



TO: All Morgan Judges

FROM: AMHA Judges Education Committee

RE: Yearly Update – March 2022

As the days lengthen and the COVID-19 virus becomes more manageable, many of us are looking forward to the fast approach of the 2022 show season. As USEF judges, the decisions you make have a direct effect on the future of the Morgan breed. Your selections are used as guidance by breeders, exhibitors, and spectators alike. This update is designed to keep you “up to speed” with show ring trends, both good and bad, so the decisions you make should be in the best interest of our breed.

The Judging Standards Manual states:

“We believe every exhibitor has an absolute right to expect his or her horse to be judged against the same criteria regardless of who is judging or in what part of the country the show is held. It is the function of the committee to establish this standard...devise and recommend to the Board ways to see that it’s universally accepted and adhered to...and research methods to generally upgrade the quality and consistency of our Morgan horse judging.”

- A. Hunter Pleasure: The hunter pleasure horse should appear to be carrying his body in a natural frame with ease of motion and without evidence of undue restraint. His motion starts from the hind end and progresses through his shoulders, which allows him to carry his head in the correct frame with quiet, relaxed collection. He should never appear to have his frame controlled by the bridle, be behind the bit, or appear to be pulling himself around on the forehand. Transitioning from the trot to the extended trot is a ground covering motion - Not go faster or higher! The canter and extended canter should follow the same progressive movement forward. The walk should be free-moving and relaxed, not tense or anticipating. When judging the Hunter Pleasure horse remember that although a Morgan

naturally moves in the arch of a circle the Hunter Pleasure horse must exhibit elliptical movement as well. A Morgan Hunter Pleasure horse should travel with twice the length of stride as height and should demonstrate SENSE OF PURPOSE! Hunter Pleasure is the most popular section within the Morgan division. We as judges must be diligent in looking for the correct Hunter Pleasure horse that reflects the criteria of the Standard. When judging pay attention to the rule governing the length of shank on hunter curb and Pelham bits.

- B. Unnatural Tail Carriage: Please stay diligent with your penalizing the unnatural tail carriage. “Unnatural tail carriage includes evidence of tail setting and/or break-over, dead tail, wry tail (wry tail is defined as twisted, carried askew or distorted).” Judges have an obligation to see that tails carried vertically with an abrupt break-over are penalized. It must be noted that there has been great improvement in this area.
- C. Suitability: As per the judging standards manual: “A horse placed first in a class judged on performance, quality and manners could justifiably be not placed against the same horses if the class were judged on manners, quality and performance.” Please remember, the order of performance criteria changes from class to class, e.g.- Open, Amateur, Junior Exhibitor, Ladies, etc. Junior Exhibitor horses must have impeccable manners.
- D. Classic Pleasure: This section of the Morgan division has grown and become one of the most popular sections of the division. Please pay strict attention to the walk and transition from one gait to another when judging Classic Pleasure. It is imperative that the Classic Pleasure horse give the distinct appearance of being a pleasure to ride or drive with emphasis on the walk and smooth transitions.
- E. Western Pleasure: The Western Pleasure section is a very popular and competitive section of our division. Judges must heavily penalize presentations which include long, loose, draped reins; heavy contact; snatching and jerking; sawing; pulling or evidence of intimidation. Remember: Anything in the horse’s mouth other than a legal bit is not permitted in the Western Pleasure section.
- F. Protective Headgear: Judges must remember that protective headgear is allowed, and may not be penalized, in all Morgan classes. Individuals wearing protective headgear must not be discriminated against in any class.

- G. Balance and Cadence/ Laboring action: The Judging Standards Manual states:
“Judges shall seriously fault any horse that is laboring, pounding, landing on the heel, winging, or paddling, whether due to faulty conformation, extremes of length and/or angle of the hoof, weight, and/or balance of shoe. In all classes the gaits must be true and correct. Mixed gaits demonstrating improper cadence and balance must be penalized.
- H. Park Saddle: The gaits of the Park Saddle Horse are: Walk, Park Trot and Canter. Not “Stand”, Park Trot, and Canter. You must penalize the Park Saddle horse that does not attempt to walk at all. Remember, it can be two beat as long as the horse demonstrates a degree of regimentation without undue restraint.
- I. Pleasure Driving: The gaits of the Pleasure Driving Horse are Walk, Pleasure Trot and Road Trot. Please pay strict attention to the distinction between the Pleasure Trot and Road Trot. Excessive speed at the Pleasure Trot makes the distinction between it and the Road Trot impossible. Excessive speed at the Pleasure Trot should be penalized.
- J. Ranch Horse: The gaits of the Ranch Pleasure Horse are Walk, Trot, Extended Trot, Lope and Extended Lope. Please pay strict attention to judging the ability of the horse to be a pleasure to ride while being used as a means of conveyance from one ranch task to another and all gaits should reflect the versatility, attitude and movement of a working horse.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the Morgan Horse. Please feel free to contact any committee member with questions, comments, or concerns.

Warm Regards,

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