



*January 2024 - 2025*

## ***Ranch Trail Guidelines***

### ***Pennsylvania 4-H Horse Shows***

#### **Class Description & Procedure**

This class should test the horse's ability to navigate situations encountered while being ridden through a pattern of obstacles generally found during everyday ranch work. This class will be judged on the performance of the horse/pony over and or through obstacles, with emphasis on manners, response to the rider and quality of movement. Credit will be given to horses/ponies negotiating the obstacle with correctness, style and some degree of speed, providing correctness is not sacrificed. Horses/ponies should receive credit for showing attentiveness to the obstacles and the capability of picking their own way through the course when obstacles warrant it, and willingly responding to the rider's cues on more difficult obstacles. The ideal ranch trail horse should have a natural ranch horse appearance from head to tail in each maneuver.

Horses/ponies will not be required to work on the rail. However, the course must be designed to require each horse/pony to show three gaits (walk, trot, lope or gaits appropriate for breed) on a reasonably loose rein or light contact.

Patterns must be posted at least one hour prior to the start of the class. Management when setting the courses should keep in mind that the idea is not to trap and/or trick the exhibitor or eliminate them by making an obstacle too difficult. Management and course designers should consider the skill level of the majority of the exhibitors. All courses are to be constructed with SAFETY in mind so as to prevent accidents. Enough space must be provided for a horse/pony to jog/trot (about 30 feet) and lope/canter (about 50 feet) for the judges to evaluate these gaits. If time and conditions warrant, the show committee should permit exhibitor to walk and/or school over the course prior to the class. If schooling is permitted over the course, only the exhibitor shall be permitted to ride the horse during schooling over the course. If an obstacle/course is disrupted, it shall be reset after each horse has worked. A course shall consist of 6 to 8 obstacles, with at least 10' between all but the combined obstacles.

The horse/rider team is judged on the correctness, efficiency, and pattern accuracy with which the obstacles are negotiated, and the attitude and mannerisms exhibited by the horse. Judging emphasis is on identifying the well broke, responsive, and well-mannered horse which can correctly navigate and negotiate the course.

**No horse may cross enter Open Trail**



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## **Required Obstacles and Maneuvers**

1. **Ride over obstacles on the ground (natural logs are encouraged).** Walk, trot or lope may be used but only one gait is required. - Walk-overs: Walk over no more than five logs no more than 10 inches high and spacing between 26 – 30 inches. The formation may be straight, curved, zigzagged or raised. - Trot-overs: Trot over no more than five logs no more than 10 inches high. The space between logs or poles should be 36-42 inches. The formation can also be straight, curved, zigzagged or raised. - Lope-overs: Lope over no more than five logs no more than 10 inches high. The space between logs should be 6 to 7 feet. The formation can also be straight, curved, zigzagged or raised.
2. **Backing obstacles:** Backing obstacles are to be spaced at a minimum of 28 inches. If elevated, 30 inch spacing is required. Back through and around at least three makers. Back through L, V, U or straight or similarly shaped course which may be elevated no more than 24 inches.

## **Optional Obstacles and Maneuvers**

Optional obstacles may be used provided the obstacles can be found in everyday ranch work. Optional obstacles from which selections can be made include, but are not limited to:

1. Opening, passing through and closing a hinged swinging gate (a rope gate may also be used): Use gate that will not endanger horse or rider and requires minimum side-passing.
2. Ride over wooden bridge: Bridge should be sturdy, safe and negotiated at a walk only. Heavy plywood lying flat on the ground is an acceptable simulation of a bridge. Suggested minimum width shall be 36 inches wide and at least 6 feet long.
3. An obstacle consisting of four logs each 5' to 7' long laid in a square. Used for rider to enter and execute a turn and then exit. Each rider will enter the square over log/pole as designated. When all four feet are in the square, the rider should execute a turn, as indicated, and depart.
4. Side-pass obstacle: Any object which is safe and of any length may be used to demonstrate responsiveness of the horse to leg signals. Raised side pass obstacles should not exceed 12 inches.
5. Carry object from one part of the arena to another.
6. Remove and replace materials from a mailbox.
7. Trot through cones spaced a minimum of 6 feet apart.
8. Cross natural ditches or ride up embankments.
9. Step in and out of obstacle.
10. Walk through brush.
11. Put on slicker or coat.
12. Stand to mount with mounting block.



13. Dismount
14. Open gate on foot.
15. Pick up a front foot.
16. Lead at the trot.

## **Prohibited Obstacles**

1. Tarps
2. Tires
3. Hides
4. Water obstacles with slick bottoms,
5. PVC pipe used as a jump or walk over
6. Rocking or moving bridges
7. Logs elevated in a manner that permits such to roll
8. Flames, dry ice, fire extinguisher, etc.
9. Dragging/pulling any objects
10. Lime

## **Judging Procedure and Scoring**

**The following scoring system is mandatory for all Ranch Trail classes.** Scoring will be on the basis of 0-infinity, with 70 denoting an average performance. Each obstacle will receive an obstacle score that should be added or subtracted from 70. Each obstacle will be scored on the following basis, ranging from plus 1 ½ to minus 1 ½: -1 ½ =extremely poor, -1=very poor, - ½ = poor, 0= correct, + ½ = good, +1= very good, +1 ½ = excellent. Obstacle scores are to be determined and assessed independently of penalty points.

An exhibitor who does not complete an obstacle during the course must not place above an exhibitor who has completed all obstacles.

**Natural ranch horse appearance will also be evaluated ranging from plus 1 ½ to minus 1 ½.**

Maneuver evaluations and penalty applications are to be determined independently. The following penalties will be applied to each occurrence and be deducted from the final score:

### ***Penalty Points***

#### **-1 point**

- Over-bridled (per maneuver)
- Out of frame (per maneuver)
- Each hit, bite or stepping on a log, cone plant or any component of the obstacle
- Incorrect or break of gait at walk or trot for two (2) strides or less
- Both front or hind feet in a single-stride slot or space at a walk or trot
- Skipping over or failing to step into required space



- Split pole in lope-over Incorrect number of strides, if specified
- One to two steps on mount/dismount or ground tie except shifting to balance
- Wrong lead or out of lead for two (2) strides or less

### **-3 points**

- Wrong lead or out of lead for more than two (2) strides
- Draped reins
- Break of gait at lope, except when correcting an incorrect lead
- Break of gait at walk or trot for more than two (2) strides
- Three to four steps on mount/dismount on ground tie
- Trotting for more than three (3) strides in lope departures or exiting a rollback into a lope from a stop or walk
- Knocking down or over, or severely disturbing an obstacle
- Stepping out of or falling off an obstacle with one (1) foot
- Missing or evading part of a log/obstacle with one (1) foot

### **-5 points**

- Spurring in front of cinch
- Blatant disobedience
- Use of either hand to instill fear/praise
- Stepping out of or falling off an obstacle with more than one (1) foot
- Dropping an object required to be carried 1st or 2nd cumulative refusal
- Letting go of gate
- Five or more steps on mount/dismount or ground tie
- Missing or evading part of a log/obstacle with more than one foot
- Dropping or letting go of the reins while building a loop (with a rope)

### **-9 points**

- Failure of rider to begin to negotiate an obstacle within 30 seconds of arrival at the obstacle. Rider will be asked to move to next obstacle.
- If a rider fails to completely negotiate an obstacle in approximately one minute, unless the nature of the obstacle requires a longer time, i.e. complex back through. Rider will be asked to move to next obstacle.
- Three refusals at an obstacle, regardless of the length of time. Rider will be asked to move to next obstacle.

### **Disqualification:**

- Failure to follow the prescribed order of obstacles, including failure to stay inside the designated boundary markers will result in disqualification
- Failure to enter, exit or work obstacle from correct side or direction
- Fall to the ground of pony/horse or rider will result in disqualification

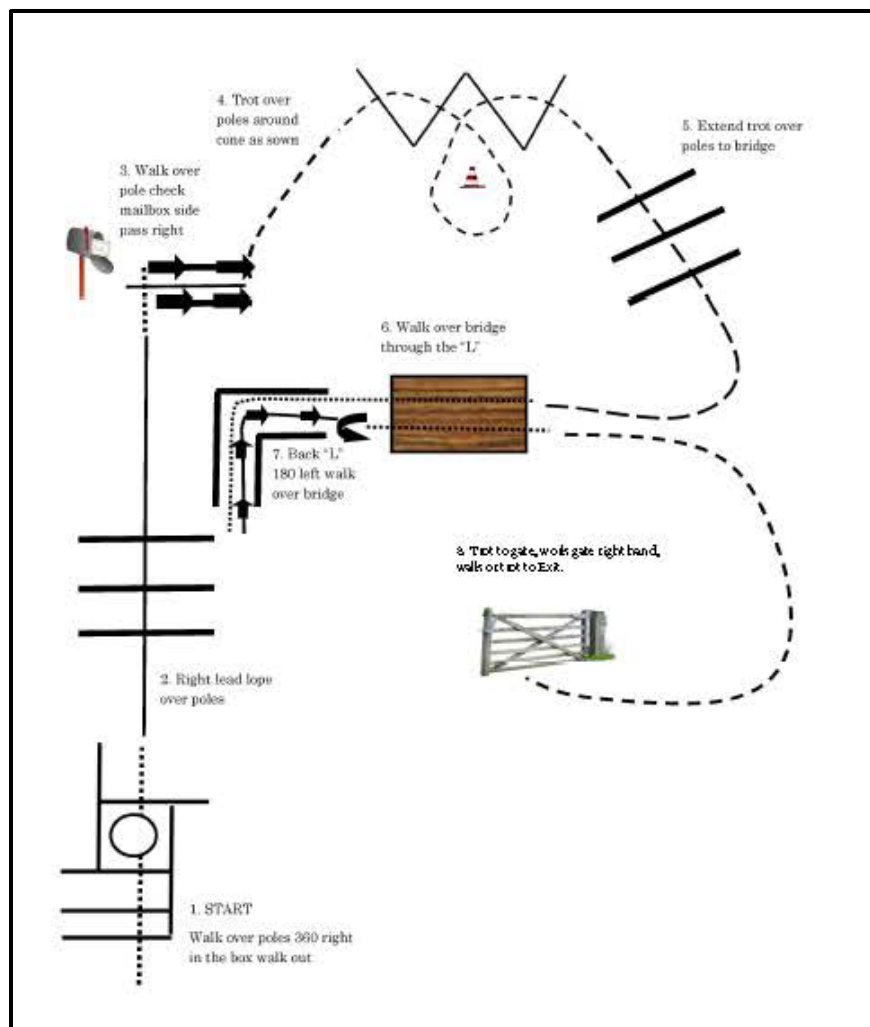


- No attempt to perform an obstacle
- Failure to complete three cumulative obstacles will result in disqualification

Failure to complete an obstacle is defined as:

- Three refusals at an obstacle or
- More than 30 seconds to begin negotiating each obstacle or
- Failure to complete an obstacle in approximately one minute, unless the nature of the obstacle requires longer time, i.e. complex back

## Course and Obstacle Examples





Open & Close Solid Gate



Carry a Raincoat



Sidepass



Bridge



Back Through



Walk Over Natural Logs

## Points to Reference

- Ranch Trail obstacles should be designed and set, providing more space to accommodate a forward moving horse.
- The distance between multiple poles within an obstacle may be greater when compared open trail.
  - Walk overs – 26” – 30”
  - Trot overs – 36” – 42”
  - Lope overs – 6’ – 7’
- Obstacles and maneuvers should closely resemble what horses may encounter in everyday ranch work or on a wooded trail.
- When designing an obstacle, it may be common to combine maneuvers to simulate a natural situation, for example; walking into a chute may replicate walking down a dead end path on a trail. Horses may then need to back up, turn and/or side-pass in order to exit and move forward again.
- If you have the option, natural wooden logs or poles are preferred but **not required**.
  - Natural wooden logs or poles may vary in length and diameter. Approximately measuring 3’-12’ in length and 3”- 8” in diameter.
  - You may replace a cone or marker with a wooden stump.
  - Natural material is encouraged to decorate the course, such as; pine brush, small trees, bushes and grasses.
- Exhibitors may be asked to pick up an object, carry it while riding and return it. This may be a rain coat, slicker, bucket, bag, lunch pail, small branch or anything similar. The object is not intended to intentionally scare or spook the horse.
- When using the solid gate option, this should be sturdy and well secured to avoid falling over. The gate can also be the entrance or exit of the arena fence, as long as it is functional and accommodates all size horses and riders. **A rope gate may also be used.**



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