

# WESTERN RIDING

*Recommended rules by the Finnish Hobbyhorse Association*

*Executed in the Finnish Championships and recommended for use in other western riding competitions.*

## CHANGES

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## 2. GENERAL

Like any other disciplines, western riding on hobbyhorses is adapted from the real horse world and the hobbyhorse riding rules are based on the international and Finnish rules. If you don't understand the rules, ask the competition organizer or the judge. As an organizer you can ask about the rules from the creator. The assumption is that if something isn't mentioned in these rules, it isn't judged or taken into account in the performance. The competition organizer has a right and freedom to use different rules, but also the responsibility to notify the competitors of which rules are used. Hobbyhorsing is a very free and unrestricted hobby. There isn't one absolute truth how one should ride hobbyhorses, and everyone can ride them however they like. The judge reviews every rider individually and evaluates how well they perform on the required level. There are different visions but these rules have been composed to create a fundament for western riding in hobbyhorsing. Western riding isn't very popular among hobbyhorsers and therefore there have not been agreed norms or ideals before this. These are the western riding rules for hobbyhorses recommended by Finnish Hobbyhorse Association. Changes and additions are made when necessary. The latest and valid rules can be always found from Finnish Hobbyhorse Association's website.

### 2.1 General rules

It is recommended that at least three riders place in a class. This can be changed if there are too much or only a few competitors. The competitor organizer has a right to choose and plan how riders are placed and rewarded. (Kati Pitkälä, The official show jumping rules of Finnish Hobbyhorse Association) Competitors who have the same score, share the same placement. A tie in speed events leads to a rerun.

#### 2.1.1 Riding arena

Recommended size of the riding arena depending on the event is about 7x14 meters. The arena must be big enough especially in classes including trailwork (pleasure, horsemanship), depending on the number of the competitors. The surface needs to be safe and suitable for hobbyhorse riders. Especially in events including fast turns etc. it's not recommended to use slippery surfaces that have for example gravel on top of it. Suggested platforms are sand, grass and sports flooring. On hard surfaces it's recommended to use shoes. Asphalt is not recommended to use in hobbyhorse sports. Outdoor surfaces must be even/flat.

#### 2.1.2 Vocabulary

Same vocabulary is used in both hobbyhorsing and real horses, so you can find the same information from elsewhere, but everything is adapted to suit hobbyhorsing.

### **2.1.2.1 Gaits**

The gaits are not judged based on the expression of breed characteristics.

#### **Walk**

In walk the horse walks forward relaxed, and the steps are forward going. In most western events the ideal is a slow and collected walk.

#### **Jog**

aka slow trot, is slow and soft. There is less impulsion than in (dressage) trot. Steps are short and low. The steps are still clear trot, and not for example fast walk. In extended jog the step stretches longer but the pace remains as normal.

#### **Lope**

aka slow canter, is slow and soft. Steps are short and slow. One should ride right lead lope (the right leg leads) when riding clockwise and vice versa, unless requested otherwise.

### **2.1.2.2 Maneuvers**

Everyone has their own style in hobbyhorsing. These are the rules on how to perform different maneuvers. The movements will be judged based on these *rules* if the invitation states so.

#### **Stop, halt**

In western riding the horse usually backs up a few steps at a stop. *However*, in a competition one should not take steps backwards unless it says so in the pattern. A good halt is performed both feet together with a good posture.

#### **Volte**

A volte is a small circle of which diameter is half of the riding arena's width. The size of the volte can be also defined in the pattern. The horse is flexed inwards. There is no bending unless the diameter of the volte requires it.

#### **Le yield**

The horse moves both forward and sideways. The horse is slightly flexed away from the movement. The hobbyhorse's front (the head) and back (the stick) should move in the same line: not head or stick first.

#### **Side pass**

Side pass is leg yield directly sideways. The horse *does not* move forwards at all, only sideways. The position and flexion are the same as in leg yield.

#### **Shoulder-out / haunches-in**

Feet are positioned away from the inside of the riding arena, flexion towards the inside of the arena. (Maikken, The official dressage rules of Finnish Hobbyhorse Association)

### **Turn on the forehand and turn on the haunches**

In turn on the forehand the rider performs a *180-degree* movement with the head of the horse as a pivot point inside the motion. Turning on the haunches is the opposite from turning on the forehand: a *180-degree* movement with the end of the hobbyhorse's stick as a pivot point inside the motion. In both movements the legs move on two rails and the horse is flexed in the direction of the movement slightly. (Maikken, The official dressage rules of Finnish Hobbyhorse Association).

### **Spin**

A spin is a 360 degree turn on the haunches. The rider performs a *180-degree* movement with the end of the hobbyhorse's stick as a pivot point inside the motion. The horse can be slightly flexed in the direction of the movement.

### **Flying/lead change, changing leads**

The rider switches the leading leg of the canter. With snaffle bit rider changes also the leading rein. Unlike in dressage, the steps in a flying change are quite low.

## **2.1.2.3 Other vocabulary**

### **Line up**

All competitors stand in a line in the middle of the riding arena, face towards the same long sideline of the arena. The judge can ask for back up in line.

### **Railwork**

Group section in western horsemanship, where all riders are at the riding arena at the same time.

## 2.2. Tack and clothing

These rules apply to all western riding events. Event specific rules are followed primarily. Tack rules apply also to warm-up. The judge has a right to inspect the tack.

### 2.2.1 Tack

The horse must always wear western bridle, which means that the bridle cannot have a noseband. Chinstrap is optional, but curb chain or strap is mandatory. The bit must be either a snaffle or a curb bit or a bosal hackamore. Split reins are used with snaffle- and curb bits. Martingales and gadgets are not allowed. Western-styled breast collars are allowed. Boots, bandages, etc. are not allowed (except in reining and speed events: check out event specific rules. A whip is not allowed in western riding events.

The horse must wear a bridle suitable for western. Those bridles are:

Bridle with a curb bit, which should have split reins and curb chain or a strap.

Bridle with a snaffle bit, which should have split reins.

Bosal bridle, which should have continuous reins. If you want to, you can also use a leading rope attached to the stick, but it is not mandatory.

### 2.2.2 Rein hold

When riding with a snaffle bit, the split reins should be crossed. When riding with a snaffle and bosal, the reins are to be held English style, with both hands. Changing the rein hand is not allowed. Other hand holds the stick and the rein and the other hand holds only reins. The outer hand holds the hobbyhorse's stick and outer rein, while the inner hand holds the inner rein. The inner hand should stay on the same level as the outer hand. In trail and ranch trail, the reins can be moved to one hand if necessary for performing the task in trail or ranch trail (i.e. gate).

With a curb bit, the index finger should be between the two reins with the rest of the reins running through your palm. Rein hand should be about 10 to 20 cm above the horse, depending on its size. The other (free) hand holds the stick. The excess rein needs to be on the side of the rein hand. Touching reins with the free hand gives penalty points. Changing the rein hand is not allowed unless it's necessary for performing a task in trail or ranch trail (i.e. gate). The one hand hold can be executed by holding the reins and the stick with the same hand and keeping the free hand on the side or as a "shadow hand" next to the rein hand. The details in holding the reins are not judged, the most important thing is to remember to use two hands with a snaffle bit and one hand with a curb bit.

### **2.2.3 Clothing**

There are no requirements on the rider's attire. The competition host can demand that the competitors wear shoes. The recommended clothing is a long-sleeved collared shirt. In many events, the rider's overall look affects the score, so a neat outfit and proper tack is recommended. Stetsons/cowboy hats are allowed. Safety equipment used in horse riding, for example a riding helmet or a safety vest, are not recommended, because it is of no use in hobbyhorse riding.

### **2.3 Position of horse and rider**

While doing movements and moving forward, the head of a hobbyhorse should be in a proper position which is lower than in English style: the stick is approximately in horizontal position but the right position depends also on the structure of the horse. The horse shouldn't be above nor behind the bit. This definition of the proper position applies in every all around events and reining unless stated otherwise in the event specific rules. The posture and position are not judged in speed events. The rider must have a good posture and should not lean especially forwards. The rider's back is relaxed and flexible and their legs work on their own. The upper body is kept straight and calm, and the hands steady while remaining relaxed.

### **2.4 Movement and performing the movements**

Definitions of gaits and movements are explained in 2.1.2 Vocabulary. When riding on a curved line or a circle, the horse's head must be flexed in the direction of the movement (inwards). Circles should be round and performed at the appropriate speed, size and location as requested in the pattern. The counter-canter should be performed with no change in pace or stride. (AQHA; SRL 2020) The horse's head/neck must be straight when stopping (no flexion or bending).

## 3. EVENTS

The events of western riding are reining, all around events and speed events. The most common all around events are trail, western riding, western horsemanship and western pleasure. Pole bending and barrel racing are speed events.

### 3.1 Western horsemanship

In this event, the rider and the horse's ability to perform different movements smoothly is judged according to the course prepared by the judge. The horse is presented with loose reins.

#### 3.1.1 Class procedures

The competitors perform in two phases: first the individual pattern and then railwork. The individual performance includes a short pattern which consists of performing different gaits, stops, turns, flying changes or other movements. Railwork is like a short western pleasure class: all competitors ride on the rail together in designated gait.

##### 3.1.1.1 Levels

To make it easier to host western riding competitions, there are three difficulty levels of horsemanship classes. In the lower difficulty classes the required movements are easier and there are less of them. In the higher difficulty classes, there are more difficult changes between gaits, more difficult movements, and the pattern is usually also longer. The judge decides what they want to see in the railwork section. Every railwork must include all gaits (walk, jog and lope), at least in one direction of the arena. If the individual pattern doesn't include a stop, it must be included in the railwork. A back-up can be included into the individual pattern, railwork or it can be asked to be performed at the line-up. The pattern can include level defined movements or movements of the same difficulty, but not movements of higher level. The pattern doesn't have to include all level defined movements.

##### Level 1

Walk, jog and lope at least in one direction, circles, figure eights, other curved lines, stop, back-up in a straight line, max. 180 degree turn on the haunches/forehand, easy transitions, simple change of lead (through jog)

##### Level 2

Level 1 movements, extended jog, max. 360 degree turn on the haunches/forehand, mediocre transitions, one flying change, back-up in a curved line, leg yield

##### Level 3

Level 1 & 2 movements, extended lope, max. 900 degree (2,5 rounds) turn on the haunches/forehand, challenging transitions, several flying changes (but not in a row), two-track (haunches or shoulder in), sidepass



### **3.1.1.2 Individual pattern**

The rider must perform the pattern accurately, precisely, smoothly, and with a reasonable pace (AQHA; SRL 2020). Before starting the individual pattern, the rider must greet the judge with a nod. The judge will grant permission to start the performance by nodding back. For clarity, a spoken permission can be used. The movements are performed according to the markers at the arena. In a good performance the rider maintains the same distance (i.e. 1 meter) from the markers during the whole performance. Varying distance lowers the score.

### **3.1.1.3 Railwork**

In the railwork all riders work at the same time in the arena. The judge determines the riding direction and the gait and judges all the competitors. The judge is not greeted in the railwork. The judge can ask for walk, jog, lope, stop, back-up and to change the riding direction. If someone in front of you moves slower than you, you must pass them from the inside: crossing the arena or riding circles isn't allowed. After the railwork all competitors are asked to fall into a line-up. The judge can ask a competitor to show the horse's bit or to back up a couple of steps.

## **3.1.2 Judging**

### **3.1.2.1 Scoring**

Exhibitors will be scored on a basis of 0-100 with 70 denoting an average performance. Points will be added or subtracted from the maneuvers on the following bases, ranging from plus 1,5 to minus 1,5:

- 1,5 extremely poor,
- 1 very poor,
- 0,5 poor,
- 0 average,
- +0,5 good,
- +1 very good,
- +1,5 excellent

### **3.1.2.2 Penalties**

Errors are divided into offences and faults based on how serious they are. The judge evaluates it based on how serious and continuing the error is:

#### **Offence: 1-2 penalty points**

break of gait up to two strides, touching the log, poor rider or horse position, early or late lead change, incorrect way to lope over a log (the leading leg steps over first)

#### **Fault: 3-5 penalty points**

wrong gait, lead change through jog, touching the horse, touching the reins with the stick hand, touching the markers

## Disqualification

- wrong course
- knocking over marker or passing it on the wrong side
- completely missing a log
- falling off/down (knee or hand touches the ground or the stick doesn't stay between legs)
- wrong rein hold (wrong rein hold for the used bit, smaller faults aren't punished)
- starting the performance without the judge's consent
- disturbing others' performances
- Obvious limping or other injury interfering with physical performance during the performance or at the end of the performance
- illegal equipment (applied from the rules by AQHA and SRL 2020)
- Unsportsmanlike behavior, such as throwing hobbyhorse or other objects, or aggression or bullying directed at others. In repeated or very harmful cases, the judge or competition organizer may, at their discretion, deny the competitor's other starts in the same competitions.

## 3.2 Western riding

### 3.2.1 Judging

Gaits and lead changes are judged in this event. Emphasis on the judging is placed on smoothness and even pace of gaits and precision and lightness of lead changes. The horse is presented with light contact or on a reasonably loose rein. Patterns are presented in these rules (attachment 3). The judge will select one of them and all competitors perform it. (SRL 2020.)

#### 3.2.1.1 Scoring

Exhibitors will be scored on a basis of 0-100 with 70 denoting an average performance. Points will be added or subtracted from the maneuvers on the following bases, ranging from plus 1,5 to minus 1,5:

- 1,5 extremely poor,
- 1 very poor,
- 0,5 poor,
- 0 average,
- +0,5 good,
- +1 very good,
- +1,5 excellent

#### 3.2.1.2 Penalties

Errors are divided into offences and faults based on how serious they are. The judge evaluates it based on how serious and continuing the error is:

##### **Offence: 1-2 penalty points**

break of gait up to two strides, touching the log, poor rider or horse position, early or late lead change, incorrect way to lope over a log (the leading leg steps over first)

##### **Fault: 3-5 penalty points**

wrong gait, lead change through jog, touching the horse, touching the reins with the stick hand, touching the markers

## Disqualification

- wrong course
- knocking over marker or passing it on the wrong side
- completely missing a log
- falling off/down (knee or hand touches the ground or the stick doesn't stay between legs)
- wrong rein hold (wrong rein hold for the used bit, smaller faults aren't punished)
- starting the performance without the judge's consent
- disturbing others' performances, a visible or serious injury
- Obvious limping or other injury interfering with physical performance during the performance or at the end of the performance
- illegal equipment (applied from the rules by AQHA and SRL 2020)
- Unsportsmanlike behavior, such as throwing hobbyhorse or other objects, or aggression or bullying directed at others. In repeated or very harmful cases, the judge or competition organizer may, at their discretion, deny the competitor's other starts in the same competitions.

### 3.2.2 Levels and patterns

Three different level patterns have been selected for hobbyhorses from the patterns of Equestrian Federation of Finland (SRL) and American Quarterhorse Association (AQHA). The competition invitation must state which level pattern is used in the competition. Patterns and their markings can be found from the attachments (attachments 1 & 3).

## 3.3 Western Trail

Western trail is an all-around class that revolves around completing various obstacles with precision and harmony. Hobbyhorse trail rules have been improvised from the ones of AQHA and SRL and course lengths have been reduced.

### 3.3.1 Trail-classes

Trail has two class categories, Open and Amateur. The categories have been divided into four class levels: Rookie, level 1, level 2 and level 3. The course difficulty depends on the class level. Hobbyhorse riders are free to self-evaluate their level and compete accordingly.

#### Open

Open classes are open for all riders and usually directed toward more experienced riders, however they're suitable to dedicated amateurs. Open classes tend to be tougher than amateur classes and the evaluation is harsher. The main focus of evaluation is posture, quality of gaits and technically correct riding. Open classes are competed at levels Rookie, L2 and L3.

## **Amateur**

Amateur classes are reserved to those just learning the discipline, who don't have experience past open L2. Evaluation in amateur classes is focused on the overall impression of the performance, correctly navigated course and careful obstacle work. Gait quality and posture aren't as important as they are in open classes. Obstacle combinations are also easier. Amateur classes are competed at levels Rookie, L1, L2 and L3 levels.

### **3.3.1.1. Class levels**

#### **Rookie**

The Rookie-level is intended for those just familiarizing themselves with trail. The recommended length of the course is five (5), including the mandatory obstacles (See 3. obstacles) and two extras. Courses on this level have long transitions between obstacles and they tend to be spacious all over. The backup is only performed on a straight line. Evaluation is focused on having control over basics, correct gaits between obstacles, turning and backing up in addition to completing obstacles. In Rookie classes a good overall performance and having fun is more important than perfect technique.

#### **Level 1**

Level 1 (L1) is directed at riders who are already some-what familiar with the discipline. Recommended course length is at least four (4) and a maximum of six (6) obstacles. Transitions between obstacles can be shorter than in Rookie classes. L1 courses favour various simple pole tasks, mostly ground poles in a straight line, however a curved line or weaving exercise is also possible. The pattern can also include a sidepass with or without a ground pole. Canter transitions are not required at this level. Evaluation focuses on precision, rider posture and overall tempo. L1 is only in Amateur classes.

#### **Level 2**

Level 2 (L2) is suitable for slightly more experienced riders. Recommended course length is between seven (7) and ten (10) obstacles. Transitions between obstacles are shorter, while still providing the rider enough time to orient themselves for the next task. L2 patterns can feature more complex pole work, weaving with tight turns, and turning while backing up. Other possible obstacles include sidepass with a raised pole and simple lead changes (changing lead through trot). Counter canter is also possible at this level. L2 is in both Open and Amateur classes.

## **Level 3**

Level 3 (L3) is the hardest of the levels. Recommended course length is a minimum of ten (10) obstacles. Transitions between obstacles can be extremely short. L3 patterns can include very hard pole work, turns on the haunches, complex backups and varying distances between ground poles. Flying changes are also possible. L3 is in both Open and Amateur classes.

### **3.3.2 Evaluation**

The rider begins their run with 70 points. Each obstacle is graded from -1.5 to +1.5. Penalties are given separately. The numbers on the evaluation form correspond to obstacle numbers. Evaluation starts from when the rider is cleared to start the run and ends after the last obstacle is cleared or the rider withdraws.

#### **3.3.2.1 Points**

Points are given in half-point increments as follows:

+ 1.5 Excellent

+ 1.0 Very good

+ 0.5 Good

0 Average

- 0.5 Poor

- 1.0 Very poor

- 1.5 Extremely poor

0 points is an average performance without any special merits, the line of an average performance depends on the level of the class and the preferences of the judge.

### 3.3.2.2 Penalties

Depending on the fault and its severity a rider can be given 0.5, 1.0, 3.0 or 5.0 penalty points. No maximum number of penalties is set; however, the judge has the right to stop the run if they deem it necessary.

#### 0.5 penalties

- Touching a pole, cone, course decoration or other objects in the arena, excluding obstacles requiring contact such as a bridge or a transportation task. 1.0 penalties
- Hitting a pole, cone, course decoration or other objects in the arena. 🎬  
Wrong gait for up to two strides.
- Incorrect number of steps if a step number has been set (e.g. backup).

#### 3.0 penalties

- Incorrect gait or lameness for more than three strides.
- Wrong canter lead if lead is specified.
- Breaking an obstacle, e.g. dropping a raised pole, knocking over a cone or moving another course marker.
- Stepping out of the bounds (if specified) of an obstacle with one foot after beginning to ride through the obstacle.

#### 5.0 penalties

- Dropping a carry item.
- First and second refusal.
- Letting go of the gate before it's completed.

### 3.3.2.3 Penalties that lead to disqualification

- Holding the reins with two hands, except when riding with a bosal or snaffle bit, or when changing the rein hand if the obstacle calls for it.
- Illegal tack.
- Riding obstacles from the wrong direction, in the wrong order or otherwise against the guidelines set in the pattern.
- Tack malfunction.
- Third refusal.
- Overturning more than a quarter turn during an obstacle.
- Leaving the arena.
- Wrong transition.
- Failing to close the gate.

### **3.3.3. Obstacles/tasks**

Every trail pattern must include a gate, a minimum of four poles that are ridden over, and a backup. The following section goes over the most common obstacle types, but only the course designer's imagination is the limit when it comes to patterns, however still ensuring the course is safe for riders.

#### **Gate**

The gate can be made from wood, hinged, or a rope between two posts. The rope gate is the most common in trail classes because a wooden gate may be unstable and unreasonably difficult to open.

The gate is completed by first riding parallel to the gate, horse facing the opening side. When the gate is being closed the horse will face the "hinge" side. The gate is ridden at the walk unless stated otherwise.

#### **Pole work**

Pole obstacles vary from going over poles (ground or raised) on a straight or curved path to various alleyway tasks that can include turns, yields and backups. Any gait can be specified. Alley-tasks gauge precision by requiring the rider to stay right in the middle of the alley and perform careful and effective turns. Ground and raised poles are crossed over the middle of the pole unless the pattern otherwise specifies.

#### **Backups**

Backup obstacles come in many shapes, but the most common ones require the rider to back up in an alley on a straight or curved path. Many "backup alleys" ask the rider to first ride through the alley normally, back up, and then ride through once more before moving on to the next obstacle. During backup obstacles the rider is permitted to glance down to ensure they're on the right path.



## **Turn-box**

The directions on the pattern will always specify how many revolutions should be performed in the box. Overturning by less than a quarter-turn is allowed and will not be penalized. The turn is ridden around the centre of the rider. The rider is not allowed to exit the box until the correct number of revolutions has been performed. The rider will stop in the square before and after the turn.

## **Sidepass**

Sidepass is most often performed over a pole so that the legs are in front of the pole and the pole is underneath the horse. During a sidepass the horse is neck reined to the side so that the horse stays in a 90° angle in relation to the pole. Steps are taken along the pole so that the legs cross.

The sidepass can be performed in an alley, when the movement is the same, but instead of a pole, the rider follows an imaginary line in the middle of the alley.

## **Bridge or seesaw**

The bridge is performed in a specified gait while lowering the horse's head slightly as the rider steps onto the bridge and lifted back to a working position after they step off the obstacle. The rider is permitted to look down while crossing the bridge.

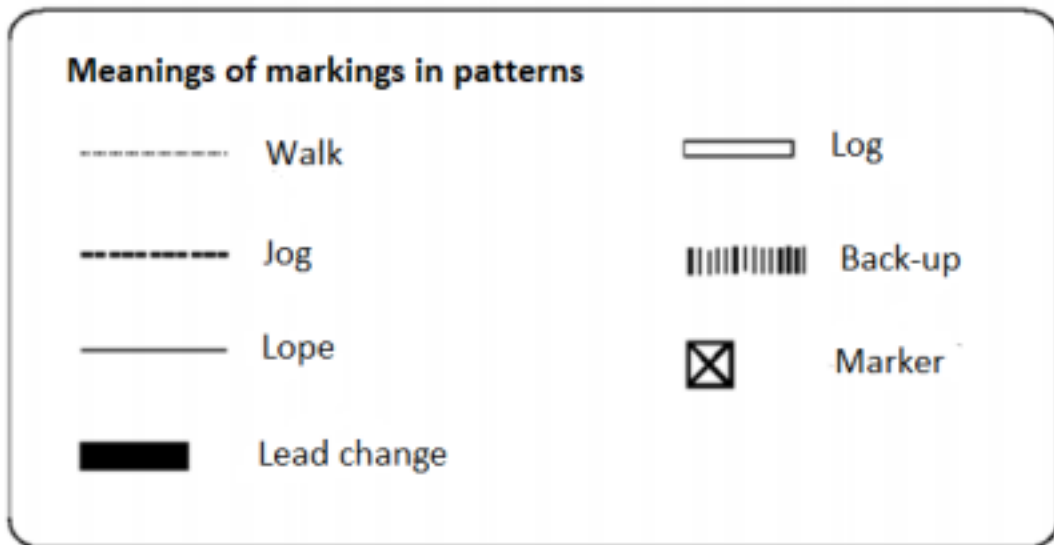
Instead of a bridge the course can also feature a seesaw which is ridden similarly to the bridge. The only exception is the requirement to slow down or stop over the pivot point. The rider is not allowed to step off the seesaw until the exit end has touched the ground.

## **Other obstacles**

The courses can also feature various other obstacles depending on what the course planner can come up with, but other relatively common tasks include various curved paths, weaving and transportation.

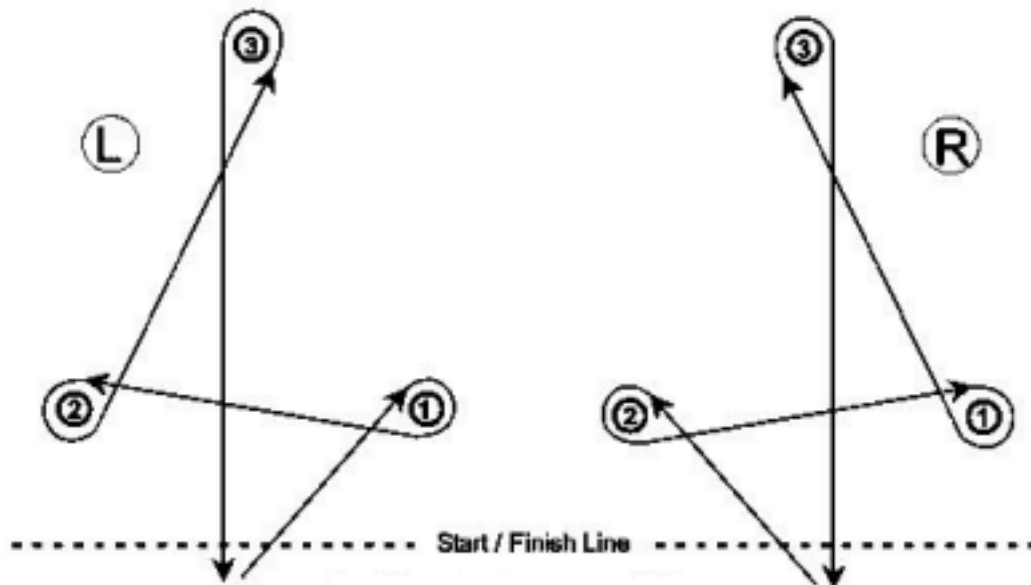
## 4. ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1. Meanings of markings in patterns



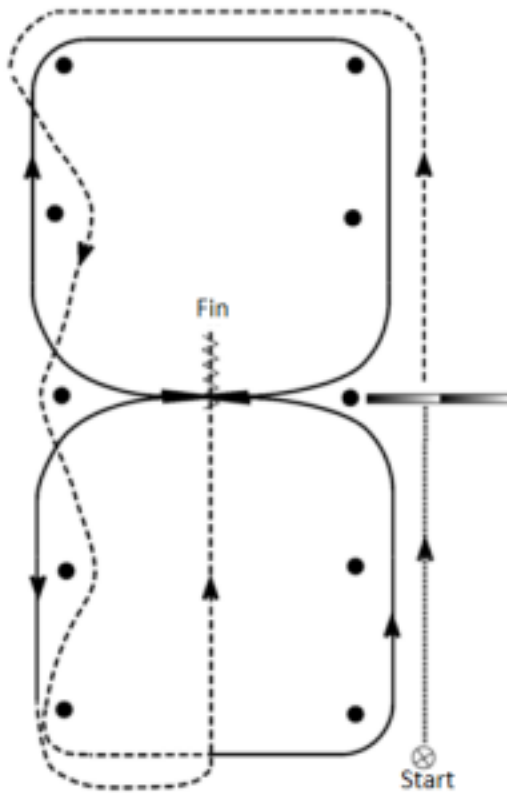
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Attachment 2. Barrel racing pattern. Contestants may choose to run pattern starting from the left (barrel 1) or right (barrel 2).



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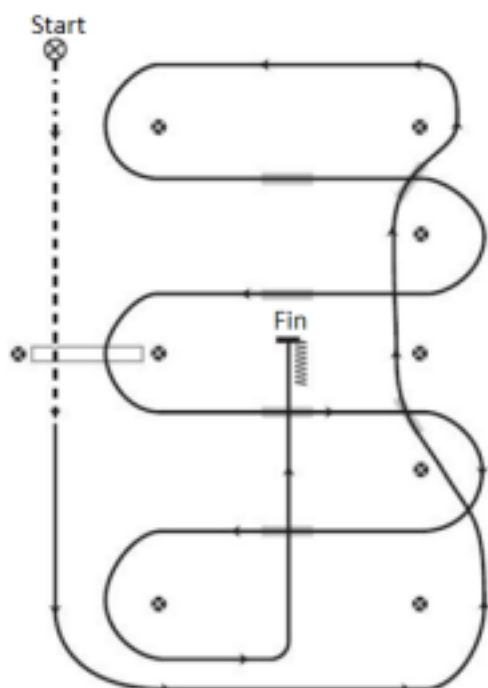
### Attachment 3. Western riding patterns



#### Level 1

1. Walk over log
2. Transition to jog immediately after crossing the log
3. Serpentine in jog
4. Transition to left lead
5. First crossing change to right lead
6. Second crossing change to left lead
7. Transition to jog at the last marker
8. Jog up the center, pass the center marker, stop & back four (4) steps.

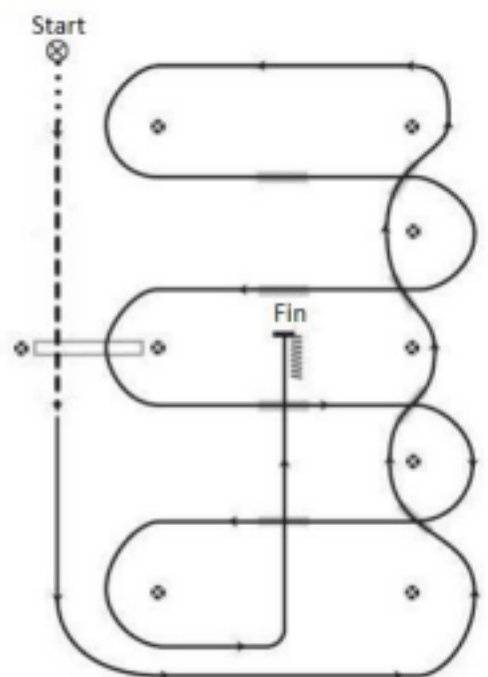
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## Level 2

1. Walk 2–3 meters and jog over log
2. Transition to left lead after crossing the log, lope around the short side
3. First line change
4. Second line change, lope around the short side
5. First crossing change
6. Second crossing change
7. Lope over log
8. Third crossing change
9. Fourth crossing change
10. Lope up the center, stop & back four (4) steps

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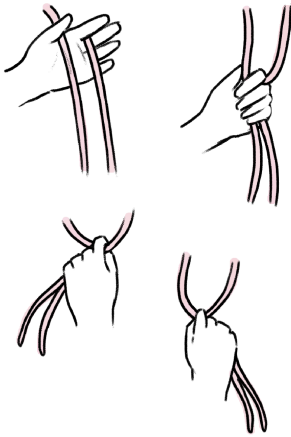


## Level 3

1. Walk 2–3 meters and jog over log
2. Transition to left lead after crossing the log, lope around the short side
3. First line change
4. Second line change
5. Third line change
6. Fourth line change, lope around the short side
7. First crossing change
8. Second crossing change
9. Lope over log
10. Third crossing change
11. Fourth crossing change
12. Lope up the center, stop & back four (4) steps

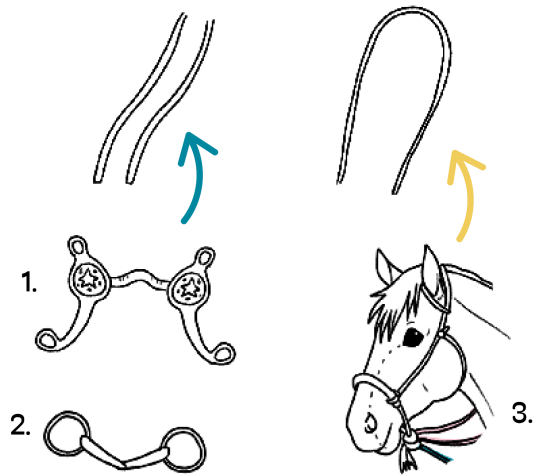
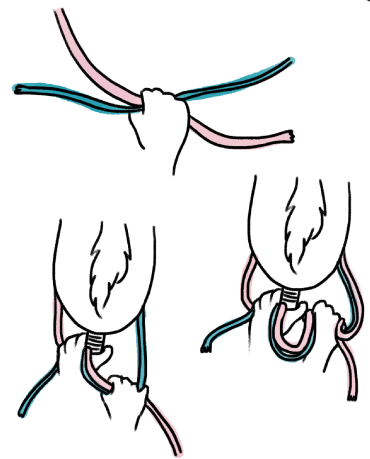
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How to hold reins with curb bits?



The other hand always holds the stick and the other hand holds the reins.

With a snaffle bit, you have to cross the open reins.



Open reins are used with a curb bit (1.) and a snaffle (2). Rope reins are used with a Bosal- hackamore (3.).

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