



JUDGING HALTER

A STANDARD OF REFERENCE FOR AQHA JUDGES

A large, expressive red brushstroke graphic that starts from the right side of the page and sweeps downwards and to the left, crossing behind the text.

AMERICAN
QUARTER
HORSE
ASSOCIATION

Casebook prepared by:

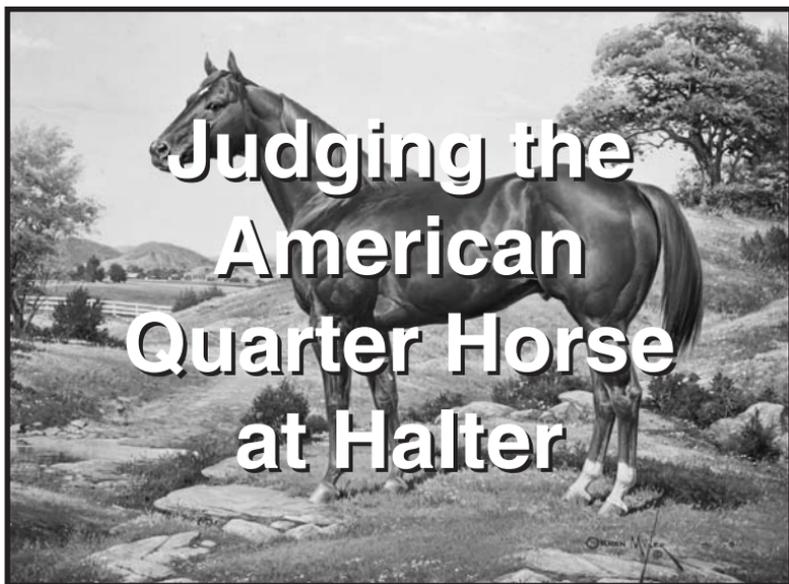
**James C. Heird
Tina M. Anderson**

**Colorado State University
for
The American Quarter
Horse Association**

AMERICAN
QUARTER
HORSE
ASSOCIATION



Drawings prepared by Bobbie Skelton, El Reno, Oklahoma.



FORWARD

In 1995, the AQHA Executive Committee appointed a task force to examine the halter class and its evaluation by AQHA judges. Members of the task force were: Jerry Wells, Chip Knost, Carol Rose, Carol Harris, Mike Perkins, Dr. Marvin Beeman, Don Burt and Dr. Jim Heird. The following casebook is the result of the work accomplished by the halter sub-committee and has been reviewed and approved by the halter sub-committee of the show and contest committee as well as the halter task force appointed in 2000.

The task force was unanimous in its opinion that the halter class is, has been in the past and will in the future be an important part of the AQHA show. Judges must realize that their selections in this class are as important as those selections made in any other class. There are selection guidelines, rules, and procedures that must be followed just as for any other class. In addition, understanding these criteria and guidelines is critical if the judge is to develop a consistent procedure and placing that benefits the breed and its exhibitors.

THE CLASS

A halter class is defined as a class where the horse is judged based upon its conformation. Conformation is defined as the physical appearance of an animal due to the arrangement of muscle, bone and other body tissue.



THE IDEAL

There is no perfectly conformed horse except in the eye of the artist. However, the American Quarter Horse Association has accepted the following “look” or image as its “ideal” from which to establish halter horse judging criteria.

*The **ideal** American Quarter Horse shown at halter is a horse that possesses the following characteristics: Eye appeal that is the result of a harmonious blending of an attractive head; refined throatlatch; well-proportioned trim neck; long sloping shoulder; deep heart girth; short back; strong loin and coupling; long hip and croup; well-defined and muscular stifle, gaskin, forearm, and chest; and straight and structurally correct feet and legs that are free of defects. The ideal should be an athlete that is uniformly muscled throughout.*

PURPOSE OF CLASS

The purpose of the class is to preserve American Quarter Horse type by selecting individuals in the order of their resemblance to the breed ideal and that are the most positive combination of balance, structural correctness, breed and sex characteristics, and muscling.

TYPE IS DEFINED AS AN OVERALL BODY STYLE AND CONFORMATION THAT IS UNIQUE TO A SPECIFIC BREED.

JUDGING THE HALTER HORSE

Halter horse judging is a positive evaluation of balance, structural correctness, breed and sex characteristics, and muscling. When judging, it is important to make a positive evaluation of each horse's resemblance to the ideal and to find the horse that best combines the traits listed above. It is easy to find what you don't like about any animal and eliminate horses on that basis. However, when a positive evaluation is used, it produces a consistent result that finds the most complete horse. All judging involves the ability to find those animals that most resemble the ideal and to rank them accordingly.

In order to judge halter horses it is important to have a thorough understanding of the traits used in the selection process. This process begins with balance.

I. BALANCE

Balance is the single most important characteristic in equine selection. It is determined by the skeletal framework of the animal being judged. When judging, it is important to attempt to visualize and evaluate the skeleton of the horse underneath its muscle and other tissues. Because it is sometimes difficult to visualize the skeletal framework of the animal being judged, there are several easy reference points to evaluate balance.



Nothing is more critical to balance than slope of the **shoulder**. Slope of shoulder changes when the angle of the shoulder is increased or decreased. Not only does the top to bottom line ratio of the neck change, but the ratio of the length of back to length of underline also changes. 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. The straight-shouldered horse will also be shallow-hearted, as measured from the top of the withers to the chest floor. Unlike the balanced horse whose legs are approximately the same length as its depth of heart, the straight-shouldered horse's legs will be longer than its depth of heart.

SLOPING SHOULDER



TOP TO BOTTOM LINE RATIO



The **neck** is an important consideration when looking at balance. Rather than only giving preference to horses with a long, thin neck, in reality judges should also select horses with the appropriate top to bottom line ratio of the neck. The top line is the distance from the poll to the withers and the bottom line is the distance from the throatlatch to the neck-shoulder junction at the chest. The ideal should be approximately a 2 to 1 ratio of the top to bottom line of the horse's neck.

NECK



The ideal American Quarter Horse at halter has **withers** that are sharp, prominent and slightly higher than the horse's hindquarters or croup.

PROMINENT WITHERS



The **hindquarter of the ideal** should appear square and full when viewed from the side. The ideal horse is an American Quarter Horse that is as full and as long across the horizontal plane of the stifle as it is from point of hip to point of buttocks.

SQUARE HIP



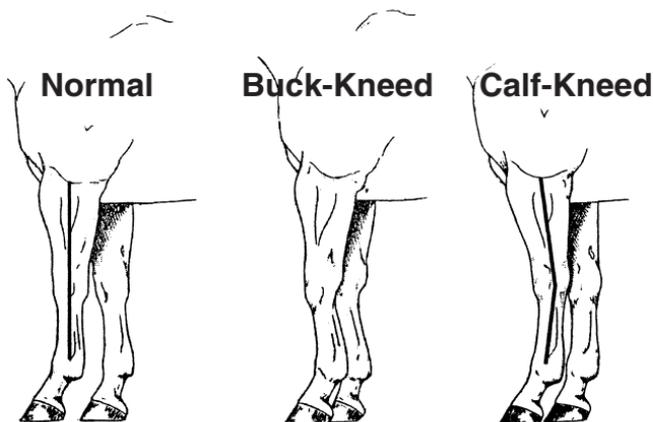
LONG CROUP AND HIP

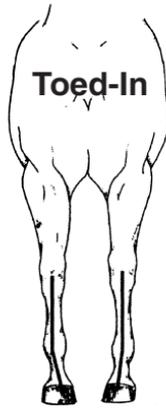
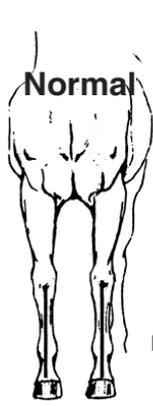


II. STRUCTURAL CORRECTNESS

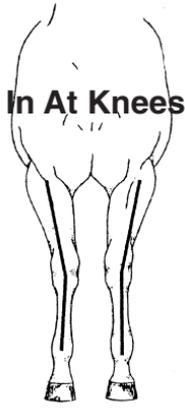
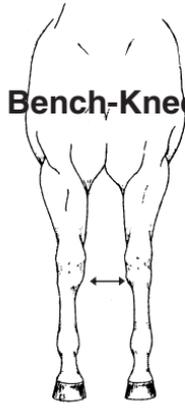
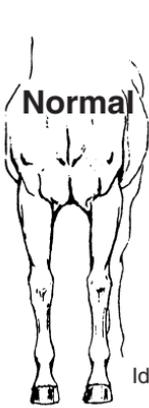
Structural correctness of feet and legs is a major area of consideration in judging. When standing beside the horse, the judge drops an imaginary line from the point of the buttocks to the ground. Ideally, that line should touch the hocks, run parallel to the cannon bone and be slightly behind the heel. The horse with too much angle to his hocks is **sickle-hocked**, and the horse that is straight in his hocks is **post-legged**. Ideally, when viewed from the rear, any horse should be widest from stifle to stifle. Another imaginary line from the point of the buttocks to the ground should bisect the gaskin, hock and hoof. It is not critical that a horse be perfectly straight from the ankles down as viewed from the rear. In fact, most horses naturally stand with the cannons parallel and toe out slightly at the hooves. This allows a horse's stifle to clear his ribcage in flight, resulting in a longer-strided, freer-moving horse. However, when a horse is bowed-in at the hocks and the cannon bones are not parallel, it is **cow-hocked**. Occasionally, there are even horses that actually toe-in behind and are bow-legged. When viewed from the side the ideal should again stand on a straight column of bone with no deviation. A horse that is "over at the knees" is **buck-kneed**, and the horse that is "back at the knees" is **calf-kneed**. Obviously, calf-kneed is the most serious condition. When the horse is viewed from the front, an imaginary line from the point of the shoulder to the toe should bisect the knee, cannon bone and hoof. The hoof should point straight ahead. When a horse toes out, it is **splay-footed** and this horse will always **wing-in**. When a horse toes-in, it is **pigeon-toed** and that horse will always **paddle out**. The most serious of these is the horse that wings-in, because it has a tendency to interfere, i.e., strike its legs with the opposite hoof as it travels. If the cannon bone is off-centered to the outside, it is **bench-kneed**. The ideal has no deviation from these descriptions and it is essential for the judge to recognize structural defects.

STRUCTURAL INCORRECTNESS AND DEVIATIONS FROM THE IDEAL

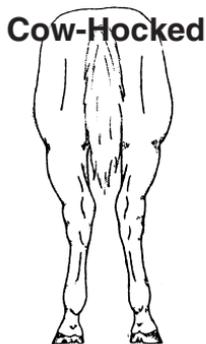
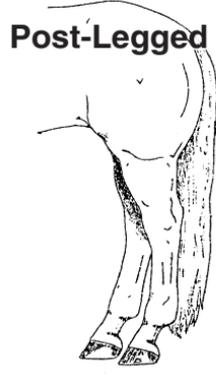




Ideal

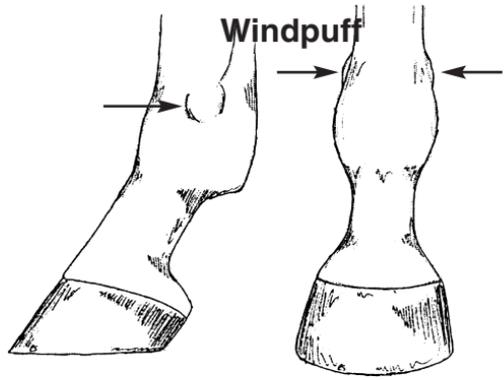
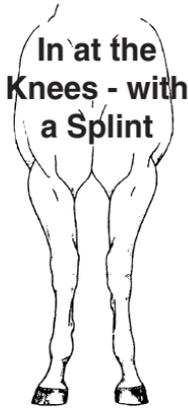
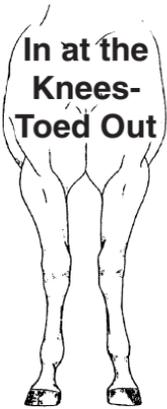
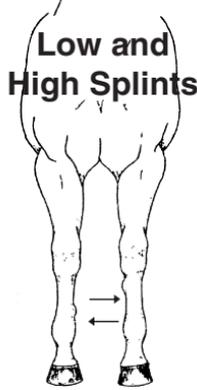


Ideal



Blemishes

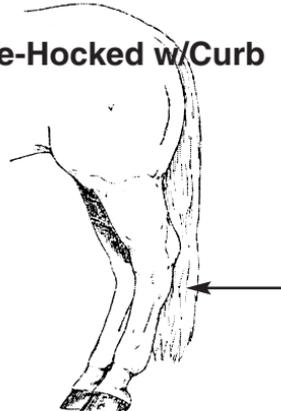
It is also important that judges evaluate the cause for blemishes and abnormalities such as **splints**, **windpuffs**, **ringbone**, **bowed tendons**, and **curbs**. Are they the result of structural incorrectness or unrelated causes? Obviously, incorrect structure should be considered and penalized more severely than tissue changes that are not the result of any visible structural deviations.



Bowed Tendon



Sickle-Hocked w/Curb



III. BREED AND SEX CHARACTERISTICS

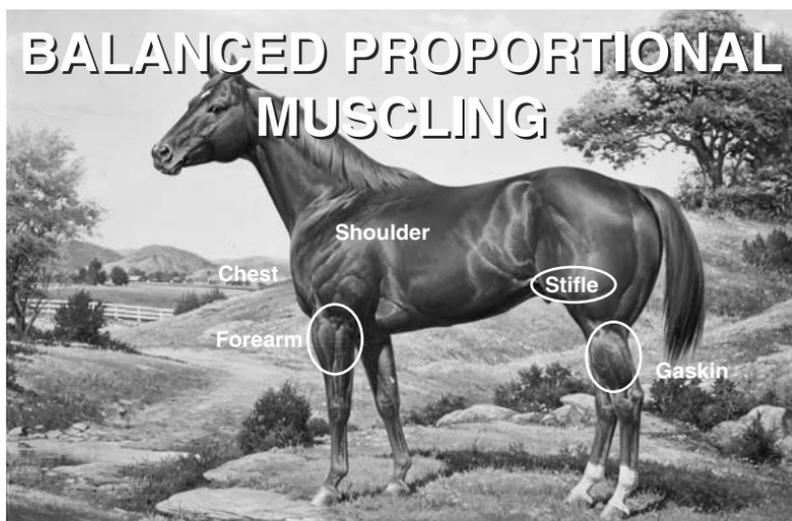
American Quarter Horses shown at halter should exhibit breed characteristics, or type. Type is defined as overall body style and conformation unique to a specific breed. In addition, mares should exhibit femininity and stallions should exhibit masculinity. Femininity and masculinity are most easily recognized in the head and throatlatch areas. They are qualities hard to define but easily recognized.

HEAD & THROATLATCH



IV. MUSCLING

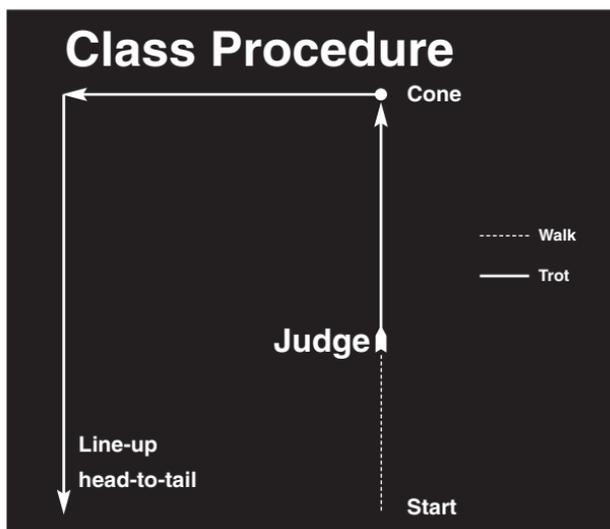
Muscling is an important criterion in judging conformation classes. However, the purpose of the class is not to find the horse with the most muscle but to find those individuals with adequate muscling for the breed. The correct horse is a balanced athlete that is muscled uniformly throughout. The question that one needs to ask when judging is which horses do not have adequate muscling rather than which horse has the most muscling. Simply selecting the horse with the largest volume of muscle is not judging for overall qualities. It can be accomplished with a scale or tape measure. Since muscle volume is uniform throughout the horse's body, muscling is easily determined by comparing individual muscle groups such as the stifle, gaskin or forearm.



CLASS/JUDGING PROCEDURES

CLASS PROCEDURE

The taskforce established a class procedure that has been included in the official *AQHA Handbook*. It is required that when judging, each judge follows these procedures. Like any other class, the judge not following the written procedures will be in error.



JUDGING PROCEDURE

Horses will walk to the judge one at a time. As the horse approaches, the judge will step to the right (left of the horse) to enable the horse to trot straight to a cone placed at 50 feet away. At the cone, the horse will continue trotting, turn to the left and trot toward the left wall or fence of the arena.

After trotting, horses will be lined up head to tail for individual inspection by the judge. The judge shall inspect each horse from both sides, front and rear.

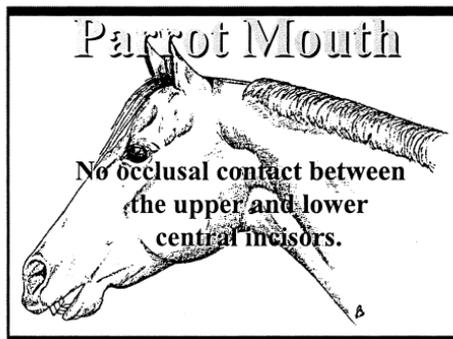
Disqualification

Obvious lameness, parrot-mouth and cryptorchid conditions (2 years of age and older) shall be cause for disqualification. The judge shall excuse these horses prior to class placing.

Lameness

The judge shall examine and check for lameness all horses brought into any class. Obvious lameness is consistently observable at a trot under all circumstances.

Parrot Mouth / Monkey Mouth (over or undershot jaws)



SUMMARY

Halter horse judging is a positive evaluation of balance, structural correctness, breed and sex characteristics and balanced, proportional muscling. The ideal American Quarter Horse shown at halter is a horse that possesses the following characteristics:

- ◆ The horse should possess eye appeal that is the result of a harmonious blending of an attractive head.
- ◆ Refined throatlatch.
- ◆ Well-proportioned, trim neck.
- ◆ Long sloping shoulder.
- ◆ Deep heart girth.
- ◆ Short back.
- ◆ Strong loin and coupling.
- ◆ Long hip and croup.
- ◆ Well-defined and muscular stifle, gaskin, forearm and chest.
- ◆ The horse should be a balanced athlete that is muscled uniformly throughout.
- ◆ These characteristics should be combined with straight and structurally correct legs and feet that are free of defects.



A HALTER HORSE JUDGE HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO FIND THE ANIMAL THAT IS THE BEST POSITIVE COMBINATION OF THE CHARACTERISTICS DESCRIBED IN THIS CASEBOOK. THIS IS A CLASS THAT STANDS ALONE - A CLASS WHERE THE HORSE IS JUDGED BASED UPON ITS CONFORMATION AND SIMILARITY TO THE IDEAL AS DESCRIBED BY AQHA.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- Q. What do I do if the best horse in the class doesn't stand still, has a foot, leg, head, etc that I didn't like, or the exhibitor is not dressed as neatly as other exhibitors?
- A. If the judge can determine that the animal being judged is the best horse in the class, that animal should go first. The horse that is the best combination of the major traits should always go first.
- Q. Should I lineup the horses for grand and reserve differently than when I am judging the individual classes?
- A. The judge should make certain he/she lines up the grand and reserve lines so that each horse can be evaluated individually. The judge should never give the impression that this decision is predetermined. As much effort should be made in this decision as any of the individual class decisions.
- Q. I believe that there are horses in the class that will perform in certain individual performance classes better than the horse that has the best conformation. Should this be considered?
- A. The halter class is a class where the horse is judged based upon its conformation. Although the halter horse should give the appearance of the balanced athlete, it is not the responsibility of the judge to determine if a horse will or will not perform. There are riding classes in which this can be determined if the owner/exhibitor of the halter horse decides to enter. In addition, the effort of the judge to determine the riding ability of the halter horse is subjective at best. The halter class is a class where the horse is judged based upon its conformation. This is the only criterion for evaluation.

AMERICAN
QUARTER
HORSE
ASSOCIATION

© 2001 American Quarter Horse Association

No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed without the prior written consent of the American Quarter Horse Association.