

Competitive Trail Riding

REFERENCE BOOK

4-H Horse Project



PENNSTATE



College of Agricultural Sciences • Cooperative Extension

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Introduction

The 4-H Competitive Trail Riding project is a fun and challenging opportunity to experience the many rewards of trail riding in Pennsylvania. The project will also help you develop horsemanship and learn life skills. Any well-mannered horse, pony, or mule, of any breed or type, four or more years of age and otherwise qualified may compete in a Pennsylvania 4-H competitive trail ride. Stallions are not allowed.

The competitive trail ride evaluates good, serviceably sound, steady, and enthusiastic trail horses. Judging on all 4-H trail rides is based on the horse's condition, subtracting only the changes that occur during the ride according to the scoring categories. Judges include at least one veterinarian and one lay judge who carefully evaluate the horse before, during, and after the ride. The judges determine the best-conditioned horses that complete the ride with the fewest changes from start to finish.

Conformation and riding style are not judged, but good horsemanship is generally reflected in the placing. A good rider finishes a ride with a horse in better condition than the poor rider who starts with an equally well-conditioned horse. Evaluation of horsemanship ability may be included as an additional category. Remember, no special type or breed of horse is necessary or favored. The only prerequisite is a well-conditioned, enthusiastic horse.

Selecting a horse

Work with an experienced horse person to help you select a suitable horse for competitive trail riding. Before purchasing, have your veterinarian examine the horse to be sure it is serviceably sound.

To select a good trail horse, you should know what traits it must have to perform well. One of a horse's most important qualities is a good *attitude*. A good trail horse is "willing" to take its rider over any trail and is always looking for more ground to cover. Your horse must be willing to try all obstacles it encounters on the trail. It needs to be alert. If your horse can finish the day with its head up and ears alert, this gives you an edge over the unwilling horse that looks as if it has had a rough day.

A lazy horse or one that requires constant prodding does not make a good trail horse. This kind of horse will make you tired and ruin the ride for you. A nervous, high-strung horse uses itself up too quickly and may not be safe on the trail. It will not take care of itself, and you will have to do a lot of work to manage it properly.

Another important trait is good *manners*. The horse will be handled constantly and checked by veterinarians and others. Avoid a horse that kicks, bites, or is not easily controlled. Your horse must be well-mannered in regard to other horses. It will pass, and be passed by, other horses on the trail and often needs to stand tied or close to other horses.

Your trail horse should be well-mannered when riding in a trailer. It is disappointing to train a horse for two or more months and then be disqualified because of injury during hauling. The trailer driver is partly responsible for this aspect of safety. Take time to teach your horse to load and ride in a trailer, and be careful when hauling. It is essential to have a safe and well-maintained rig.

Additional key traits of a good trail horse are *intelligence* and *natural ability*. An intelligent horse can be

trained faster and can cope with new situations more easily. An intelligent and able horse can be an enthusiastic horse. With more trail miles, these traits can be an asset. The horse should tie well and not spook at little changes. The horse should be responsive. You should not have to pull back on your horse constantly or worry about it bucking you off or running away with you. The horse should work on a light rein, back readily, stand quietly, and move with light cues.

Work with a knowledgeable instructor or horse person. Remember that no horse is perfect, nor is any rider perfect. Learn to make the best of your abilities and those of your horse.

Natural ability is very helpful. The horse should keep its balance, move carefully, pay attention to where it puts its feet, not panic, and be able to cover rough terrain without falling. The horse should be able to descend steep grades. Almost all horses can climb steep hills, some slower and with more work than

others. They can climb hills if you do not rush them or place too much weight on their backs.

Always ride in a balanced position when going uphill or downhill. Riding downhill is hard for horses. The rider's weight becomes an ever-increasing burden on the horse's loin muscles, and the horse must expend a great deal of energy. Weight is also hard on the ligaments of the lower leg. These problems cause many horses to be penalized or eliminated from competition after long downhill stretches.

Good riding can make going downhill easier. Avoid speed on long downhill sections of the ride. Teach the horse to move in a collected frame with its hind legs reaching under it. Put your weight in the stirrups and ride in a balanced position. This will make going downhill easier for your horse.

The last important trait of a good trail horse is *correct conformation*. See the diagram on this page. No one would purposely select a horse with major

Parts of the horse

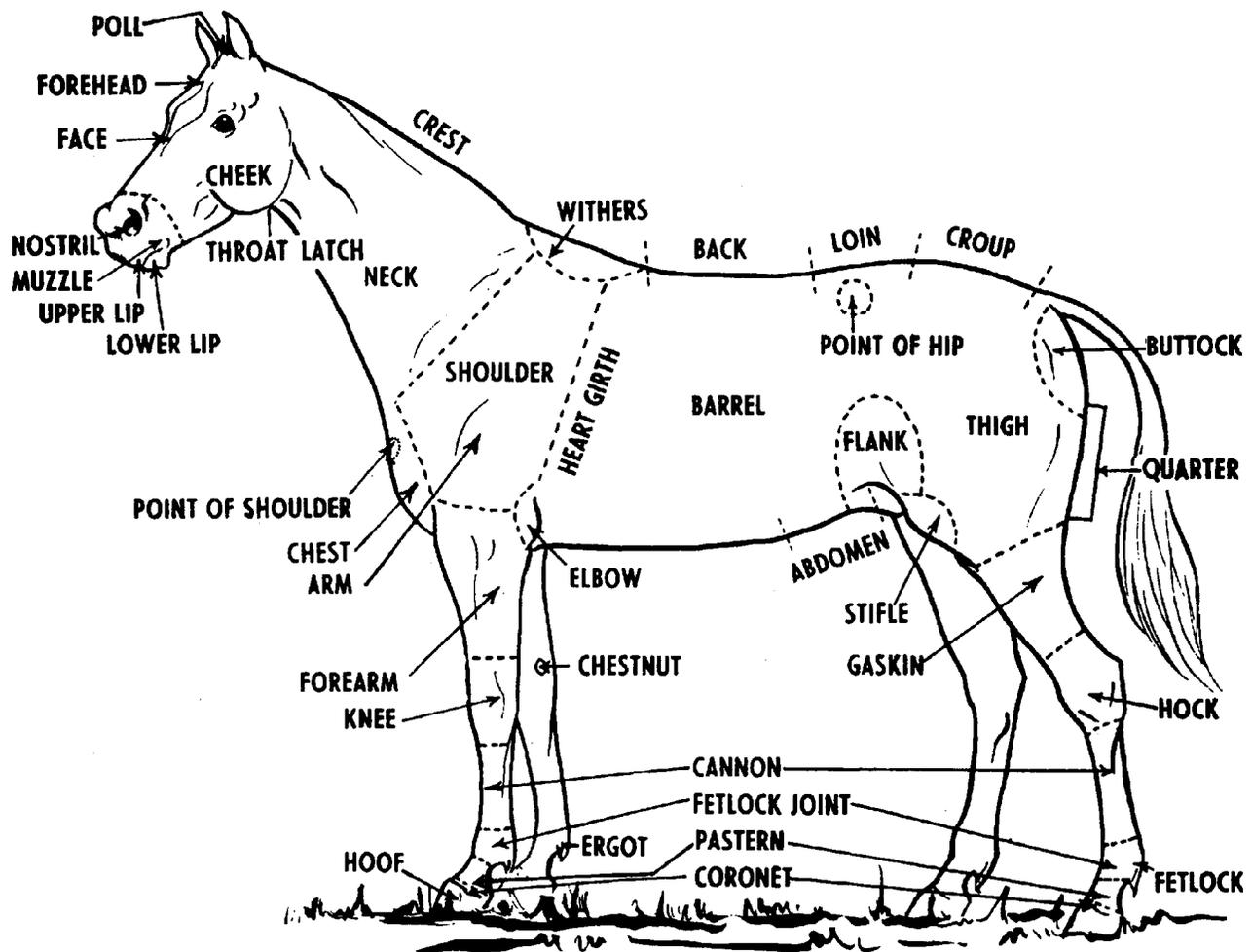


Diagram from the Virginia 4-H Horse Project: Horseless Horse Project Unit 2 Horses Are Fun, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

conformational faults to carry them the long, often hot miles of a competitive trail ride. Under prolonged stress, however, even a small defect can become so damaging that your horse may be eliminated from competition. Many horses with conformation defects are ridden in competitive trail rides. Some do well in spite of their handicaps. Remember, no horse is perfect, and you must make the best of what you have.

For example, when a horse is base narrow, the hoof can hit the opposite fetlock, causing interference wounds. During the first few weeks, you may not notice calluses appearing on the insides of the fetlocks. However, careful daily inspections should reveal this early on. Either through a minor shoeing mistake or fatigue, this horse can develop severe, painful, bleeding wounds. If these interference wounds occur, ask your farrier to try to correct them. The judge will deduct points if there is evidence the horse's feet are hitting its legs, causing wounds.

If at all possible, select a well-balanced horse with a good length of neck, large nostrils, and an open throat for breathing. The horse should have a fairly long, well-sloped shoulder with a well-defined wither.

Straight-shouldered horses with upright pasterns may have many problems once the long training rides begin. They are prone to developing sidebone, ringbone, and splints. The foot suffers more from concussion because of the upright nature of the shoulder and pastern.

The loin muscles of a horse with a long back tend to become sensitive because of the long "coupling" between the last thoracic vertebra (where the last rib lies) and the sacral area of the croup. This problem grows worse if you are careless and let your weight fall toward the rear of the horse.

A horse with choppy, short strides must put more effort into covering ground than a horse with smooth, long strides, and must be in much better condition to travel the long miles. Any awkwardly moving horse usually is not successful as a competitive trail horse because it wastes too much energy getting down the road.

Another consideration in selecting a well-conformed horse is its saddle-carrying ability. Avoid a mutton- or thick-withered horse because the saddle will not stay in place. The back should be well-covered with muscle and tough, not tender. A tender-backed horse is prone to sores in the saddle area. Well-developed loin muscling, which lies on either side of the spine, is necessary for carrying the rider's weight. If the horse has the proper conformation and you use conventional equipment, the saddle should fit and hold to the proper place on the horse's back. If not, try a different saddle or ask a knowledgeable person about saddle fit.

A breast collar is strongly recommended for many trail horses, although some horses are thin-skinned and a breast collar tends to rub or chafe and cause sores. Examine the withers and back. Look at the skin over the back, barrel, and girth area. A competitive horse must carry weight for long distances, putting a great deal of heat over the back and girth area. The skin in these areas should be free of any defects and is a big factor in selecting a competitive trail horse.

The croup should be muscular and well-developed, carrying down to the gaskin and hock. Long, well-defined muscling is desirable, but muscling should not be too heavy. Horses shown in halter classes are often typical examples of too much heavy muscling and too much fat.

Below the hocks and knees, the cannon bones should be clean and form a well-set line. The horse with off-set cannon bones (called bench knees) is a poor candidate for the stresses of competitive trail riding. Choose a horse with a well-defined knee and a hock with a straight cannon carrying down to the center of the fetlock.

The horse's tendons should be clean. They should feel like a tight, well-fitted cable held to the leg by healthy tendon sheaths, with no bulges or puffiness.

The fetlock joint is very important. It is comprised of the end of the cannon bone, the two proximal sesamoid bones, and the first long pastern bone. This joint receives much jarring, so it should be clean and not puffy. The pastern should be clean and free of any bulges, and should have enough slope to absorb jarring. The pastern should blend cleanly into the coronary band and thus into the horse's most important structure: its hoof.

The hoof of the competitive horse must be sound, because it helps bear the horse's weight and absorbs shock. The hoof should be in proper proportion to the horse, with feet being symmetrical in size and shape. The hoof should have a well-defined heel and dense, tough horn with no evidence of separations or cracks on its surface.

The outer layer of the hoof, the periople, should be intact, making the hoof wall appear shiny. The sole should be concave, with a density of horn that will withstand constant wear from friction with the ground surface. The white line should not show any separation that would allow foreign material to go through the wall and cause lameness. The frog should be resilient, tough, and placed in the midline of the foot.

A horse's "keeping" qualities and body condition should be considered. Horses that lose weight and fail to regain it during the training period become problem horses. Psychological factors probably cause many

horses to fail as easy keepers. For example, some horses are “nervous” and can’t relax enough to eat or drink properly at the ride. You should work on this during training and teach your horse to eat and drink when possible.

Teeth problems, which result in improper chewing, can contribute to the poor condition of some horses. It is a good idea to have your veterinarian or equine dentist check the horse’s teeth at least once or twice a year, and to float the teeth (file any sharp edges) when needed.

Ingrown hair follicles, dermatologic cysts, saddle burns, lacerations, and bruises are all problems that can occur during hard work, but all can be prevented with proper care. Do not clip the mane short (roach) or clip inside the ears, as the horse needs the hair for protection. You should not closely clip the fetlock area or below. The hair in these areas acts as a protective coating against scrapes and fungus.

Experience with a horse will reveal its actual weight-carrying ability. Regardless of height, a short-coupled horse can carry more weight than a long-coupled horse. Choose a strong-backed horse with firm muscling (one that shows little sensitivity to firm palpation of the loin area) rather than a horse that flinches each time this area is touched. During the ride keep your weight off the horse’s loins as much as possible, especially when ascending or descending a steep trail.

Basic feeding and care of the horse

Feed supplies the nutrients horses need to perform. You should feed your horse quality grain and hay, and allow it free-choice salt and plenty of clean water. Access to good pasture with water is always helpful. Feed your horse to maintain its best body condition. An overweight horse has to work harder and sweats more. An underweight horse lacks the necessary reserves of energy. Your horse’s general appearance, coat, pulse and respiration recoveries, and attitude will tell you if you are doing the right things. Pay attention to your horse and learn to know it better than you know yourself. Vitamins and supplements won’t help if your basic nutrition program is not adequate.

Pay careful attention to the feed ration. Successful competitive riders use a wide variety of concentrates (grains), hays, and pasture combinations. Knowledge of your horse is essential, since past feeding history may influence how and what you choose to feed. Commercial horse feeds offer a combination of grains usually

mixed with molasses in a palatable feed. Some riders feed complete pelleted rations. In these, the grain and hay are combined to certain fixed values. Whatever your choice, know how this ration is working for your horse under the stressful program of competitive riding. Make gradual changes in feed over a period of 7–10 days as needed. Never change the feed of a performance horse abruptly.

Electrolytes are important salts and minerals that become electrically charged when dissolved in body fluids. The electrical charge enables them to assist in nerve impulse transmission, muscle contractions, body fluid maintenance, and control of body fluid acid-base balance. If you participate in competitive trail riding, be prepared to use electrolytes as needed. Your horse expends in sweat many minerals that plain water does not replace. The main minerals affected are sodium, potassium, magnesium, calcium, and chloride.

During long-distance events a horse loses a lot of sodium. Consuming only plain water dilutes the amount of sodium left in the blood. A lack of sodium in the blood can cause a condition known as hyponatremia. Its symptoms are lethargy, drowsiness, muscle weakness and twitching, mental confusion, and seizures. Low levels of other minerals can lead to tying up, thumps, and/or muscle cramping. Consult your veterinarian or other knowledgeable person for specific recommendations on using electrolytes.

Lack of a well-planned, proper deworming program can cause problems such as poor body condition, colic, and anemia. These can result in poor health and poor performance, irreversible internal damage, or even death. Consult your veterinarian for help in designing an effective deworming program.

The horse’s teeth must be checked regularly. Notice how your horse is chewing its feed and whether feed is lost during chewing. A loss of weight is often the result of sharp teeth and improperly chewed feed. Sharp teeth can also affect bit comfort. Establish regular teeth care with your veterinarian.

Weight, including that of the rider, is the greatest problem for the competitive horse. The longer the event, the more that weight becomes a factor. You should consider an overweight horse a problem and try to remove the excess weight during the conditioning period. Extra weight may result in overheating, dehydration, and unnecessary stress on feet and legs. A fat horse may get by on a cool or rainy day but may have big problems in heat and humidity.

As a general guideline, you should be able to feel, but not see, the ribs. Optimum body condition scores for most competitive trail horses are 5.0 to 6.5 (on a

scale of 1 to 9). It is very important when conditioning an overweight horse to keep accurate records of pulse and respiration rates and how much time is needed for these rates to return to normal (recovery).

Regular and proper shoeing is very important. Work closely with your farrier, and don't hesitate to describe your horse's problems. Your horse's shoes may wear out before it outgrows them, so you should check the wear on the shoes often. A smooth bead of borium welded to the shoe will prevent excessive wear. Plan your shoeing schedule so that new shoes are put on one to two weeks before the ride.

On average, horses need to have their feet trimmed or be reshod every six to eight weeks. Don't wait too long between regular shoeings. Long toes put excessive strain on ligaments, tendons, and joints. Injuries to these structures may take a long time to heal. Your horse's hooves will grow faster with frequent riding because of the greater blood supply to the foot caused by the extra work.

Evaluating your horse's vital signs

You need to know how to check your horse's vital signs—pulse (heart rate), respiration, temperature, capillary refill time, and hydration. The best way to take the pulse is with a stethoscope, available from your veterinarian or tack supplier for around \$10. Have your veterinarian, or another knowledgeable person, show you how to take your horse's pulse with a stethoscope.

There are two other ways to check your horse's pulse rate: Feel (palpate) the external maxillary artery that crosses over the margin of the jawbone, or feel the common digital artery on the inside of the knee. If you have trouble finding the pulse, work the horse. Exercise will increase the force and rate, making the arteries easier to find. To get the pulse rate, count the beats for 15 seconds and multiply by 4, or count for 30 seconds and multiply by 2.

The respiration rate may be taken by watching and counting the flank motion of the horse as it breathes. Two other ways are to watch the nostrils move with each exhalation, counting the same way you do for the pulse rate, and using a stethoscope on the trachea to listen to each breath.

The following table should give you an idea of what vital signs to expect from your horse:

| Type of work | Pulse (beats per min) | Respiration (breaths per min) |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| At rest | 30 to 44 | 6 to 20 |
| Light work | 50 to 70 | 20 to 40 |
| Medium work | 70 to 90 | 40 to 60 |
| Heavy work | 90 to 110 (or above) | 60 to 100 |

A recovery pulse rate close to the normal, at-rest rate after 10 minutes is excellent. No matter how high your horse's "at-work" readings, a good recovery is the best sign of good conditioning. An "inversion" is when the respiration is higher than the pulse. An inversion may mean the horse is doing harder work than that for which it is conditioned. Some horses pant as a cooling strategy. However, for these animals an inversion can be normal if the other vital signs (temperature, hydration, capillary refill time) are normal and the inversion stops after a rest period. To be sure, evaluate the vital signs of any horse that inverts.

Normal, at-rest temperature for a horse ranges from about 99 to 101 degrees. Become familiar with your horse's normal temperature so you will recognize abnormal temperatures.



Taking your horse's temperature requires a rectal thermometer. Lubricate the thermometer with Vaseline or saliva, and gently insert into the rectum for two to three minutes. Be sure to hold the thermometer or tie a string to it and fasten it to the horse's tail. If not secured, the thermometer may be drawn into the rectum or dropped and broken. After using the thermometer, be sure to wipe it off and shake it down so that it is ready for the next time you want to use it. Be cautious and stand to the side of the horse to avoid being kicked.

You can test capillary refill time by pressing your thumb on the horse's gum and then releasing it. In a normal, healthy horse the gum will turn white and then return to normal pink color in about one second. Longer capillary refill times indicate dehydration or a cardiovascular problem. Another way to check hydration is through skin pliability. Normal skin is pliable: if you pinch a fold of skin on the neck and release it, it should quickly return to its normal position. If a horse is dehydrated, the skin will return to normal slowly.

Conditioning records

Before conditioning your horse, you should devise a method for keeping daily records of your horse's condition. A large chart is best for this purpose. Visual inspections should be made and recorded before your training ride. Make another careful inspection when you complete the conditioning ride. Record all data at once and always include the date. You should record everything you see, no matter how insignificant it may seem to you.

The visual inspection is accompanied by a hands-on inspection covering the entire horse. Check for heat, rubs, or sensitivity in the tack area. Check legs for heat, swelling, or interference marks. Any abnormality may indicate that your training schedule is too strenuous and needs to be adjusted. Also check shoes for tightness.

Pulse, respiration rates, and temperature should be checked every day, if possible at the same time of day, and recorded on your chart. A morning check shows the slowest rates and lowest temperature. This check gives you the at-rest pulse and respiration rates for your particular horse. At the midpoint break, if you

have one on your ride, take the pulse and respiration and record them when you first stop, and then again in 10 minutes.

Pulse and respiration should also be taken when the training ride is completed. After 10 minutes, again take the horse's pulse and respiration rates. In another 10 minutes, repeat. Remember to record this information on your chart. Any time your horse has an inversion, take the temperature and be sure it is below 103 degrees. You should carry a pencil and paper while training and when you are on the trail ride so that you can record midpoint data.

For the first two weeks, record your horse's temperature before and after each training ride, and any time an inversion occurs. After two weeks, take the horse's temperature twice a week. Remember to record the data on your chart at once. This will give you a normal temperature for your horse.

Two more items you should record are time and miles. Record the time you start out on your training ride, the midpoint stop, the time you restart after the midpoint break, and the time you return at the end of the training ride. Transfer these times to your daily chart. The distance in miles and the total hours ridden should also be recorded on your chart daily. This will also help you get a feel for rate of travel, which is important for competitive rides.

The last column on the chart should be a remarks section. This is the place to record important information about what is happening on the trail during your training sessions. Note if your horse is alert, willing, or bored. Any information such as weather, footing, injuries, etc., not covered above, should also be noted here.

Make lots of notes. They may seem unnecessary at the time, but they will form a meaningful history when you look back at them later. Note the horse's attitude during workouts, along with its consumption of grain, pasture, roughage, supplements, etc., and any changes in shoeing or equipment.

See the sample conditioning record (page 9). A notebook will work for keeping this record, but remember that the bigger the chart, the easier it is to read and understand. Consider a piece of poster board (22" x 28") for record keeping.

Training schedule

Regularity of work is the most important part of a conditioning program. Increase the workload gradually without asking for too much too soon. Riders who overwork their horses in training often have fatigued or injured horses by the end of the ride. Remember, your training rides should be over terrain similar to the type you and your horse will encounter on the competitive ride. *A competitive horse should be used . . . not used up!* Rest is very important. Know your horse and listen to what it tells you.

To succeed in competitive trail riding, you must be willing to make a daily time commitment. You should know the amount of time it will take to get your horse in proper condition for the ride. You must keep the ride date in mind since the horse needs to be at peak condition by that day. You also must know the rules of the ride so you can keep them in mind during training. It is useless to prepare for competition and then be eliminated for violating the rules.

One of your key concerns in conditioning a horse for a competitive trail ride is devising a training schedule that is realistic and workable. You should be able to get the average horse into condition for a 25- to 30-mile ride in 8 weeks. Keep in mind, there are always exceptions. A veteran campaigner bounces back more quickly than a horse in its first year of conditioning.

Plan your work schedule so that you work your horse five days a week for the entire eight weeks. You must be committed to a regular schedule, or your horse will not be in proper condition for a competitive trail ride. If you notice something is not quite right with your horse, let it rest and try to figure out what is wrong. Consult a veterinarian if needed. This can prevent serious illness or injury.

See the sample training schedules below for suggested conditioning programs for 25- and 30-mile competitive trail rides. These schedules are designed for the average horse and may not work for all horses. Adjust your training schedule according to your horse's condition and degree of fitness.

Sample training schedules

Eight weeks, 5 days a week, 25-mile ride

It is preferable not to work five days in a row. A suggested schedule is to work Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, rest Thursday, work Friday and Saturday, and rest Sunday. Then repeat this schedule for the eight-week training period.

Week One: 5 miles a day at a brisk walk.

Week Two: 5 miles a day. Gradually increase the pace to a trot. By the end of the week, you should do 5 miles in 1 hour.

Week Three: 5 miles per day. One 10-mile day, toward the end of the week, followed by a rest day.

Week Four: 5 miles per day. One 10-mile day, toward the end of the week, followed by a rest day. You should do this in 2 hours.

Week Five: 5 miles per day. One 15-mile day, toward the end of the week, followed by a rest day. You should do this in 2 1/2 hours.

Week Six: 5 miles per day. One 20-mile day, toward the end of the week, followed by a rest day.

Week Seven: 5 miles per day. One 20-mile day, toward the end of the week, followed by a rest day. You should do this in 3 hours.

Week Eight: 5 miles per day. Take the day off before the ride. Do some light exercise to keep the horse prepared.

Eight weeks, 5 days a week, 30-mile ride

It is preferable not to work five days in a row. A suggested schedule is to work Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, rest Thursday, work Friday and Saturday, and rest Sunday.

Week One: 6 miles a day at a brisk walk.

Week Two: 6 miles a day. Gradually increase the pace to a trot by the end of the week. You should do 6 miles in 1 hour and 12 minutes.

Week Three: 6 miles per day, with one 12-mile day toward the end of the week, followed by a rest day.

Week Four: 6 miles per day with one 12-mile day toward the end of the week, followed by a rest day. You should do this in 2 hours and 12 minutes.

Week Five: 6 miles per day. One 18-mile day, toward the end of the week, followed by a rest day. You should do this in 3 hours.

Week Six: 6 miles per day with one 24-mile day toward the end of the week, followed by a rest day.

Week Seven: 6 miles per day with one 24-mile day toward the end of the week, followed by a rest day. You should do this in 3 hours and 36 minutes.

Week Eight: 6 miles per day with the day before the ride off. Do some light exercise to keep the horse prepared.

Tack, equipment, and riding apparel

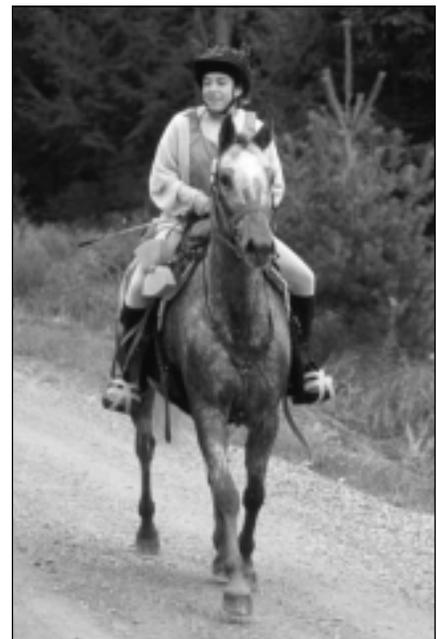
The tack and equipment you use can be of any type, provided it is safe and properly fits you and your horse. The equipment should be lightweight, sturdy, and comfortable. After riding, always check your horse's back and girth area for swellings, dry spots, irritated areas, or tenderness.

Have a knowledgeable person check the fit of your saddle if it is causing problems for you or your horse. Breast collars are effective for keeping the saddle in place and are highly recommended for many trail horses. It is important that breast collars be properly fitted so they do not restrict breathing or shoulder movement. If you have trouble with the saddle moving forward while you are going downhill, try a tail crupper.

The horse's bridle and bit should fit properly so that you have control over your horse at all times. Clean and check your tack frequently. Wash saddle pads and girths, or hose them off, to remove dirt and sweat. Sweat contains salt and can damage your tack and scald your horse's skin.

Wear comfortable clothes, but avoid clothing that is too tight or too loose. Whatever clothes you wear to condition your horse are the clothes you should wear during the competitive trail ride. Do not make any last-minute changes. If you are uncomfortable, it will reflect on your horse.

Protective headgear is required at all times while riding in all 4-H-sponsored events. See the current *Pennsylvania 4-H Horse Show Rule Book* for complete rules regarding protective headgear.



Ride requirements and conditions

A competitive trail ride is a timed event in which a contestant travels a well-marked trail of 25 to 100 miles averaging approximately 5.5 to 7 miles per hour. Speed is not a deciding factor, and horses are checked on the trail to ensure safety. Each horse starts with 100 points. Points are deducted at the final examination for changes that signify stress or loss of condition as defined in the scoring system. The contestant must pace his or her horse over a set course in a given time, keeping the horse as fresh as possible at all times. You need to know the date of the ride you are going to enter and how many entries will be accepted for the ride. You must also know the deadline for having your entry submitted.

You must know the rules of the ride. Check with ride officials to find out what you need to enter. What papers are required to compete? What medical records are needed? Most veterinarians recommend vaccinations for tetanus, encephalomyelitis, influenza, and rhinopneumonitis. Rabies vaccinations are required for all Pennsylvania 4-H horse events, and a vaccination for Potomac horse fever is sometimes needed. Most rides require a negative Coggins test. Breed registration papers are usually necessary for registered horses.

Where is the ride to be held and what kind of terrain will the horses be going over? Is water available? Is the ride rocky, on a smooth trail, or on paved roads? Is it hilly or flat? What is the actual length of the ride? What kinds of camping facilities are there at headquarters?

The Eastern Competitive Trail Ride Association's (ECTRA) suggested times for a 25-mile ride are 4 hours and 10 minutes to 4 hours and 40 minutes. This includes a 20-minute midpoint break. ECTRA-suggested time for a 30-mile ride is 5 hours to 5 hours and 30 minutes. This includes a 20-minute midpoint break. Times can be adjusted slightly owing to terrain or unusual circumstances at the option of ride management.

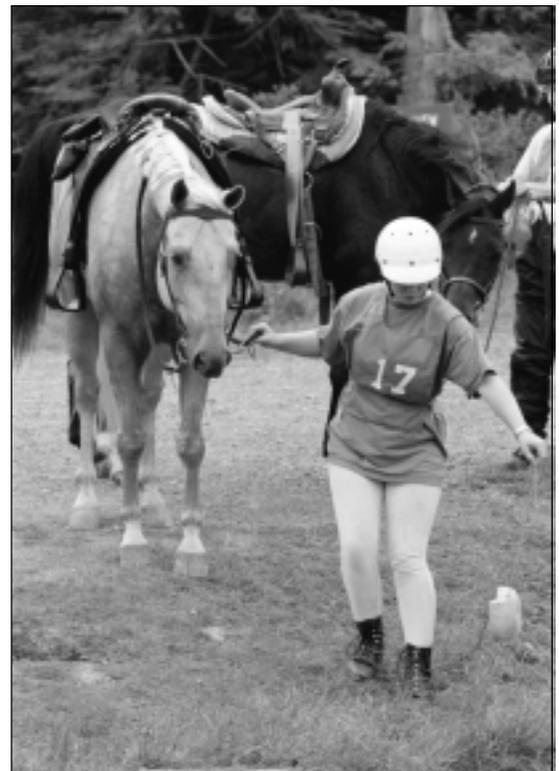
Ride strategy and riding techniques

Riding balanced and relaxed is very important. When going uphill, place your weight on the stirrups and lean forward to remove your weight from the horse's loins and hindquarters. If you post to the trot, switch diagonals often, especially with turns on the trail. If you canter your horse, you should change leads often. Do not place all your weight on your horse's back. Always keep your weight distributed as evenly as

possible through your thighs, calves, and feet. Holding the reins in one hand will shift your center of balance to one side or the other, so if you ride with the reins in one hand, change hands often. These positions will help to prevent your horse from tiring and developing soreness or muscle imbalance.

During training, encourage your horse to drink anywhere water is available. Many horses may not drink during the training ride or an event, but you must continually give the horse the opportunity to drink. Some riders use scoops to make water more accessible. Hard-to-reach water can be scooped up and taken to your horse. A water scoop can be made by cutting the bottom off a well-cleaned plastic gallon jug. Keep your horse moving after drinking. Consider the use of electrolytes and discuss uses, doses, and types with your veterinarian.

Sponging is vital for keeping your horse's system cool and for conserving internal fluids to prevent dehydration. The most effective sponging places are the head, neck, chest, and the inside of the legs. Blood vessels are close to the surface here. The hotter the weather, the more you need to sponge. A sponge on a long strap can be lowered into a stream or pool of water for sponging while on the horse. In cool weather some horses chill easily and should not be sponged. In fact, you may need to blanket your horse to prevent it from becoming chilled. In cold weather any water over the loins and back chills the horse and may cause stiffness.



Trail riders spend a lot of time looking at the ground. You must look up often enough to watch for trail markers. Watch for any other hazards that might be above the ground, such as branches. Also take time to look at the scenery and smell the flowers. Most trail rides are in picturesque areas. Above all be safe, take care of your horse, and have fun.

Trailer guidelines

If you have a long distance to travel, it is best to arrive the day before the event. For the state 4-H competitive trail ride, you must arrive the day beforehand to have your horse go through the preride vet check. Drive carefully to avoid trailering injuries, which could cause disqualification.

Wrapping or protecting the horse's legs is highly recommended. When you wrap your horse's legs, wrap low enough to cover the coronary bands. Don't bandage too tightly, as this might impair proper circulation. Don't wrap your horse's legs too loosely or the wraps may slide down the legs, fall off, or become tangled. Your veterinarian or other knowledgeable person will be happy to show you how to wrap your horse's legs correctly. Shipping boots are easier to put on the horse and usually can't be put on too tightly. In addition, three-inch foam padding under the trailer mats allows for absorption of some road shock. Shavings on top of the matting help provide good footing and prevent slippage.

If you feed prior to trailering, feed at least one hour before you leave. Give your horse hay, free choice, while transporting, and water often, especially on hot days. You may want to use a fly mask to keep hay chaff and other debris from getting in your horse's eyes during transport.

What to expect at the event

Arrival

Normally, ride management will have someone on hand to greet you and tell you where and how to park your trailer. This is done so ride management can handle all the trailers and safely direct vehicle and horse traffic.

Once parked, you may unload your horse and tie it to the trailer or picket line. Do not tie to trees without permission. You may also choose to use temporary fencing or portable corrals if available and if your horse respects the fence! Give your horse some hay and water and then report to the ride secretary. The

secretary will give you a ride packet and further instructions if necessary.

General ride rules and regulations

Management, judges, or both may at any time disqualify any rider or horse from the event for any of the following: violation of any event rule by a rider's crew, groom, or any other person connected with the rider; conduct deemed to be dishonest, unsportsmanlike, or excessively rude; dangerous or unsafe behavior by any rider or horse; or any cruel or inhumane treatment of horses. Additional rules may be distributed prior to the ride. All participants are expected to be aware of the ride rules and to abide by them.

Care and handling of horses

PERMITTED PRACTICES:

- Use of electrolytes and fly repellents, except medicated products.
- Use of blankets, brushes, curry combs, and other grooming aids. Any type of tack is permitted unless deemed unsafe or inhumane by the judges.
- Use of water that has not been artificially heated or cooled. One foot at a time may be placed in a bucket of water as long as the water is continuously stirred by the contestant.

Contestants presenting their horses late for pulse and respiration checks and midpoint vet check are subject to loss of maximum points in that category.

PROHIBITED PRACTICES:

- Use of any internal substance with the exception of feed, electrolytes, and water.
- Use of any external substances with the exception of water and fly repellent.
- Any veterinary treatment required for a horse prior to the final exam. Such treatment will result in elimination.
- Use of any devices for protecting the horse's legs (boots, bandages, etc.) from the initial vet check until the final vet check is completed. Easyboots® or other similar products are permitted.
- Use of water that has been artificially heated or cooled. Hosing is not permitted.
- Use of acupuncture needles and/or staples from the initial exam to the final exam.

If event judges deem it necessary for a horse to receive treatment and a contestant refuses, the horse is

disqualified from the event whether or not treatment is administered.

Your horse may not be ridden from the time it crosses the finish line until its final vetting, although you may ride the horse from the finish line to your trailer. Horses may not leave the event grounds between crossing the finish line and the final vet-out.

Drug and medication rule

No horse or pony may compete in a 4-H competitive trail ride if it has been administered, in any manner, a forbidden substance. Refer to the current *Pennsylvania 4-H Horse Show Rule Book* for complete drug and medication rules. A forbidden substance is any stimulant, depressant, or local anesthetic that might affect a horse's performance (stimulants and depressants are defined as medications that stimulate or depress the circulatory, respiratory, or central nervous systems).

Also prohibited are any drugs, regardless of how harmless or innocuous they might be, which by their very nature might mask or screen the presence of the prohibited drugs mentioned in the previous paragraph, or prevent or delay testing procedures. The presence of abnormally large amounts of these masking agents may subject a horse to the same penalty as if an illegal drug were found. Examples of masking agents include, but are not limited to, vitamin B₁ (thiamin), some sulfa drugs, some deworming preparations, and some diuretics. Test results are interpreted by ride management with advice from veterinarians. If a drug or its by-product is found in the blood, urine, or saliva of a horse, it is used as evidence that the drug was illegally administered.

Any horse may be subjected to the collection of blood, urine, or saliva at any time during or after the event. Blood is collected by a veterinarian. Urine samples are also collected by a veterinarian or veterinarian-designated person. Samples are taken with the owner's or contestant's permission. Refusal to grant permission is understood to be an admission of illegal drug use. Horses to be tested are selected at random by ride management.

If any traces of drugs are found in any animal, that animal is disqualified. External medication may be used, but only with the veterinary judge's knowledge and permission. Any animal showing any evidence of contagious disease is ineligible to compete, and the rider will be asked to leave the ride grounds.

Presenting your horse to the judges

Your horse will be examined by a veterinary and lay judge before and after the ride. The judges look for soundness, way of going, condition, and manners. For the judges to do their job accurately, the handler must be able to present the horse to the best of its ability at all times. How you present your horse to the judge may make a difference in your ride score.

Have your horse clean and tidy in appearance before the vet-ins. Remove any dirt, matted hair, manure, and bot eggs. Declare any important blemishes to the judge.

Many of the same showmanship techniques used in a show ring apply to the competitive trail ride. You should lead your horse from the left side and always be able to control its actions. Pay close attention to the judges as they examine your horse, and always be alert no matter how much you trust your horse. If the horse should spook or become alarmed in any way, you are responsible for helping to prevent the judge from becoming injured.

Stay on the same side of your horse as the judge. This is important, particularly if the horse should attempt to kick. Being on the same side allows you to pull the horse's head toward you, which will take the rear end of the horse away from the judge.

After the judges examine your horse, they will ask you to trot the horse so that they can evaluate the way it moves. First take a look at the area and attempt to find the most level path for you and your horse to travel. Lead the horse from the left side and give the judges an ample view of your horse at all times. When you lead, your right hand should be approximately 12 inches from the horse's head. If you hold the horse too closely, you will restrict its motion.



Travel in straight lines or as directed by the judges. Try to keep the horse moving at a constant speed. Changes of direction or speed make it very difficult for the judges to evaluate the horse's movement, and may lower the overall score. Remember, you are trying to make the horse look as good as possible.

At the end-ride check, it is still very important for you to show the horse to the best of its ability. Your horse's score will be affected by its overall appearance. After a long ride, you and your horse may be tired. Move briskly so your horse will not look sluggish and appear in poor condition.

Conduct on the trail

Competitors must always wear their assigned numbers, from the initial examination to the final exam at the ride's end. Numbers must always be visible. While on the trail, a contestant should use good judgment and good manners. When passing, ask permission and do not pass in an unsafe manner or in an area that is unsafe. Pass at a safe gait, not a canter or gallop. A red ribbon must be worn in the tail of a horse that is a known kicker.

Any contestant going off course, intentionally or otherwise, must return to the trail at the same point that he or she left it in order to continue. Forward progress may be maintained only if the contestant is mounted. The loss of a shoe is the only exception.

When approaching a judge on the trail, do not ride in a group. Spread out and trot your horse past the judge so that he or she may see how your horse is moving. You must keep your horse moving forward for the last mile of the trail ride.

Spotters are used at key locations to make sure all riders make it to that point and that the riders take the correct trail. If you see riders having problems, tell the spotters when you come to their positions. Call out your number as you come up to them or as you go past. If someone is lost, this will help ride management know who it is and the last point at which they were seen.

Trail specifications

The following are recommended times for 4-H competitive rides. All time limits may be altered or changed by the ride committee if required by unusual circumstances or weather conditions.

| Horses | | Ponies | |
|--------|------------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| Miles | Hours | Miles | Hours |
| 20 | 2 hrs 45 min to 3 hrs | 20 | 3 hrs to 3 hrs 15 min |
| 25 | 4 hrs 10 min to 4 hrs 40 min | 25 | 4 hrs 25 min to 4 hrs 55 min |
| 30 | 5 hrs to 5 hrs 30 min | 30 | 5 hrs 15 min to 5 hrs 45 min |
| 35 | 5 hrs 50 min to 6 hrs 25 min | 35 | 6 hrs 5 min to 6 hrs 35 min |

The actual speed for median time averages 5.9 to 6.1 miles per hour. Times indicated are elapsed time (check-out to check-in) without penalty, including one 20-minute pulse and respiration hold.

There are no penalties when you arrive within these time brackets. If you arrive before the allotted time, you are charged a penalty of one point per minute. Arriving after the allotted time carries the same one-point-per-minute penalty. If you exceed these time limits by more than 30 minutes, you are eliminated.

Any official, unscheduled holds on the trail, or farrier time, are timed by an official and credited to the contestant. Both minimum and maximum times are changed accordingly.

Trail markers will appear along the trail on the rider's right side. These will be in plain sight and easily visible. The turns will be well marked, with ribbons and arrows pointing in the directions to take. Sometimes markers will appear on both sides of the trail, indicating that you will be going both ways on that section of the trail. Trail marker positions will be clarified at the preride briefing. Distance markers will appear every five miles on the entire trail, and every mile for the last five miles.

The only water to be used on a competitive trail ride should be of a natural source and location, or as supplied by the ride management for the use of all competitors. Water is furnished at the midpoint and at ride headquarters for both contestants and their horses. Ride management will provide a trailer to use as a horse ambulance if needed.

Hazardous areas on the trail will be marked and discussed at the preride briefing by ride management.

You will be told of hazards or unusual trail features and how they are marked. You may ask any questions you have at the preride briefing. Most rides provide contestants with a map of the trail. Take this with you to the briefing.

No equipment may be used during competition, except that carried by competitors and their horses. For reasons of safety, management (not crews) may help contestants, as long as this help is made available to all contestants. Examples are assisting injured, sick, handicapped, or junior contestants.

Finish line

When you approach the ride finish, you may have been instructed to trot your horse across the finish line. Your time is recorded by the official timer when you cross the finish line.

After-ride care

You may now make hay, feed, and some water available to your horse. This is a personal preference, and you may only want to give your horse hay and small amounts of water. Later, you might want to offer hay, grain, and water on a free-choice basis.

Brush and groom your horse. Sponge off your horse with water, especially the head, neck, and chest areas. This will help lower the pulse and respiration, especially when the weather is hot. If it is a cold and windy day, sponging may not be necessary and keeping your horse warm may be more important. Walk your horse occasionally to avoid stiffening of the muscles.

You have several options at this point in caring for your horse. The first is to loosen the girth slowly, then sponge the head, neck, and chest area. Remove the saddle and sponge the area of the horse where the saddle was, then use a dry saddle pad, replace the saddle, and refasten the girth. Twenty to forty minutes later, remove the saddle. This is done to help prevent heat bumps. The second option is to loosen the girth, leave the saddle in place, and sponge the head, neck, and chest areas, then sponge around the saddle while it remains in place. Twenty to forty minutes later, remove the saddle.

The third option is to remove the saddle and sponge the head, neck, chest, and saddle area, but not to replace the saddle. Whatever you choose, remember to do the same thing at the end of the ride that you do during your training phase.

You will be called back after 20 minutes for your final pulse and respiration reading. It is your responsibility to have your horse available for the final hands-on exam, which may be up to an hour or more later. All tack must be removed for the final hands-on exam. You will be recalled for the final exam by the timer in the order of finish.

Trail ride score sheet

Become familiar with the sample score sheet. It includes all of the factors used for scoring by both the veterinary and the lay judge during pre- and postride checks. (See sample score sheet on page 18.)



Trail use guidelines

Always get permission from the proper authorities or landowners before riding on their property. Do not ride in areas that are posted or where horses are not allowed. Respect property rights and obey all rules and regulations. While riding do not disturb feeding, resting, and nesting wildlife. Do not put up trail markers such as paint or ribbons without permission. Always remove markers at the end of a ride.

Always respect the rights of others using the trail. Slow down when you approach hikers, bikers, or skiers. Consider that they might be afraid of your horse. Promote a friendly, positive attitude among all trail users. Avoid riding in wet or muddy conditions to prevent damage and erosion of trails. While on the trail do not litter. Carry out everything you take in with you. Headquarters areas should be cleaned before you leave. Always leave an area in as good or better condition than you found it.

Be sure to thank the appropriate people after using private or public lands. Become involved in regular maintenance of horseback riding trails in your area. Do your part to ensure that trails remain open for future equine use. Additional trail use guidelines are available from the Pennsylvania Equine Council or the USDA Forest Service.

In conclusion

Competitive trail riding can be fun and a great way to experience the outdoors with your horse while you learn valuable horsemanship skills. Study the guidelines presented in this book and work with experienced riders, leaders, veterinarians, and judges. Always keep safety for you and your horse a top priority. For additional information, refer to the 4-H horse references list available from your county extension office.

4-H activities report

This report will help you keep a better record of your club activities. Fill it in as you complete each assignment. Refer to this record when you are entering county, state, and national programs. Ask your 4-H leader to explain these programs to you.

Projects taken _____

Offices held _____

Club _____

County _____

Committees _____

“Show-and-tells” or presentations given to:

Local club _____

County _____

Region _____

State _____

Others _____

News articles _____

Radio _____

TV _____

Displays or exhibits _____

Things done to improve your health _____

Community service or citizenship work done:

By yourself _____

With club _____

Number of meetings your club(s) held this year _____

Number you attended _____

Number of persons you encouraged to join 4-H _____

Number of 4-H'ers you helped with projects _____

In what way _____

Check activities in which you participated and tell how you helped

Camp _____

Club or county tours _____

Club picnic _____

County fair _____

Achievement programs _____

Roundup _____

Leadership training _____

State 4-H Capital Days _____

Penn State 4-H Achievement Days _____

Pennsylvania Farm Show _____

National 4-H Week _____

State Ambassador Conference _____

Quiz bowls _____

Hippology _____

Judging _____

Others _____

Prepared by Richard Ely, 4-H volunteer leader in Somerset County, Patricia M. Comerford, extension horse program coordinator, and Brian A. Egan, extension horse program assistant, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania 4-H Horse Program development committee.

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Name _____

Age (as of January 1) _____

Date of birth _____

Address _____

County _____

Club name _____

Club leader's name _____

Project helper's name _____

4-H horse achievement program level (check one)

1 Horsing Around

2 Galloping Ahead

3 Blazing the Way

other

Year in achievement program level (check one)

first

second

third

Date record started _____

Date record closed _____

4-H Club Motto

“To make the best better”

4-H Club Pledge

I pledge
my head to clearer thinking,
my heart to greater loyalty,
my hands to larger service, and
my health to better living, for
my club,
my community,
my country, and
my world.

4-H Club Colors

Green and White

