

FREESTYLE REINING

A. GENERAL RULES

(1) Reining maneuvers originated from moves that a cow horse must use in performing its duties and have been refined to the high level of competition existing today. Freestyle Reining not only provides an opportunity to use these maneuvers creatively, but also to expand them to music by means of choreography. Riders are encouraged to use musical scores which permit them to show the athletic ability of the horse in a crowd appealing way.

(2) NRHA rules will apply except where the following rules preempt same.

(3) Required Maneuvers. Will be defined as follows:

(a) A minimum of four (4) consecutive spins to the right

(b) A minimum of four (4) consecutive spins to the left

(c) A minimum of three (3) stops

(d) A minimum of one (1) lead change at the lope from right to left

(e) A minimum of one (1) lead change at the lope from left to right

(4) Exhibitors will only be judged astride.

(5) Exhibitors are allowed to use two (2) hands (as well as one or no hands) and any bit approved by the *NRHA Handbook*, including snaffle bits and bosals approved for use in the Snaffle Bit or Hackamore classes.

(6) Failure to perform all the required maneuvers or failure to complete the performance within the time limit will result in a score of zero (0).

(7) Additional maneuvers such as rollbacks, backups, speed variations, and non-classical reining maneuvers such as half pass and side pass are appropriate in Freestyle and shall be given appropriate credit. Additional repetitions of required maneuvers are appropriate, but will only add or subtract from the existing scores already given for the required maneuvers, not as additional scores.

(8) Equipment used in Freestyle must adhere to the following standards:

(a) All equipment must be non-abusive and humane based on NRHA Rules and Guidelines.

(b) Any equipment not specifically covered by or in conflict with standard equipment guidelines must be non-abusive to the horse.

(9) **Time Limit.** A maximum of four (4) minutes. The time limit will begin when the music starts.

(10) Length of introductions will be at the discretion of the show staff.

(11) **Costumes.** Permitted but not required. Emphasis is placed on performing the reining maneuvers to music.

(12) Props. Permitted but at no time may hinder the judges' view of the horse. The use of props will not add to the score.

B. JUDGING OF FREESTYLE REINING

(1) Required maneuvers in Freestyle will receive a score based on technical merit from the technical judges utilizing judges score sheets specifically designed for the Freestyle. Transitional maneuvers and other maneuvers not specified as reining maneuvers will be evaluated and scored accordingly in a specified box and counted as a single maneuver score. If an artistic impression judge is used, they must use the score sheet provided by NRHA and are encouraged to include remarks regarding performance. In the event an artistic judge is not used, the technical judges will assess an artistic impression score in the box specified using a -2 (two) to a +2 (two) evaluation. (See Figure #9.)

(2) Number of Judges. Two or more NRHA approved judges must be used in any Freestyle class that offers \$2,000 or more in added money.

(3) In the case of one or two (2) judges being used, they would be required to be NRHA approved. They would judge the technical merit of the ride. As part of the overall score, each judge would weigh the artistic impression of the ride as 10 percent of the overall ride.

(4) Tie Breaker Judge. One (1) judge (not to be an artistic impression judge) shall be designated as the tiebreaker prior to the Freestyle class. In the event a tie still occurs (or the tie occurs with one judge), the technical merit scores will be tallied to break the tie. In the event a tie remains, the exhibitors tied will be declared co-champions.

(5) Validating required maneuvers will be the responsibility of the judges. However, at least one scribe will be used to assist in verifying the required maneuvers for each horse as they are completed in the pattern.

(6) All five (5) point penalties may apply except holding the saddle or saddle horn with either hand or touching the horse with the freehand, which are allowed.

(7) Eliminations are to be used at the discretion of show management and must use NRHA patterns, NRHA judging rules as applied to Category 1 classes, and NRHA judges. Eliminations may be held without music or costuming, but must allow the use of either one (1) or two (2) hands. The emphasis in the design of any elimination should be on quality of competition.

(8) Artistic impression judge or applause meter should not represent more than twenty percent (20%) of the combined score and should only be used in conjunction with (minimum) two NRHA approved judges. When used in scoring, the following formulas should be applied to properly weigh the

scores according to the above percentage and still produce a comparable numerical score as when three judges are used.

(a) Score for Judge 1 should be multiplied by 1.2

(b) Score for Judge 2 should be multiplied by 1.2

(c) Score for the Applause Meter should be multiplied by

.6. All three scores should then be added to determine the final score for placing.

(9) Freestyle Reining may offer both an Open and a Non Pro Freestyle class. Show management will reserve the right to run them concurrently or separately.

(10) Show management will reserve the right to rule on music or dress which may be inappropriate or offensive to the spirit and nature of the show. Show management may also determine the use of special lighting.

(11) **Costumes.** Permitted but not required. Emphasis is placed on performing the reining maneuvers to music.

(12) **Props.** Permitted but at no time may hinder the judges'

C. SCORE SHEET

(1) The NRHA has revised its standard score sheet for reining to accommodate the special needs of the Freestyle. (See Figure #9.)

(a) "Maneuver description" Each of the 7 required maneuvers are outlined above a specific box. Box #8 is for scoring circles, transitional maneuvers and non-required maneuvers.

(b) The line containing the "Draw/Exhibitor" box is divided into a top and bottom row. The top row is used to record any appropriate penalties and the bottom to record required maneuver scores as performed. Each maneuver box may contain multiple scores if the maneuver is performed more than once during the program.

(c) "Penalties" are to be assessed during each maneuver in which they occur and each time they occur; for example, penalties associated with lead changes will appear in the #3 and #4 boxes respectively and may be multiple if occurring more than once.

(d) The scoring of maneuvers in Freestyle remains consistent with the guidelines set forth in *NRHA Handbook*. Maneuvers are scored in $\frac{1}{2}$ point increments from a low of $-1\frac{1}{2}$ (extremely poor quality) to a high of $+1\frac{1}{2}$ (excellent quality) with 0 denoting an average or correct maneuver with little or no degree of difficulty. The "Score" boxes below the "Draw/Exhibitor" box line are used to record the official score of each required maneuver. The scores in the corresponding box above will be "averaged" and dropped down as a single official score recorded in the "Score" box. In the event a score averages a fraction other than those of $\frac{1}{2}$ point increments allowed in the scor-

ing range, one should follow the standard mathematical practices of rounding. This will allow for the scoring of the maneuver as a “required” maneuver as well as an additional score for each time the maneuver occurs during the remainder of the performance. The required and additional scores from the “Draw/Exhibitor” box line are considered notes by the judge to aid in his/her evaluation of the maneuver designated for that box. They are not considered an official score. The total scores on the score line minus any penalties incurred (added or subtracted from 70), result in the final official score of the performance.

Examples:

Box #1 (4 L spins)

Scored a +1/2 for the required maneuver

Scored a 0 and -1/2 for additional maneuvers

Therefore, average score = 0

Box #1 (4 L spins)

Scored a 0 for the required maneuver

Scored a +1/2 and a +1/2 for additional maneuvers

Therefore, average score = .33, rounded up to a +1/2

Box #1 (4 L spins)

Scored a -1/2 for the required maneuver

0 and -1/2 for additional maneuvers

Therefore, average score = -.33, rounded down to a -1/2

(e) Box #8 may include multiple scores for any transitional maneuvers, circles that have not been evaluated in conjunction with another maneuver, or other non-required maneuvers as they occur. Scores are averaged and recorded in the “Score” box #8 as an overall score.

(f) If a required maneuver is not performed, the maneuver box will be blank indicating failure to perform all the required maneuvers resulting in a score of 0.

(g) In the event an “artistic impression” judge is not present, a box for an overall artistic impression score is available under the Total Penalty Box. Artistic impression may be scored in 1/2 point increments from a low of -2 to a high of +2. This score should consider the suitability of music, choreography and presentation of the ride.

D. SCORING PENALTIES

(1) **General Scoring Guidelines.** Scoring Freestyle requires the same rigor and diligence be applied to determine the quality of a maneuver as in any other reining class. The *NRHA Handbook* specifies that Freestyle allow the exhibitor to use maneuvers creatively but the evaluation of those maneuvers remain consistent with guidelines set forth in the *NRHA Handbook* (i.e., a 0 maneuver is the same in Freestyle as any other class). The scoring range for Freestyle maneuvers shall remain from -1 1/2 to +1 1/2 in 1/2 point increments.

(2) Artistic Impression. NRHA judges score the artistic impression of a performance from -2 to +2 using the following criteria:

1. Choreography: This refers to the planning and arranging of movements, steps and patterns for dancing in rhythm with the music. Ask, does the pattern flow in time and cadence with the music? If not it does not meet this parameter, it should get a (-) for this area; if it does, the ride should get merit (+). Some pieces may have partial choreography but places where it is absent, and thus a (0) for this component.

2. Originality: Ask, does this presentation bring “anything new” to the development of Freestyle Reining? New moves, maneuvers, ways of presenting the required maneuvers, increased difficulty, etc? Score accordingly (+, 0, -).

3. Musicality: This refers to how music is used in the presentation to develop the theme or “mood” of the piece/performance. Did what was presented appeal to the senses and the emotional aspects of the ride, be it serious/humorous/romantic, etc? Score accordingly (+, 0, -)

4. Presentation & Balance: This simply said, refers to how well the ride plays to all areas of the audience; does it cover the entire arena and entertain all areas of the audience equally? Score according, (+, 0, -)

A judge should consider each of these and whether the exhibitor met this parameter will give a (+) or did not consider the parameter evident in the ride (-). Accordingly a horse that does all of these (receives a (+) in all 4 categories) would be awarded a +2 for the artistic impression. While a ride that does none of these (-) for all categories would conversely receive a -2 for artistic impression.

(3) Required Maneuvers. The required maneuvers include four (4) consecutive spins to the left, four (4) consecutive spins to the right, three (3) stops, and at least one (1) lead change in both directions. The technical judge(s) will ascertain if all requirements are met using the Freestyle Score Sheet. Failure to perform all of the required maneuvers will result in a score of 0.

(4) Penalty Application and Maneuver Scoring. The following shall result in a score of 0; failure to perform all the required maneuvers, fall to the ground by the horse or rider, balking, refusal of command, running away where it is obviously not part of the performance, equipment failure that delays the pattern even if the failure is part of the costume or a prop, and exceeding the four (4) minute time limit. (Show management should be responsible for timing and verifying the length of performances). The four-minute time limit will begin when the music starts, and end when the

music stops. However, not to be considered for a score of 0; use of two hands, changing of hands, use of no hands on the reins, altering the tension of the reins with a romal, or the inclusion of nontraditional, cued, or trained responses. For example, a horse taught to lie down as part of the performance is not to be considered a fall to the ground. Since no set pattern is specified in Freestyle, inclusion of maneuvers not required must not be considered a penalty situation.

(a) Judges are asked to apply more liberal guidelines in deciding what equipment/tack is allowable in the freestyle class. All equipment must meet general guidelines regarding mouthpiece size, shank length, port height, curb chain width and flatness or any other aspect that would affect whether it would be considered abusive or not. Not to be considered for disqualification would include:

1. Rope mouthpieces, if of adequate diameter (5/16") soft and non-abrasive.
2. Cavisons, if used as part of a traditional English presentation or elsewhere, if appropriate, as long as they are loose and not the dropped style.
3. Slinkies or other head covering as long as they allow free movement of the jaw and the horse's vision is not impaired.
4. A bridleless presentation with a neck rope/reins, as long as the neck rope is smooth and loose. A judge is encouraged to halt any ride when safety and control becomes a concern.
5. Other untraditional equipment is allowable at the judge's discretion, considering its abusiveness or suitability. Exhibitors are encouraged to discuss any special equipment with a judge prior to the class as to its suitability.

(b) Jogging is allowed in Freestyle if it is in an obvious part of the performance. However, in an instance where a jog should not be present, as in exiting a rollback or a lope departure, the proper penalty should be applied.

(c) All situations which result in a no score according to NRHA rules for judging are applicable in Freestyle. Penalties, which would result in a no score, would include; any act of abuse to the horse or any animal used in Freestyle, any act of unsportsmanlike conduct, the use of illegal equipment or failure to provide horse and equipment to the appropriate judge for inspection.

(d) All five (5) point penalties apply in Freestyle except holding the saddle or touching the horse with the free hand. Also, the inclusion of an obvious cued or trained maneuver (i.e. a rear) should not be considered a blatant disobedience. The exhibitors will only be judged astride. Therefore, any movements performed off the horse must only be considered in the artistic impression score.

(e) Two (2) point penalties must be applied for freezing up in spins or rollbacks, and for break of gait. However, no penalty shall apply to markers or walking to the center for a departure.

(f) All lead penalties apply in the case where the judge is certain the exhibitor has not asked the horse to be on the incorrect lead. Typically it is easy to discern between a counter lope demonstration and a horse failing to respond to a rider's lead change command. In the unusual instance a judge is not clear as to whether a horse is failing to comply with the rider's lead command or demonstrating a counter lope, the benefit of doubt should always go to the rider as with all NRHA penalties.

(g) Failure to remain a minimum of 20 feet from the wall or fence shall not result in a ½ point penalty. However, fencing a horse to stops is not desirable and judges are encouraged to reflect this by reducing the maneuver score (i.e. a horse stopping within 10 feet in front of the fence should not be considered for a positive score on the stop.)

(h) When a stop is followed by a rollback or a backup it should be considered as one maneuver. If a stop is followed by a lope, jog or other transitional maneuvers, the stop is to be scored independently. Exhibitors are required to perform at least 4 consecutive spins. In the event any additional consecutive spins are performed, the maneuver score should reflect the quality of all the spins and an increased degree of difficulty. Several consecutive lead changes may be scored individually or as a group. When scoring consecutive lead changes as a group, a maneuver score must be assessed for each directional change reflecting their overall quality and degree of difficulty.

(i) Non-required or transitional maneuvers that add or detract from the technical merit of the ride should be scored and averaged as the overall score in the eighth box of the Freestyle Score Sheet (See Figure #9.)

(j) Circles may be evaluated in conjunction with a required maneuver such as a lead change or a stop, or at the judge(s) discretion may be scored separately as a transitional maneuver. The fact that circles are not required maneuvers is not to diminish their importance in providing the exhibitor a method to demonstrate a horse's ability to guide and willingness to be controlled.

(k) When judging Freestyle, judges have the option of conference and/or videotape review when major penalties (five (5) point, two (2) point, 0 score and no score) occur and should follow the procedures as set forth in the *NRHA Handbook*. In any instance where a judge is uncertain as to whether or not a penalty has occurred, the benefit of doubt should always go to the rider.