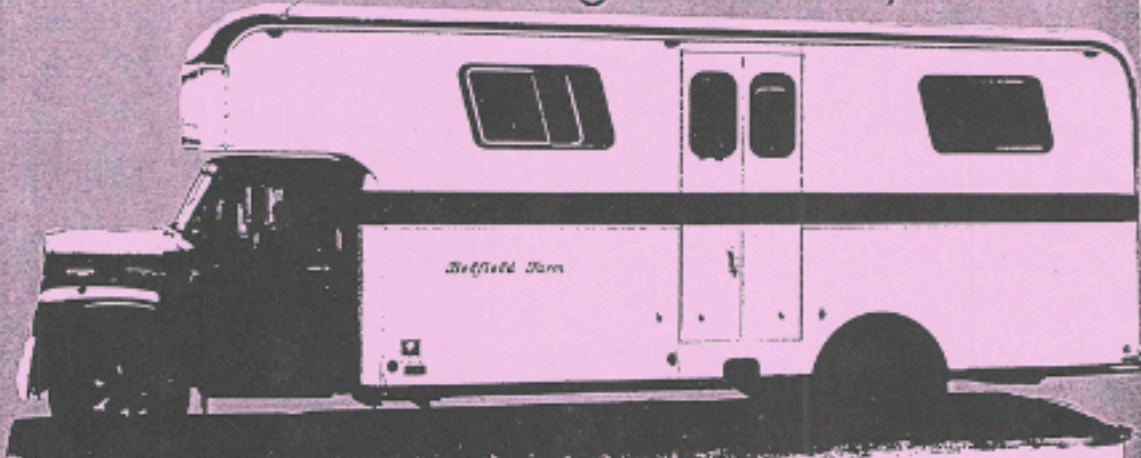


It takes good riding and good showmanship to succeed in the show ring. Showmanship is the ability to make the most of yourself and your horse—accenting your strong points and minimizing your weaknesses. In this series, a judge tells you how.

SHOW SAVVY

Part Eleven: Showing Selectivity



By Dana
Chenkin-Johnston

The exhibitor who can assess which shows will be best for him has a leg-up on his goal of successful horse showing. While many exhibitors ride with trainers who decide which shows their stable will attend, unless a rider can afford to attend all of these shows, he will have to determine which ones would best serve his purposes.

In deciding which shows to attend, a trainer will consider which shows have the most classes for the largest number of his students. The show which is best for the trainer may not be the show which would be best for an individual competitor.

Uppermost in every competitor's mind should be the goal he wishes to achieve in the show year. Whatever the goal, it

Dana Chenkin-Johnston is an AQHA research judge of hunters, jumpers and eventing. She also coaches riders, and privately breeds, shows, and sells young horses for the show ring.

should be realistic in regards to the horse and rider's skills, the horse's degree of soundness, the amount of time the rider can devote, and the financial commitment the rider and/or parents are willing to make. It would be wise to formulate a budget and to make a calendar for horse showing.

CALCULATING A BUDGET

For the purpose of calculation, assuming the rider is paying for use of a horse, braiding, shipping, trainer, and entry fees, one-day horse shows generally cost between \$120-200 per day, excluding hot dogs and hair nets. Multiple-day horse shows average about \$250 per day because of stabling, grooming expenses, high entry fees, and often greater transportation costs. (Hotel accommodations are extra.)

Let's assume a serious novice junior rider's family has budgeted \$3,000 for one year of shows. The budget allotted should offer her enough showing opportunities to achieve her goals.

The rider, whom we'll call Rebecca,

has two goals: one is to get out of novice equitation, and the other is to win some children's hunter championships, all at one-day horse shows. She has her own pony, but she boards it at a barn which holds no shows of its own. She will do her own braiding, so generally speaking, each show will cost her entries in six or nine classes (\$54 to \$81), plus her trainer's fee (\$25), and shipping (\$50), an average of about \$150 per show. Rebecca will be able to enter 20 shows during the year.

The same budget and schedule would suffice for a serious novice adult rider, and it would be more than enough for a casual or beginning rider on a rented mount, but it would be quite inadequate for the serious competitor who is aiming either for high-score achievements or elite equitation finals.

Equitation riders, particularly in the east, would need to plan on at least 25 one-day shows (more likely, a minimum of 36), assuming they can win one out of every five Maclay or Medal classes they enter. A show budget of \$6,000 to

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\$10,000 is more the norm for this kind of ambition.

ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES

A savvy rider's next step is to identify those horse shows that will move him towards his year-end objective. Usually, this is best accomplished by listening to his trainer's suggestions, using the AHSA rule book for horse show dates and status, and by reading prize lists.

Generally speaking, the beginning rider, whether a junior or an adult, can get the most mileage out of going to as many nearby one-day horse shows as possible, rather than fewer, more expensive, and farther-away shows that run for several days. On the other hand, competitors who want to accumulate AHSA points towards entering the most prestigious shows and possibly garnering year-end high-score awards must concentrate their efforts at A and B-rated shows run over several days, where they can earn the most points—and prize money.

Advanced junior riders aspiring to year-end equitation finals are best served by a combination of the two kinds of shows. They will need the host of opportunities to compete in Maclay and Medal classes that one-day shows offer; and they will need the tough competitive challenge of occasionally entering these classes at the hardest A-rated shows to see how they stack up against the best competitors they can find.

RECOGNIZED OR NOT

Obviously, the least expensive and most convenient shows to participate in are held at one's own stable. With respect to shows away, because it costs as much to ship to and be trained at a schooling show as it does at an AHSA-recognized local or regular-member show, my personal preference is to go only to AHSA-recognized shows, because they offer the protection of regulations and standards of competition which are rarely met by unrecognized shows. There are exceptions to this, of course; I have judged a series of unrecognized shows which are so well run, they exceed AHSA regulations. And, of course, if you are a member of a Pony or 4-H Club, you will want to support your organization by participating in its shows.

It doesn't make much sense to decide at the beginning of the year which one-day shows one will attend, because most of these accept post entries. Therefore, a competitor can select a show just a few

days before it takes place, after analyzing the prize list and checking weather reports, to see if the classes and conditions are right for him. The only decision that needs to be made at the outset of the show year is approximately how many one-day horse shows one will enter, and during which months.

OUTDOORS OR IN

Outdoor horse shows proliferate during May to September, and riders have the widest choice of where to go during those months. During rainy or cold weather, outdoor horse-showing activity grinds to a halt, and one's choice of shows is limited to those held in indoor rings. Consideration of prevailing local weather patterns will help one to tailor a show program that best suits one's comfort level.

Another factor affecting a show calendar is the work or school-vacation schedule. Novice rider, Rebecca, who will attend 20 shows, might design a show calendar that complements her school calendar, and which will keep her busy during the summer: two shows each in April and May, three shows in June, four shows each in July and August, two shows each in September and October, and one show in November.

WEIGHING ALL THE FACTORS

The features that make one show better than another for a competitor are: date and location of the show, size and number of rings, number and kinds of classes offered, the amount of prize money and rating of the show, the judges, the way the show is run, the kind of footing, fences, and courses, what competing riders are likely to show up, and the competitor's personal idiosyncracies.

The prize list provides information including date and location of the show, the names of the officials, the AHSA rating, the starting time of each ring and the roster of classes that will be held in them, class descriptions, what prize money, ribbons, and trophies are offered, and special rules by which the show will be run.

REBECCA

Most riders, including our hypothetical novice rider, Rebecca, would be smart to look for shows that offered them the opportunity to ride in six to nine classes. Except for the advanced junior rider attempting to qualify for an equitation final, it's hardly worth the cost of

braiding, shipping, and training to go to a show that has only a few classes to enter. For Rebecca, a show offering two over-fences classes and a flat class each in Maiden and Novice equitation, and Children's Hunter would be ideal. When Rebecca gets out of Maiden, she may continue to enter the Novice equitation and Children's Hunter divisions, and she might add Limit on the Flat.

She will not enter Limit over Fences, because it has a combination which her pony may have difficulty covering if the distance between the in and out is set for a horse's stride.

DOUG, JANE, AND JEREMY

Another competitor, whom we'll call Doug, is an avid adult rider of intermediate ability. He has the same trainer as Rebecca, and he's considering going to the same show. The show has no adult equitation classes, and no amateur adult hunter classes. It has a three-foot local-hunter division, which Doug could enter, but he remembers the last time he entered that division locally, when local professional riders used the class to give their green horses some experience, and the professionals won all the ribbons.

Winning isn't everything to Doug, but he likes to compete where he feels he has a chance of winning a prize. Therefore, Doug passes up the show Rebecca will attend, preferring to show the next week, where he can enter an amateur adult hunter division and have some fun in a three-foot baby green jumper division being judged on rubs.

Jane wants to qualify for the Medal and Maclay finals. Her trainer gives her a choice of two shows, one 10 minutes from her barn, the other two hours away. The closer show is likely to attract at least seven other barns with advanced equitation riders; the more distant show is likely to be smaller. Jane opts for the farther show, hoping that not too many other riders will follow the same strategy.

On another occasion, her choice is between two shows of about equal distance from her barn—a two-ring show with smallish, narrow rings; the other a show with two big rings. Small, narrow rings mean tight turns and short lines in over-fences classes and crowding in flat classes. Jane's horse is a big horse with lots of stride and enthusiasm, and she decides that, even if more people go to the show with the bigger rings, making the competition tougher, it would be better for her horse to be uncrowded and to have a

little more room for turns.

Jeremy's goal is to qualify his fancy large pony for Harrisburg and to try for a high-score award. He could go to either of two A-rated shows, both about three hours from his home. Both shows take place over several days. Both have a combined entry fee for the pony hunter division, and both have other equitation classes he can enter as well.

But the combined entry fee is two-thirds the cost, and its prize money about half that offered at the other show. Jeremy's parents talk to his trainer, who feels Jeremy is up to the best level of competition. They choose the show with the higher entry fee and prize money, counting on Jeremy's winning enough prize money to make the extra expense worth it.

TIFFANY AND LYNN

"Everyone" at Tiffany's barn is going to a local show that will have three rings and an outdoor course running all at the same time. The trainer has only one assistant, which means that it is likely the trainer or the assistant will be tied up at two rings, while some of their students are in the other ring or on the outdoor

course.

Tiffany's mother reads the prize list and concludes that Tiffany will not get much individual attention from her trainer under those conditions. Tiffany goes to watch that show and to help her friends. Her mother says she can show the next week at a show with fewer rings.

Lynn's small junior hunter does not have a huge stride. There are two A-rated shows she could go to, one of which has most of its classes on a beautiful grass polo field—with very hard ground underneath. The other show has all its classes in a soft dirt ring.

While Lynn knows her horse will go forward a little more in a field than in a ring, she realizes that her horse will shorten his stride and even possibly refuse if the ground "stings" his feet, so she chooses the show with the dirt ring.

She also checks to see which judges will be officiating. While there are some judges who like her horse, and pin him well when he has what Lynn thinks is a good round, there are other judges who "don't use" her horse, even with good trips, or who, in the open numerical scoring system, routinely give her horse lower grades than the other judges. No-

body likes to feel their best efforts will go unrewarded; as a result, Lynn simply will not show in front of certain judges.

ED

A competent adult rider with a demanding career, Ed competes often for the fun of it. Ed will pass up local one-ring shows that offer much more than 22 classes, when the adult classes are scheduled at the end of what turns out to be a very long, mostly wasted valuable weekend day. He likewise is not big on shows with multiple ring "conflicts" or inattentive gate attendants, resulting in lengthy delays. Ed avoids going back to shows he discovers have dusty rings, or flimsy, unappealing jumps.

He wants to have a good time in a pleasant environment when he shows, so he favors well-run shows with attractive jumps. Occasionally, he'll take his vacation by going to a long A-rated show in a resort area.

Being able to pick the shows that are right for you is a key element of show savvy. You have a much better chance of getting what you want out of a show when you go to it with a clear idea of what you want. ■

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