

## 2016 Judges Update

The main subject of this *Judges Update* is to address the changes to the Versatility Ranch Horse (VRH) classes and how those changes relate to AQHA All-Around Judges. Starting in 2016, you may see VRH classes included in the show you are judging. The show has the option to select the VRH classes they want to include in their show. To give the VRH All-Around award, the show must have:

1. Ranch Conformation
2. Ranch Reining
3. One, or both, of the two cattle classes (Ranch Cutting/Ranch Cow Work)
4. One, or both, of the remaining classes (Ranch Riding/Ranch Trail)

A regular carded (All-Around or Progressive) judge may judge VRH classes. However, if the show offers the required number of classes to award the VRH All-Around award, the regular carded (All-Around) judge must also be approved as a VRH Specialized Judge. If you are not currently approved as a VRH Specialized Judge, you may submit a request, in writing or by email ([judges@aqha.org](mailto:judges@aqha.org)), for the AQHA Judges Committee's consideration.

As a judge, you do not have to worry about the all-around award listed above as this will be handled by show management but I want you to understand the process. But remember, the show may only have VRH Ranch Riding and VRH Ranch Trail (for example) in their show so you must be familiar with the VRH rules and fully understand that horses in ranch classes will, and should, be shown (and judged) slightly different than horses in their respective traditional class. As judges, you are the main cog in protecting the integrity of the ranch horse.

First, I want to make sure you understand the differences between the ranch riding class that has been held at AQHA shows the past 3 years and the ranch riding class associated with the VRH division. The stand-alone AQHA Ranch Riding class (Rule SHW 416) is composed of mandatory gaits and at least 3 optional maneuvers. When judging, make sure you review the pattern to ensure the pattern has the walk, trot and lope both directions and the extended trot and extended lope in at least one direction, as well as a stop and back. With these mandatory gaits, the pattern must also include 3 optional obstacles, which are separate than the mandatory gaits. For example, a maneuver of walking over logs would be considered one of the optional obstacles but would not be considered one of the mandatory gaits. The walk has to be a stand-alone maneuver where the exhibitor has the opportunity to show the horse at a ranch horse walk as described in Rule SHW 334 (Gaits-Ranch Riding). In the VRH Ranch Riding class, there are no optional maneuvers. The horses are judged on their gaits and the stop/back only.

Now is a good time to discuss the way to break ties in AQHA Ranch Riding and all VRH classes (as described in SHW557.6). It is also the way most generally accepted by the exhibitors and should be utilized in these classes. This system must be used in all classes but I will use VRH Ranch Riding in this example. Assuming your pattern has 10 maneuvers, before the class, number each maneuver from 1-10 in the order you want to use as your tie-breakers. For example, you want to use the 3<sup>rd</sup> maneuver, the extended trot as your first tie-breaker. You would put the number 1 over that maneuver on your score sheet. You want to use the 8<sup>th</sup> maneuver, the extended lope, as your second tie-breaker so you put the number 2 over that maneuver, etc. Then, with horses that have the same score, look back over your tie-breakers until you see one horse that has a higher maneuver score than the other and the tie can be broken. This system is very transparent and considered fair by all exhibitors.

Remember, in AQHA Ranch Riding and all VRH classes, horses being off-pattern, eliminating a maneuver, having an incomplete maneuver or even leaving the working arena before the pattern is complete are not disqualified. As stated in SHW419.4 and SHW 557.2, these horses are to be placed below all horses/riders that have completed the pattern correctly.

For clarification, in VRH Ranch Trail, the rule states the course must include no less than six and no more than nine obstacles. The rule book is not clear on the six mandatory obstacles. The first mandatory obstacle should be "Ride over obstacles on the ground (usually logs or poles). Walk, trot or lope may be used but only one gait is required." The next three items listed below this statement should be subsections of the two sentences above with the 5 items below that as the other 5 mandatory obstacles.

In VRH Ranch Reining, "Trotting more than 2 strides when starting a circle or exiting a rollback (but less than ½ circle or ½ length of the arena)" should be added to the 2 point penalties.

The AQHA VRH World Championship Show will be held March 17-19, 2016 in conjunction with the Houston Livestock show in Houston, Texas. AQHA will be filming the event. If you are interested in improving your knowledge of the VRH events, we will make a video available for judges only. You will be able to download the score sheet from the event to compare with how you judge the class. More information will be available after the event.

In Western Horsemanship, Rule SHW437.3 lists “Loss of stirrup or rein” as a severe fault. Rule SHW437.3 should read “loss of rein” as a severe fault. Loss of stirrup, as listed in SHW437.2, is a major fault.

NRCHA will hold a working cow horse seminar at Lone Star Park in Grand Prairie, Texas on February 26-27, 2016. If you are interested in attending, you can access the registration form by going to: <https://form.jotform.com/60194730866158>.

The dates for the All-Around, Progressive and Level 1 (Novice) judging seminar will be December 12-14, 2016 at the Sheraton DFW in Irving, Texas. The AQHA Judges Committee will meet at the AQHA Convention in March to select the classes to be covered at this seminar. After the classes are decided, a schedule and hotel contact information, will be finalized and posted on the AQHA website. You will be able to find this by going to AQHA.com, Showing and scroll down to Judges-Seminars.

I would encourage each of you to attend the 2016 AQHA Convention in Las Vegas where various committees discuss rule change proposals and recommendations are generated to submit to the AQHA Board of Directors and AQHA Executive Committee for their consideration. Your opinion is valued!

Here are a couple of my favorite sayings by Festus Hagan, played by Ken Curtis on Gunsmoke.

- “When you learn a thing a day, you store up smart”
- “The onliest thing you get from straddling the fence is a sore backside”
- “Safer than chitlins on a city folk’s supper plate”

Be safe and let me know if I can ever be of assistance.

Alex  
2/23/16