

As the AWR/NASPR Inspection Tour quickly approaches, many breeders are looking at their new crop of weanlings and wondering how to best present them to the judging panel. Many new members are also facing their first experience at inspection and may have questions or concerns about how the process works. The most important fact to keep in mind when preparing is that the purpose of an inspection is to help breeders best objectively look at the product of their programs, and to make educated decisions based on whether the product results in the breed “type” known as sporthorse or sportpony.

Understanding the sporthorse and sportpony “type” is essential to fully understand the process and evaluate the grading received. Sporthorses and sportponies are first and foremost meant to be capable of competing in the Olympic disciplines of Show Jumping, Dressage, Eventing and Driving. Although in America we tend to want to see a “pretty” horse or pony for marketing purposes, this is not the foremost element of the sport type. Instead, what is prized above all else is **superior movement which exhibits suspension with a free shoulder and elastic way of going**. Movement is first examined on the “triangle” which allows the judge to see the horse or pony walk and trot straight lines and then “at liberty” where the natural way of going can best be seen. Older horses and ponies and stallions will then be asked to free-jump through a chute to determine form over fences. Lastly, a performance test under saddle or in harness may be done to assess rideability and attitude.

Many first time attendees will be uncertain of how the inspection day should best be prepared for. A few weeks prior to the actual day it is best to start spending time practicing the work on the “triangle” to be sure that the horse or pony presents as best as they can. They will be asked to walk and trot on the triangle, which is intended to show correctness of movement, impulsion, length and reach of stride. The judge can now assess how the horse or pony uses his/her conformation in his movement; a key point in evaluating the sporthorse or sportpony.

Walking the triangle correctly takes some practice and waiting until the day of an inspection may leave a handler with a horse or pony that does not understand what to do and therefore may not show his or her best, leaving everyone overwhelmed in an environment that is unfamiliar and full of distraction. In addition to the triangle, horses and ponies should also practice standing and allowing the judge to touch them on various areas of the body, as this is an essential part of the inspection process when judging conformation and frame.

Horses or ponies should be in good weight by the day of inspection but not overly so. Too much weight on the horse or pony makes judging the frame difficult, and does not give the impression of an athletic appearance which is part of the sport type. Horses and ponies should clearly be in good health and well-groomed, as this is the best way to view the animal and is generally considered a professional and respectful way to share the horse or pony with the judges. Braiding is optional, but oftentimes it will accentuate a good top line, making it easier to view. Therefore most exhibitors will appear with braids. Tails should not be braided, and handlers should be dressed conservatively so as to not distract from the horse or pony (handlers dress in khaki or white slacks with a dark blue polo shirt for example). It is best to wear comfortable athletic type shoes.

All paperwork required for inspection should be received in the AWR/NASPR office at least one month prior to the date of inspection. This paperwork includes registration, DNA-typing (results may be pending) and completion of an Inspection Reservation form so that the site host and the judging panel know they will be in attendance. All fees must also be paid before the actual inspection date. Anyone who shows up at an inspection with no paperwork may not be accommodated due to the schedule of the site host and the judges. All forms and fees can be obtained by visiting the appropriate website or contacting the Registry’s office.

Upon arrival at the inspection site, exhibitors should check in with the site host. The order of go (which is subject to change based on conditions) is generally: Foals,

Foals & Mares, Yearlings, 2-year-olds, Older Mares, Older Geldings, Stallions, Final Scoring, Awards Ceremony and Branding.

Grading will begin by having the horse or pony stand on a hard, flat surface to examine breed type and conformation. This area of inspection examines the size of the animal, shape of the head and neck and the setting of the neck on the body. Judges will grade a horse or pony against the sporthorse/sportpony “ideal” stated in the standard. It is considered important to the judges that the horse or pony look masculine if he is to be a stallion prospect and feminine if she is to be a broodmare. Shoulders and withers, top-line and quarters, along with front and hind legs are examined at this stage, and the judges will feel the frame of the horse or pony, oftentimes placing a hand between the shoulder and the body to judge freedom of elbow.

Keep in mind that horses or ponies that have certain “flaws” when compared to the ideal may be perfectly acceptable when looked at for potential breeding purposes. An example of this concept would be a Thoroughbred. Many Thoroughbreds have somewhat straight shoulders which in their breed are perfectly acceptable as they are indicative of a horse bred to run. When the sporthorse judges look at this particular specimen, they may penalize the horse for having a shoulder that is too straight in the “conformation” area of the scorecard, but the idea is that bred to a stallion with a more sloping shoulder the result would be more toward the ideal of the standard. So the entire purpose of the grading is to help breeders identify what areas in an individual horse or pony need to have particular attention paid to when selecting a mate so as to avoid perpetuating the issue in the next generation when developing stock to the “ideal standard”.

After the conformation examination, the horse or pony will then be asked to walk and trot on a hard surface directly away from, and then back toward, the judges. This is the first assessment of correctness of movement, which looks at how correctly the footfall of the horse or pony is as well as its rhythm. This assessment is continued while looking at the horse or pony walk and trot on the triangle and then at liberty. During the at liberty phase judges will also look at the canter. This is the stage in which the sporthorse/sportpony shines, and

“super gaits” will make the difference in a horse or pony going First Premium or First Premium Premier. A sporthorse/sportpony type has big elastic, swinging gaits with floating suspension and not a flat, tight, “jiggy” movement, such as that most commonly referred to as a “daisy-cutter”. Sporthorses/sportponies need more freedom through the shoulder, which is why the judges will look for a space between the elbow and the body.

Foals and Youngstock as well as pregnant and broodmares will end their grading at this point, but stallions, performance mares and older geldings will proceed to the loose jumping assessment. This will include a series of jumps that will be raised incrementally until the judges are satisfied that they have been able to assess the horse or pony’s approach to the fence, style over fences including the neatness of the front and rear legs, the landing, overall balance and attitude. All of these are factors into his stage of the grading.

For performance mares and geldings as well as stallions over the age of five looking to satisfy their performance requirement during inspection (rather than through the submission of scores earned through open competition), the next stage in assessment will be the under saddle portion, which will be done both on the flat and (optionally) over a series of 5 fences. Horses or ponies that compete in driving may opt to complete a test in harness rather than under saddle. The under saddle portion of the test approximates the skills required in a Dressage test and is not meant for the very green horse or pony.

The performance test is an evaluation of the attitude of the horse or pony in regards to the rider’s aids, the balance, rhythm, impulsion of movement, as well as his or her overall rideability. These elements are integral to a sporthorse/sportpony hoping to accomplish what they are bred to do. A stallion that has been injured and is therefore unable to complete the performance element may have the requirement waived if an owner provides written documentation from a licensed veterinarian stating such. These exceptions are handled on a case-by-case basis by the Registry’s Board of Directors and owners who have such stallions should contact the Registry well in advance of the inspection date to clarify.

After all of the grading has been completed the judges will generally confer in private to combine their scores. All ponies and then all horses will be brought together and each animal’s scores will be announced and discussed. This is the most valuable aspect of the inspection process, as it will be the time in which the judges will be able to share with exhibitors and audience the rationale behind the scores. All various parts of the grading will be combined to produce an “Overall Score” for each horse or pony examined, which is a mathematical average of the individual elements. This can be confusing to those unfamiliar with the process, as a horse or pony that excels in one area may have a very similar score to one that was more or less average in all the areas combined.

The final “Overall Impression” score will result in a horse or pony being admitted into the Registry’s stud book in the following level: 0-4.9 Preliminary, 5.0-6.9 Second Premium, 7.0-7.9 First Premium, and 8.0-10.0 First Premium Premier (only 2% will fall into this category). Stallions who are graded at two years of age as Youngstock will receive a “Preliminary Breeding License” for a score of 7.0 or higher. They will return to inspection as a five year old to complete the process, including the performance test.

Awards for the highest scoring horse and pony will receive the honor of being recognized as Site Champions. All horses or ponies receiving a score of 7.0 or higher are eligible to wear the AWR or NASPR brand, and branding will take place at the conclusion of the awards ceremony and is optional.

The inspection process is a wonderful tool to help evaluate the product of American breeders, but it is important to keep in mind that judging is based on one day in the life of a horse or pony, and that only what is exhibited on that day will be considered. This can be hard for an owner to understand when their beloved two-year-old fails to receive a high score because they did not “step out” and show the true movement they are capable of. Judges cannot base scoring on potential, but owners who are disappointed in their youngsters showing on that day are welcome to bring them back to try again when

perhaps they are more mature. As anyone involved in horses knows, babies especially will change from day to day and may not always show themselves as best as they can, but the process itself is invaluable in planning for future breeding, and should be taken for what it is worth to the individual breeder. If one has the opportunity, it often helps to take the time to attend an inspection prior to participating in one, so as to be more educated in the process without being personally involved.

Being prepared and understanding the inspection helps to make the process more meaningful to those who participate as well as a lot of fun!



**UNDERSTANDING
AND PREPARING FOR
YOUR INSPECTION**



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