

- Showing your Sporthorse on the TRIANGLE

Rachel Ehrlich, NEDA Sporthorse Committee

I hope that my previous article gave you lots of valuable information to peak your interest in showing your Sporthorse at USDF Cosequin Breeds Shows. Remember that you can Qualify for the USDF-DSHB HOY awards & USDF DSHB All Breeds Awards Awards by attending these shows. The shows have many classes for young horses from foals at their Dam's sides to 3year olds, and Mature Horse Mares and Stallions. There are also Under Saddle Classes offered to get your horses well started towards their competition career.

Hopefully by now you have gone to the USDF web site and perhaps consulted with a friend or two to answer many more questions you might have. If you are really proactive, you may have ordered and received the USDF videotape "Showing Your Sporthorse In-Hand", and you are hard at work starting your training for the USDF Breed Show Cosequin Series .. There are some basics that I would like to review that can make your journey a little easier and perhaps end with success for you in the Breed Show Ring.

The first step in getting your horse or mare & foal to a Breed Show is to submit your complete entry to the show secretary. Don't miss the opening date, published in your Regional USDF Omnibus. Make sure to check out the stabling options and be aware that sometimes stabling is limited on a "first come first serve basis". Make sure always to check the closing date for entries, and don't miss it!!!!. DO NOT PROCRASTINATE on sending your entry as classes can fill and late fees are applied to late entries.

You should include photocopies of your horse's registration paper so that you can qualify for Registry High Score Awards and /or IBC's (Individual Breed Class) that you would like to be eligible for. In the case of foals for which you may not yet have your registration paper or passport to copy, include a copy of the Stallion Service Certificate and the Registry Inspection form as proof of the foal's registry acceptance. The Breed Show Manager must check your eligibility to enter on the basis of your submission. If you do not include the correct information, you may not be cleared to enter the IBC or for the Breed Registry High Score Award. To enter the GET OF SIRE class, you must have written permission for your offspring from the Stallion owner included with your entry.

All Stallions, Mares, foals, Geldings competing in an USDF-DSHB show must have a Lifetime Number to qualify for USDF Cosequin Breeders Series Year End Awards, this includes All Breeds Awards for your participating Breed Registry. You can sign your horse up for their lifetime recording number online with USDF, or by filling out an application form that you can fax or mail. USDF staff will be more than willing to help you with questions about the process. WWW.USDF.ORG.

If you have any questions about your Breed Show entry contact the Show Secretary to be sure you understand all the details. A correctly filled out and complete entry with all the back-up documents necessary will save you time and aggravation in the long run!

The proper attire to present your horse or mare/foal in is Kaki/Chino type trousers usually white, beige, or black and a nicely fitted short sleeve shirt. Many runners prefer a white shirt that is somewhat loose fitting to allow comfort and coolness while running. A polo shirt in your farm colors or the colors of your Breed Registry . It is best to choose the color of your trousers to offset that of your horse, i.e.: black horse/white pants, white horse/black pants, as you can imagine, chinos in the Khaki color work well with any

color. The runner should wear gloves in black or white and should carry a whip to help direct the horse on the turns. Running shoes are the best footwear to provide support and lightness. Tall boots, breeches, and jackets are not appropriate when presenting a Sporthorse in-hand and may interfere with the ability of the runner athletically. An assistant or “whip handler” following behind the horses should be in dress coordinated with the Team leading the horses being presented. The whip handler is allowed to carry a buggy type whip with a short lash. It is not permitted to crack whips in the ring and absolutely no bag whips, soda cans with rocks, or any such “noisemakers” are allowed. Participants may be excused by the judges for the use of such devices. Last but not least, Professional handlers are usually at your service for a fee at most breed shows. Sometimes it is best to let a professional take your baby into the ring to give them and you the best experience possible. Please feel free to contact any NEDA Sporthorse Committee member to discuss your options for success.

The horse is required to wear a bridle if they are 2years old or older. You may either use the reins or a lead attached to the bridle. A Split chain lead works the best as it gives equal pressure off both sides of the bit and allows a thorough, yet humane half-halt to balance the horse in the runners hand. Using a long lead with the chain snapped to the off side of the bit and run under the horses chin through the near side of the bit can cause the horse to try and escape the pressure under the chin by raising the head and using the “undermuscle “of the neck. Using the chain up and over the nose band or halter can cause the horse or foal to go in unequal balance and turn in on the handler with haunches out when the half-halt is applied. Using too big a halter with the chain placed over the noseband and up to the side ring, can cause the halter to go in the horses eye creating resistance to the handler. Caution must be used to train your horse before hand to properly fit halters/leads, and find which configuration/use of the lead will work best with your horse. If you do not feel confident to sort out these arrangements on your own, this is where some lessons with a professional handler for you and your horse or foal may be a wise investment.

The type of fine halters which have no chin strap and are used for showing Arabians and Morgans in the in-hand classes are not suitable to the Sporthorse Show ring and many accidents have been seen when a youngster objects in the run and breaks one of these fine halters. When you prepare well in advance you will have the time to try different tack to see what will work best, just as you would when finding the right bit for a horse you were training.

Now that we have sorted out the pre-details, *First and Foremost, do not wait until just before the show to work with your horse or mare&foal.* In fact, waiting until just the month before the show is rushing your timing and will not give you enough time to polish your performance. Learning at an unstressed pace is most suitable to any new task undertaken. Most professionals recommend that a horse be given a 3month-training program to present their best in the Sporthorse ring. If you feel you need assistance, please contact the manager of your Breed Show or a member of the USDF Sporthorse Committee for the name of a professional handler or in-hand instructor that could assist you.

By 1.5 months of age most foals have had a halter on, and can lead with a “butt” rope. Hopefully you have been picking up their feet, brushing them, and familiarizing

them slowly with the sound of clippers, water, and the outside world. If you have put them on a trailer with their moms and taken some short rides, all the better. Having accomplished these things you are well on your way to a positive show experience. If you have not started a short daily routine with your foal, please do so now! They will need to be properly washed, braided, and groomed for presentation and go the distance to the show to strange surroundings. Also, they will need to show in the ring beside their mothers on a lead, as foals are not allowed to go at Liberty at most breed shows.

At USDF-DSHB Sporthorse competitions horses that are shown are presented “on the triangle”. The triangle measurements specified in the USEQ rule book are 30 meters from the apex to the corner of the long-side, 30 meters across the top of the long side, and 30 meters back to the jury at the apex. A smaller triangle is often used within the larger one for the walk and is usually marked by flower boxes, rails, or cones.

Find a flat, area large enough to set up the triangle using overturned buckets or traffic cones to mark the points of the triangle perimeter and the smaller walk triangle. Set poles on the ground in between the points and at the apex to give you a good visual guide to keep your horses straight when practicing. It is best to start slowly with the walk encouraging the horse or mare&foal from behind and up into the handler’s hand for good lengthening on the long side in walk and trot. A few good strides, and a break, is better than allowing the horses or foals to become frustrated and confused. The horses will add more good strides as they learn. Remember, you will be leading them on their left side and turning into them at all turns, success and polish will take practice. Make sure to use your voice commands and be encouraging with praise and treats. Give yourself time to start slow and make the goal to be practicing in the last two weeks as if you were actually giving the finished presentation in the show ring. You may use crinkly paper, treats, your dressage whip, etc, to get your horses attention and ears forward with a nicely arched neck in the stand-up for the conformation judging. Nothing impresses a judge more than a well turned out horse and a practiced presentation, your effort will show even if the day does not go perfectly and you will be rewarded.

At the show, you will either have stabled your horses or will be in the breed show day parking.. You will need to pick up your packet at the secretary and see that all is in order. Once settled you will need to check with the ring steward to see how the daily schedule is progressing and whether or not the show is on time. You must always listen carefully for announcements to be sure that you do not miss pre-class calls or announcements about timing. In the busy atmosphere it is easy to miss a call and suffer disappointment. Be sure to check the timing regularly and be at the ring to warm-up your horses at least 20minutes prior to your “go-time”. The warm-up serves the purpose to loosen up your horses at the walk and then a few trot lines to get them focused and going. A holding area is not appropriate to warm up in, nor is it safe to do so there. Usually these areas are small and should only be entered post warm-up, when you are approximately 3rd to go and can keep your horses walking before presentation.

Once you are on-deck in the warm-up, the ring steward has your number and will let you know which horse you follow and when to enter the ring. You will pass through the gate and proceed to the judges at the “apex” of the triangle. (See diagram #1/triangle) If you are showing a foal at its mother’s side, pass by the judges with the mare and stop so that the foal is standing at the Apex of the triangle. In Sporthorse competitions the stance use for judging conformation is the “Open Stance”. This means

that the horse's legs that the judge is facing for the conformation analysis should be "open" and the opposite site legs should be "closed". (See diagram/photo 2) You should be careful to stand in front and slightly to the off side of the horse so as not to block the judge's view. You should move to the opposite side as the jury moves around your horse for the viewing. It is much more difficult to get a foal to stand and move exactly when and how you like but most foals given time and practice will surprise you with their willingness to work. I cannot stress enough that from the minute you enter the door you are creating an impression. Grooming is very important to presentation. A washed, trimmed and braided horse or foal with a well fitting halter or bridle and show lead will give the impression that the exhibitor respects the process and took the time and care to show their best. Judges do take notice of this fact.

After the jury is finished assessing the conformation of your horse or foal you will be asked to show the walk on the triangle. Be sure to check the ring layout before hand so you will be confident about how you will proceed in advance. You start the walk triangle by moving away from the judges in a clockwise fashion, the handler on the left side of the horse. When you are going away from the judges the straightness and correctness of the horse is being assessed. As a handler you need to be sure to train your charge to go in a straight line. Pick a point on the wall and move toward it in a marching stride. It is very frustrating for the judges when a handler allows a horse to go back and forth off the line in no regular pattern. At best, this performance can cause a hold up when you must walk the line again, at worst you may get a lesser score for your walk correctness because the judge cannot "see" a correct presentation.

When you reach the first corner of the triangle, you will turn right and lengthen your stride at the walk on the long side. The judge will like to see a lengthened walk with a good overstride, swing and freedom through the back and haunches and a good use of the head and neck. It is important that the handler be able to "walk out of their hips" in a lengthened stride, with the body upright, and encouraging the horse to step forward from behind. It is also important that the handler give the horse enough rein or lead to use their neck in a swinging and rhythmical way. Holding the lead or reins to tight or close to the bit or halter stops the flow of movement through the back and will negatively affect the horse's score for the walk. In the case of a foal, they will often follow the lead of the dam. It is important to practice to find where the foal follows best. Some foals prefer to go in front of the shoulder, some at the shoulder, and some behind. You need to work this coordination out in advance to have a plan with you mare handler.

You will finish the walk triangle, turning right again and going straight to the jury at the apex of the triangle. Like the first leg of the triangle, you are being judged for straightness and correctness. Again, it is very important that you go straight to the jury and not crookedly off the line of the triangle. When you reach the apex of the triangle, the jury wills either ask you to walk again (if they have not seen what they need) or they will ask for the trot. If you are asked to walk again, proceed around the triangle just as before.

After you finish your go at the walk, the jury will ask you to present at the trot. You need only go at a slow jog on the short side, but you should carefully prepare for the turn to the right across the long side at the top of the triangle. As you make this turn you will need to half halt your horse and step into the long side while lengthening your stride. The

judge will be looking for the horse/foal to step under itself from behind and into the front hoofprint, pushing off in a rhythmical, harmonious, and suspended trot with good freedom from the shoulder. The judge should see an up-hill profile with good suppleness through the back in the presentation. Mature horses can be taught to go into the bridle through regular practice and the correct use of the whip or whip handler encouraging from behind. With coordinated handling foals will show their trot on the line beside their dams. Again, you will finish the trot triangle, turning right toward the judge in a slower trot. You must go straight toward the judge to provide the opportunity to see straightness and correctness. If the jury needs to see more of the trot, they will ask you to go again. The jury will usually signal the end of your presentation by saying, "Thank You". At this time you should continue past the apex of the triangle and closer to the outside edge of the ring clockwise, and exit at the specified gate. It is important to know the exit gate/route, as the next competitor will be entering behind you and you may not turn into their path.

The individual Breed Classes are conducted the same as the open classes. In the Group Classes, such as Get of Sire and Produce of Dam the horses are usually shown in individual groups on the triangle. For the ridden classes of suitability, young horse and Material Prufung, usually the jury specifies the number of horses they will like shown under saddle per group in the ring and will assign you to a group by number. Often times that number will depend on the number of class entries. You will need to check with the show manager to determine exactly how these classes will be run.

In the Dressage Sporthorse Breed Show, the horses are scored individually and a scribe records the comments/scores of the judges. Your score sheet will be handed to the scorers for processing. When the class is finalized the results will usually be announced and then posted. The shows vary in how they present awards, some pin in the ring and some have an awards table where you pick up your scoresheet and award.

Announcements are usually be made throughout the day giving the class placing. You should be on alert to hear these announcements to determine if you have won first or second place in your class. Placing in these top two places in your open class will make you eligible to enter the Championship class for colts/geldings, fillies, mares, or stallions. Likewise, placing Champion or Reserve in those classes allows you to move on to the Young Horse or Mature Horse Championship Class, and also qualifies you for the USDF-DSHB finals Championships, a third placing horse may also qualify if a Reserve or Champion horse have a prior placing at that same level. Horses that place Champion or Reserve in the Young and Mature Horse Championships are eligible to enter the Grande Championship.

Individual Breed Classes are often held only if they are sponsored by an individual or an organization. You should be proactive about seeing that these awards are offered in your USDF-DSHB Shows. Contact the Show Manager to find out about having the awards at your show. Sometimes sponsorship can mean as little as a Registry member speaking to their Registry to get the appropriate High Point Ribbons to the show manager.

The IBC are run like an open class with horses presented on the triangle individually and pinned according to score. Special Awards for the Breed will be given with the class pinning in the ring. If a High Score Breed awards are given, show management keeps track of all Open Scores for the Breed Registry entered Horses throughout the day. The

show calculates the final scores and announces the Registry winner at the end of the show. It is your responsibility to know if you are contention for this award and be sure to pick it up at the end of the show. . Please, don't be shy if you have questions to ask about your entry, presentation, or show day, contact a USDF or GMO committee member or show secretary now. You can also contact your fellow breed registry members who have experience showing horses in hand. Look in your Breeders Guide or contact your registry office for the name of someone in your area. Most of all, get ready, practice and have fun!!! See you on the USDF- DSHB Breeders Series Shows!