



Showing the 4-H Hunter

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Some important aspects to consider when preparing to compete in a 4-H Hunter competition include the horse, rider, attire and tack. Let's look at each of these individually.

The Horse

A hunter-type horse typically displays a long-reaching stride at all three forward gaits. The hunter will be asked to perform the walk, trot, canter and back. The horse should move in an even rhythmic stride throughout the class with a more forward way of going than that of a western-type horse, however, no less collected. The judge evaluates manners looking for the horse that responds quickly and softly to the rider's cues. Flat classes require the horse perform each gait with a workmanlike attitude. When asked to back the horse should give to the bridle and back with a cadenced two-beat diagonal stride.

Over fences the horse should work between the jumps in an even cadence and a free flowing stride. A horse that speeds up as it approaches a fence should be penalized. The horse should take off before the jump and land on the other side in an even arch. See Figure 1.

Taking off too close to the jump (chipping) or taking off too far away from the jump (long spot) should be penalized. Courses are set for specific number of strides between fences which is evaluated during

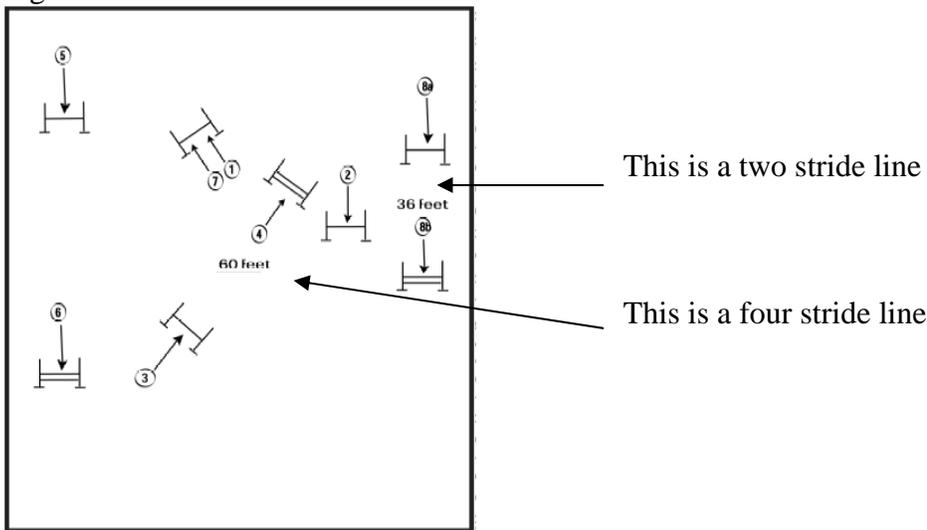
Figure 1



competition. If the distance between two fences is 48 feet, there should be three strides between the fences. Each stride is considered 12 feet in length, so 12×3 equals 36 feet. The extra 12 feet include the landing and take off. When trying to determine strides the rider should subtract 12 from the distance and then divide by 12. Example: 60 feet between two fences - subtract 12, which equals 48, and divide this number by 12 to get four strides between the two fences. If the horse works with a shorter stride, the rider should know to push the horse to get a bigger stride, or if it is a pony more strides will be accommodated between fences. See Figure 2.

With the pony hunter the number of strides added should be consistent throughout the course for a similar distance, i.e., for 48 feet between jumps, which is typically a three stride distance, the pony may exhibit four strides and this should be consistent for another 48 foot distance.

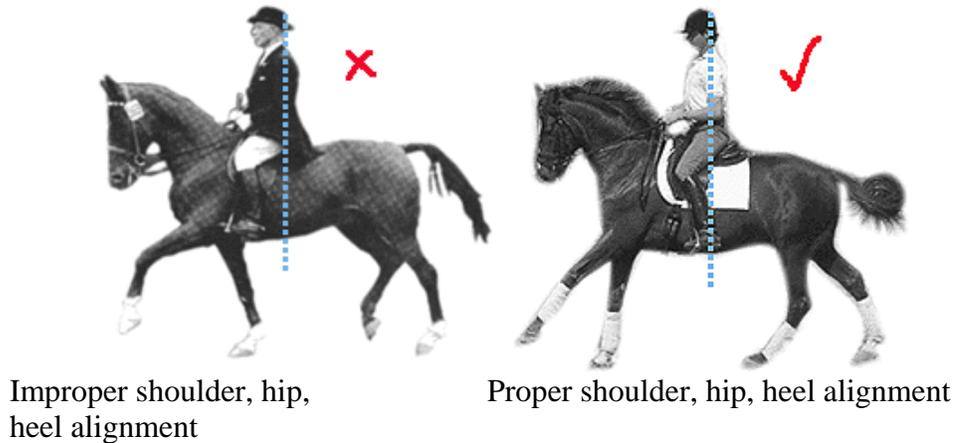
Figure 2



The Rider

The rider plays a major role in all classes, whether on the flat or over fences. Proper equitation is imperative with proper leg, hand and seat position and a solid foundation (refer to rule book for positioning). See Figure 3.

Figure 3



Soft seat and hands allow for more ideal communication with the horse and a horse that responds in a soft, trusting manner. A horse and rider working in unison will exhibit a positive picture that the judge will reward. The rider should always look up and forward to avoid other horses or problems that arise as well as exhibiting a confident picture. When going over fences the rider should release the horse's mouth at the jump so as not to bang the bit against the horse's bars. A rider that uses the reins for balance over the fence will interfere with the horse's balance which can cause the horse to refuse the fence. The rider should take the fences in two-point position with the seat out of the saddle and the weight balanced through the legs. This position allows the rider to stay off the horse's back and follow the horse's movement. The rider's heels should remain lower than the toes to help with balance and to take up the shock upon landing. See Figure 4.

Figure 4



Proper Attire

Hunter classes require the rider wear proper attire. This includes an American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) approved helmet, an English shirt with collar, an English riding jacket, breeches or jodhpurs, belt, and tall boots or paddock boots with garters. The judge may allow riders to remove coats due to hot temperatures. Riders must be wearing a short or long sleeve English shirt to show without the jacket. Shirts without sleeves are not allowed. Typically the jacket, hard hat and boots are black or a dark color. The breeches are usually beige in color. The rider's hair should be tied back and secured in a bun or inside the helmet. Gloves are optional, but if worn should be the same color as the jacket. If the rider uses spurs they must be an English type "nub" spur, rowel spurs are not permitted.

Legal/ Illegal Tack

Proper tack is important in flat and over fences classes. Illegal tack will require the judge to either drop the exhibitor a ribbon placing or disqualify the exhibitor. Many hunters are shown in simple snaffles such as the full cheek or eggbutt but kimberwicks are also permitted.

Figure 5



Kimberwick



Full Cheek Snaffle

Eggbutt Snaffle

The hunter horse must have a full English bridle with a cavasson noseband. Other types of nosebands such as a figure eight, drop, or flash noseband are illegal.

Figure 6



Flash Noseband Figure Eight Noseband Drop Noseband Cavasson Noseband

Other equipment such as martingales are not permitted in flat classes. The standing martingale and running martingales are permitted in over fences classes, although the running martingale is considered “unconventional.” See Figure 7.

Figure 7



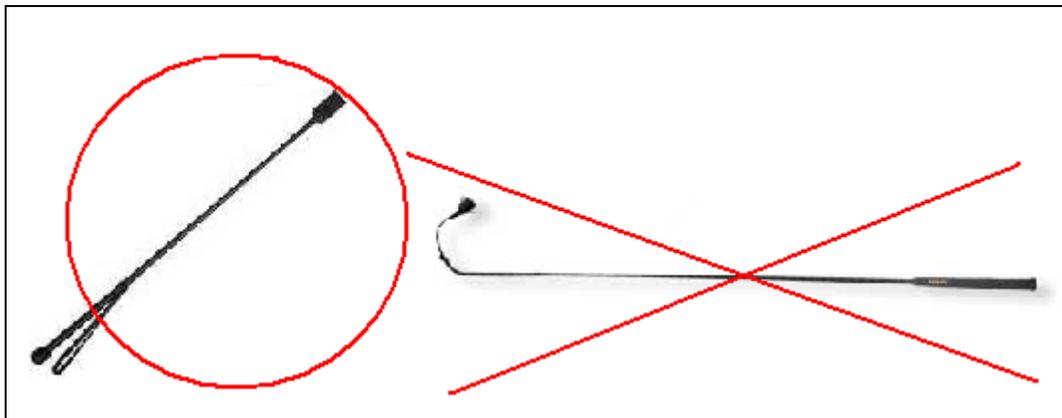
Running
Martingale

Standing
Martingale

No types of leg protection, such as boots or leg wraps, are permitted on the horse in flat or over fences classes. Hunter classes require a hunter-type saddle for both flat and over fences work.

The rider may choose to carry a crop or bat during both flat and over fences classes. No dressage length whips are permitted.

Figure 8



Summary

In summary, the 4-H hunter is a very traditional event with conservative tack and attire. Exhibiting in these events should demonstrate unity between horse and rider. A horse with a long, free flowing stride and willing attitude is most desirable. A rider with a soft seat and hands will bring out the horse's best in both flat and over fences classes.

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