, it refers to the qualities that a stallion, gelding, and mare possess. For example, stallions should look like stallions and mares should look like mares. More specifically, stallions should possess a more prominent jaw and bolder, sharper features about the head. Mares should have more refined features about the head and a more tapered look to the muzzle. Likewise, one would expect mares to have a more slender, elegant neck while stallions, although still clean, would have more muscular features about the neck. Although

geldings do not pass sex character traits to offspring, they should still possess quality. That beings said, they should not be criticized as greatly as mares and stallions.

#### **4. MUSCLING**

*Muscling serves many purposes can aid in the athletic ability and function of the horse; therefore it is vital for halter horses to have adequate amounts of muscling while at the same time not possessing too much.*

Horses that carry too great of a volume of muscling can be less agile and potentially have feet problems. The ideal horse has muscling that is both long and well defined. It is common to think that more is better, but once a horse has adequate amounts of muscling it is not necessarily an advantage to have more muscling.

It is relatively useless to refer to a horse as “muscled” without expanding on that explanation because there are different types of muscling, as some horses will have greater volume of muscling, while others may have greater expression of muscling. For example, on one hand, a horse can have more quantity of muscling. This horse will be heavier muscled or possess more substance and in many cases weigh much more. Substance refers to the amount of body capacity of the horse in terms of width, depth and thickness. On the other hand, a horse can have more expression or quality of muscling. A horse with higher-quality muscle will show more expression and separation (delineation) of muscle. This basically means the horse has more definition or development of its muscle pattern. A horse can also be more athletically muscled or be more “athletic appearing.” A more athletic-appearing horse will have a longer muscle pattern that is also well defined and delineated as opposed to a horse that is short and has muscles that are bunched together. Both horses may be heavily muscled, but they have two distinctly different muscle patterns.

#### **Side View**

The most beneficial view to evaluate muscling is from the profile (side). From the profile view, one can evaluate all the major areas which represent the quantity and quality of muscling that a horse possesses. These major areas are the:

- Forearm
- Pectorals
- Shoulder
- Hindquarters
- Stifle
- Gaskin

#### **Front View**

Once you have evaluated muscling from the profile view, it is necessary to view the horse from the front to evaluate width through the floor of the chest. From the front, an adequately muscled horse will have an inverted (upside down) ‘V’ where the pectoral muscles tie deep into the insides of the front legs. Not only is it important for there to be depth in the floor of the chest,

but it is also equally important for there to be width through the floor of the chest. Width gives the horse strength, plus also allows the legs to be set further apart so that the horse doesn't interfere when it's traveling.

### **Rear View**

From the rear, it is important for the width between the stifles to be wider than the width at the top of the hip. Therefore an adequately muscled horse will appear "pear shaped" from the rear.

### **Travel/Way of Going**

When the horses are traveled, it is important to get in a spot where you will be able to see the horse clearly without having to look around or over people. Once you have watched the horses travel, it is important to remember to include points about the travel in your reasons. However, it is not necessary to talk about traveling in every pair. One or two good, accurate points about travel should be sufficient. When the horses are traveling, it is important to look for deviations in both the stride and foot placement as well as if the horse is sound. A halter horse should not be disqualified (or placed last) unless it is grade-three lame. A horse must consistently bob its head at the trot to be considered grade-three lame.

## **JUDGING HALTER IN A JUDGING CONTEST**

*There are several keys to keep in mind when judging halter in a judging contest:*

- It is important to never stop and gaze at a horse for an extended period of time. This causes you to "pick a horse apart" or find more negatives than positives in a horse. Instead, it is important to keep moving when judging halter and judge strictly on the positive and add up the good qualities each horse has.
- You should move down the line at the profile view and develop a placing based on your first impression. The majority of the time your first impression is your best. After you have developed a placing, it is then important to study the horses further, especially when developing a set of reasons for the class.
- If you suspect that a horse has a structural defect it is wise to come back and view that horse again to determine if the horse does have a defect or if it is just set up incorrectly. At any given moment a horse can be standing in a manner that may give the appearance of a severe structural problem, while in fact, the horse is actually set up incorrectly. However, the best method to determine if your inclinations are correct is to study the horse while it is traveling. The way in which a horse travels is an extremely important part of evaluating the total value of a horse. We would not want to ride a horse that had severe problems with movement.
- It is also recommended that you not swap your placing at the last moment because that is the most often detrimental to your placing score. You must always remember that most of the time your first impression is your best. **Your first priority is to get the class placed**



**correctly.** After you have placed the class correctly, developing a good set of reasons will be easy. However, if you start developing a set of reasons before you have the class place, you will most often miss a placing.

## **REASONS TERMINOLOGY FOR JUDGING HALTER**

### ***BALANCE***

#### **Compliments**

- More correctly balanced
- Exhibits more balance
- More nearly proportional
  - from end to end
  - from top to bottom
- More uniform in height
- Lower set in knees and hocks
- Longer, more sloping shoulder
- More angulation to the shoulders
- Has a more desirable slope to her shoulder, and is neater and sharper at her withers.
- Deeper-barreled horse
- Shows greater capacity in the heart girth
- Deeper ribbed, wider chested
- More prominent withers, with a more functional top to bottom line ratio
- More arch (spring) to rib
- Longer in the hip, shorter in the back and shows more depth of heart girth and hind rib indicating more body capacity
- Taller at the withers and shows more uniformity of height from the croup to the withers
- Shorter-backed gelding that is longer in the underline
- Deeper flanked
- Deeper hind rib
- Deeper cinching
- More powerful top line
- Shorter topped
- Shorter and stronger over the top
- Wider topped, showing a more powerful loin
- Stronger coupled
- Higher at the withers
- Fuller in the loins
- Longer, wider croup
- Nicer turn of the croup
- Straight and smooth over the topline
- More horizontal over the croup
- Stronger, more horizontal over the back, loin, and croup

- Shorter back in relation to the underline, due to a more sloping shoulder and longer, flatter croup
- More laid back in the shoulder, creating a shorter, stronger back in relation to a longer underline
- Stronger linked in the back and loin
- Shortness of back, length of underline and depth of heart combined to give a more balanced appearance as viewed from the side
- Exhibits more balance with all parts blending smoothly and symmetrically
- Longer and flatter over the croup
- More horizontal over the croup
- More nearly proportional
- More easily divided into three equal parts of shoulder, barrel and hindquarter
- Uniform from front to end and from top to bottom
- Longer and deeper through the hip

### **Faults**

- Shallow middled, light quartered
- Shallow through the heart girth
- Lacked the capacity and depth of...
- Narrow in the chest and shallow in the heart girth
- Shallow hearted
- Long and weak over the top line
- Steep shoulder and croup
- Short, straight shoulder
- Too straight in the shoulders
- Mutton withered
- Thick (mutton) withers
- Low-backed, weak loin, high hips
- Weak though the back and loin
- Has a long, weak back in relation to the underline

### ***QUALITY***

#### **Compliments**

- Sharper-chiseled features
- More sharply chiseled about the head
- Especially shorter from the eyes to the nose, as well as being...
- Shorter headed
- More triangular about the head
- Shorter down the bridge of the nose
- Shorter face
- Brighter about the eyes
- Broader between the eyes
- Wider from eye to eye

- More prominent, larger, brighter eyes
- More refined and shorter through the muzzle
- Shorter, neater ear
- More erect ear
- Tighter in the throat latch, and has a longer, leaner neck which ties higher in the shoulder
- Trimmer throat latch coupled with a longer, smoother neck
- Longer, leaner neck
- More shallow through the throat latch
- Higher tying from the neck into the shoulder
- Exhibits more presence and quality through the head and neck
- More shallow through the throat latch
- More elegant and refined head and neck
- Sharply, sculpted face
- Dry features of the face
- Has more active, alertly poised ears and a large, more lucid eye
- Finer featured
- More chiseled head
- More expressive about the eyes and ears
- Shorter distance from eye to muzzle
- More prominent through the jaw
- Larger, more flaring nostrils
- Cleaner cut about the head and throat
- Longer neck that rose out of a more angulated shoulder
- Greater definition to the jugular groove
- Shows more alertness about the head
- Typier, more elegant head
- Larger, flatter bones
- Cleaner boned
- Straighter and more symmetric in the knees
- More feminine head
- More tapering muzzle
- Knees and hocks lower to the ground
- Larger eye
- More prominent jaw
- Higher-quality hair coat
- Finer hair
- More stylish, eye appealing, higher quality mare
- Shows more refinement about the head and neck
- More alert about the head, showing a brighter eye
- Has a smoother blend of all body parts
- Nicer profiling
- More athletic in appearance
- More alert and attentive appearance
- More stylish

## **Faults**

- Rough-made mare, lacking femininity
- Coarser made, lightest muscled and most narrow based
- Lacking style and presence of...
- Least attractive
- Longer, coarser, plainer headed
- Coarse head
- Less refined in the bone structure
- Long ears
- Long face
- Narrow between the eyes
- Duller, smaller eye
- Large, coarse muzzle
- Thick throat latch
- Heavier, thicker through the throat latch
- Too thick at the base of the neck
- Low neck attachment
- Crest over the neck
- Neck joined in extremely low into steeper shoulders
- Small, unattractive head
- Looks dull and sulky out of the eye
- Lower-quality hair coat
- Possesses a rough hair coat
- Lacks style, symmetry, and animation
- Low headed, plain, lacking eye appeal

## ***MUSCLE***

### **Compliments**

- Shows more tone and power of muscling from end to end
- More powerfully driven from the hindquarters with a thicker, more bulging stifle
- Shows a greater volume of muscling over the larger frame
- Heavier and has more bulge to the muscle pattern
- An expressively muscled stallion, mare, etc
- Exhibits more ripple and bulge of muscling
- Has more muscling from end to end
- More powerfully muscled in the shoulder, loin, hip and through the plane of the stifle
- Spreads a greater total volume and mass of muscling over a larger frame
- Fuller through the forearm and shoulder, and is more powerfully muscled though the quarter, dropping down into a more flaring gaskin
- Showing more width through the stifle dropping down to a more bulging gaskin
- Fuller loin and heavier-muscled shoulder
- More length of hip

- Stands down on a wider, more desirable foundation
- Wider chested, wider-walking mare, stallion, gelding, etc.
- Carries more powerful muscling in the chest
- More powerfully built through the front
- More evident V muscling
- V-ed up deeper in the front
- Longer and stronger hipped horse
- Exhibits more muscle development in the lower quarter
- More uniform and athletically muscled hind leg
- Being thicker and more bulging through the stifle
- Shows more total dimension of the hip, evidenced by being longer and flatter over the croup, and having more width and depth through the hind leg
- Shows more thickness through the center of the stifle in relation to the points of the hip
- Thicker, heavier-muscled stifle
- Heavier-muscled arm
- Stronger in the stifle
- Heavier-muscled thigh
- Carries more volume of muscling to the upper, central and lower portions of the hip
- Heavier-muscled stallion that was particularly wider from stifle to stifle
- Wider fore and aft
- Stood out wider both fore and aft
- More dimension to the quarter, a quarter that is wider from stifle to stifle
- Heavier muscled throughout
- Longer muscled
- Deeper, smoother tying
- Greater circumference to the gaskin
- Larger more bulging gaskin
- More powerful gaskin
- More heavily muscled over the loin
- Longer, more bulging forearm
- Forearm ties deeper and smoother to the knee
- Forearm showed greater circumference
- More prominent pectoral muscle
- Greater separation and delineation
- More powerfully developed
- Wider through the stifle
- Wider through the center portions of the stifle
- Greater width and depth to the stifle
- Longer, lower tying muscle pattern throughout

### **Faults**

- Narrowest-based horse, lacking adequate muscling
- Narrow chested, close-traveling horse

- Lacks volume and dimension through the hip, gaskin, and stifle
- Flat chested
- Narrowest designed
- Flat through the V muscling and exhibits short, bunched muscling from end to end
- Shows equal width between the top of hip and through the stifle when viewed from the rear
- Short in the underline
- Long coupled
- Tapers when viewed from the rear

## ***SEX AND BREED CHARACTER***

### **Compliments**

- More stylish, eye-appealing mare
- Exhibits a more attractive, breedier head of greater quality
- Shows more breed character about the head and neck
- Shows more breed character and femininity (masculinity)
- Shows more refinement about the head
- The mare is more refined and stylish
- Exhibits more overall style and beauty
- Larger, more bulging jaw
- More prominent, deeper jaw
- More bulge and prominence of the jaw
- Represents the ideal Quarter Horse
- More balanced, refined and feminine mare, which shows the classic features which are the trademark of the Quarter Horse breed being...
- More stylish
- More rugged and durable type of frame
- Breedier
- More finely chiseled

### **Faults**

- Off-type
- Rough-made mare, lacking femininity
- Lacks the style and quality of the other mares
- Coarser made
- Old fashioned
- Drafty in its appearance
- Lacks style and presence
- Shows the lease breed character
- Feminine about his head
- Masculine about her head
- Lacks a powerful jaw
- Lacks style, symmetry and animation

## ***STRUCTURAL CORRECTNESS***

### **Compliments**

- Stands straighter and more structurally sound
- More structurally correct being...
- Squarer-placed legs
- Stands on straight legs
- Stands wider both fore and aft, with all four legs set squarely beneath
- Stands more squarely on the feet
- Stands more structurally correct through the hocks and front legs
- Cleaner about the knees and hocks, with a finer and flatter cannon bone
- Cannon bones coming out more neatly to the center of the knee
- Stands with the cannon bones extended more squarely from the center of the knee
- Stands on a shorter cannon
- Stands on more rugged, durable-type bone
- Seems to possess a heavier, denser bone
- More substance of bone
- Stands on a straighter column of bone
- Knees and hocks closer to the ground
- More correct angle at the hock
- Wider between the hocks as viewed from the rear
- Cleaner at the hocks
- Longer, more sloping pasterns
- More shapely foot that is wider and deeper at the heel
- Hoof is more open at the heel
- Wider, deeper heel
- Straighter legged
- Well-defined tendons
- Joints free from swelling and blemishes
- Hooves more proportional to the body size
- Straighter and more symmetric in the knees and hocks
- Straighter down the front legs
- Shorter, flatter cannon bones
- Straighter through the knees
- Straighter in the toes
- Shorter and stronger in the top line
- Straighter down the hind leg when viewed from the side or rear
- Straighter and more symmetric in the hocks
- Straighter in the hind feet
- Larger, more rounded feet
- More desirable slope to the pastern
- Greater length to the pastern

## **Faults**

- Structurally incorrect, being...
- Stands crooked and structurally unsound
- Shorter, straighter pasterns
- Short, steep pasterns
- Longer, weaker in the pasterns
- Post legged
- Stands close at the hocks, appearing to be cow-hocked
- Sickie-hocked stallion, mare, etc
- Crooked through the front legs with the cannon bone coming out of the side of the knees
- Long, weak cannons with splints and wind puffs through the fetlocks and hocks
- Back at knees, appearing to be calf-kneed
- Stands over at the knees, appearing to be buck-kneed
- Splay footed
- Flat footed
- Stands on a hoof too small for the size
- Cracked, brittle hooves
- Hoof narrow at the heel
- Contracted at the heel
- Stands on bone too fine for her massive size
- Round, coarse bones
- Too fine a bone
- Too light a bone
- Puffy about the knees and hocks
- Stocked up behind
- Stocked up in all fours
- Joints are puffy and swollen
- Coarse in underpinnings
- Lacks definition of tendons
- Club footed
- Mule footed

## ***WAY OF GOING***

- Moved with more clearance between her knees and hocks
- Was a wider traveling mare
- Moved straighter and more correct at the walk
- Tracked out straighter with more length of stride
- Straighter, truer stride
- Exhibited more length and spring at the walk
- Moved with a more athletic and agile stride showing greater drive off his hocks
- Moved with greater softness of stride
- Longer, more ground covering stride
- Longer, softer-strided horse
- More forceful stride



- Moved out with a longer stride, showing more freedom of movement
- More direct stride
- A prompt stride
- Longer, further reaching stride
- Freer moving, having a bolder stride, longer stride
- More fluid
- Sounder moving horse
- Softer moving horse
- More coordinated mover
- More flexion to the hocks and more elevation and reach from the forehand
- More flexion of the knee and hock, with more reach
- Folded his knees and worked more with his hocks
- Lifted his knees and drove with his hocks
- More forward impulsion
- More collected stride
- More stylish on the move
- Showed more movement and freedom of motion in his shoulder
- More athletic and agile stride
- When on the move, she exhibited more beauty and presence, possessing a more floating stride
- Drove from behind with more hock action

The information found in all judging materials have been compiled from the American Quarter Horse Association Official Rulebook, the American Paint Horse Association Official Rulebook, the National Reining Horse Association Official Rulebook, the National Horse Judging Team Coaches Association Official Handbook, the Texas Tech University judging manual, the Colorado State University judging manual and from personal experience. Special thanks to Dr. Dave Denniston, Dr. Kris Wilson, and Dr. Jim Heird for their expertise in the area of horse judging. The information in this handbook is to be used for educational purposes only.

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