



# THE CANADIAN COWBOY CHALLENGE

## Guide to Judging

The Canadian Cowboy Challenges is not a trail class but a western ranch/trail riding class. This is a Challenge with obstacles and manoeuvres based on every-day ranch and trail activities and encounters.

A ranch/trail horse needs to move at a nice long fast paced walk with consistency. His head will be in a nice level position: no *peanut rolling* or forced collection. For lack of a better phrase: *ambling at a good pace*. Although we are not looking for collection, horses need to be able to round at the stop and all other manoeuvres with a bit of flexion at the poll.

In addition to your intimate knowledge of the application of the Canadian Cowboy Challenge Rules, as a judge there are many other things to take note of when judging a rider.

Various manoeuvres are requested as part of the course, for example, the course may ask that a rider lope to a position and perform a rollback. All manoeuvres will be controlled, relaxed, with the horse and rider working with each other, not against.

Although not inclusive, this list provides a guide to rider position, gaits and manoeuvres that you will encounter and are expected to judge properly.

### Rider Position

A western rider should be:

- relaxed and comfortable while performing any maneuver on the back of a horse.
- precise and smooth all the while maintaining a balanced functional and fundamental body position.

**Seat:** Regardless of the maneuver or gait being performed the position should be consistent. The seat should be secured, yet relaxed and centered in the saddle and on the horses back. The rider's back should remain soft, flat and relaxed. Deductions may be given for a stiff overly arched lower back. This is a very insecure position.

**Upper Body:** Shoulders should be level and square with the trunk of the rider's body. Head should be held with the chin level and eyes softly focused ahead (looking at the 'big picture'). The rider's head can be slightly turned in the direction he or she is riding, but excessive head turning or looking down causes imbalance. Deductions may be given for this.

**Legs:** *One leg on each side and the mind in the middle.* The rider's legs should hang in such a way that there is a straight line from the ear through to the shoulder, hipbone and down to the heel. The foot should rest on the stirrup with a flat foot or slightly raised toe – not a locked ankle. Weight is



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distributed over the balls of the feet and the lower leg should hang below a flexed knee. Light contact should be maintained through the mid calf area in order to give the leg aids effectiveness. The A frame look where the legs are held out in an exaggerated manner is ineffective. Deductions may be given for this.

**Stirrup length:** This will vary but as a general rule the stirrup should touch any where between the arch of the boot and the button on the spur strap or anklebone.

**Toes** can be turned out slightly to be more effective if wearing spurs or may be pointed straight ahead with a soft ankle ready to point the toes if needed.

**Feet:** Foot position varies greatly depending on stirrup type and should generally not be cause for deductions. Riding on the tippy toes however is very insecure and deductions may be given for this.

**Arms:** Hands and arms should be relaxed with a slight bend in the elbow. There should be a straight line from the horse's mouth through the arm to the hand, with the reins in one or both hands (if riding two handed). The free hand should hang loosely by the side or carried in a similar position to the rein hand with a slight bend. Excessive flapping of free hand is not productive. Deductions may be given for this.

**Wrists:** The wrist should be straight and relaxed.

**In motion:** At a lope or hand gallop the rider should be *glued* to the saddle, with no space between the seat and the saddle. The upper body should be still and relaxed at all gaits.

## Gaits

**The Walk** is a flat footed four beat gait. The horse should be alert and his stride should be in keeping with the size of the horse. A horse that is landing on his toes or heel is indicating he is about break into a jog.

**The Jog** is a smooth two beat diagonal gait, hind feet nicely following the front as in the walk. It has an even rhythm with one pair of diagonal legs following the other. A jog is not the slow peanut rolling gait as seen in pleasure horse classes but one with forward motion, smooth and easy to sit, while on a loose rein.

**Extended Jog or Long Trot** is an increased stride without an increase in rhythm. The legs don't move quicker just the stride lengthens resulting in more ground covering stride. Some people can sit this and others will rise. Either is acceptable.



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**The Lope** is a three beat gait, smooth and rhythmical. When going left you travel on the left lead and vice versa for right unless a counter canter has been called for. It is important to know that a correct lead is only required on the bend and not on the straight.

## Manoeuvres and Movements

**Counter canter:** A deliberate balanced lope on one lead while the horse is in a curve to the opposite direction. There should be no change of rhythm or stride. Sometimes this happens not so deliberately - be aware.

**Cross firing** is when the front and the back are not on the same lead.

**Straight Lines:** Here a horse must travel straight. His head and neck should be in a straight line with his body, with the hind feet again following in the tracks of his front feet.

**Curved lines:** Requires the horse to slightly bend his body to the inside of the arcing lines and circles. Once again hind feet follow closely to front tracks.

**Serpentines:** A snake like pattern that can be a series of arcs connected by straight lines or a very shallow wave.

**Circles** should be evenly rounded. Each half of the circle should be the same size.

**Figure Eight:** consists of two circles that touch at one point.

**Stop:** A stop should be straight, square, smooth and the horse should remain straight during the entire maneuver. The horse's back should be rounded slightly and not hollow. The horse's head should remain in a consistent position (not tossed high or nose up). The rider should not be pulling on the reins – a horse opening his mouth seeking relief from rein pressure is a sure penalty. Keep in mind a stop differs for ranch horses, horses with reining background, cutters and arena-trained horses. The key is they stop properly at the point assigned.

**Turn:** A response to a neck rein and should be smooth, with a continuous flow.

**Pivot:** A 90-degree turn from a stand-still and on the hindquarters with inside foot as a pivot point. However a rider should not be penalized if the outside pivot foot is used as some horses are trained that way. The key is that the pivot foot be held.

**Spin:** is a reining maneuver done on the hindquarters with speed. Also called a turnaround.



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**Rollback:** Done at a lope, with a brief stop and 180 degree turn over the hocks without hesitation or loss of forward motion. A full stop or backing during this would result in a penalty.

**Turn on the forehand:** The horse rotates around a pivot point, (Ideally the front leg of the direction of the turn). However remember this is a ranch/trail riding class so a nice smooth turn is acceptable.

**Turn on the hindquarters:** The pivot point is the hind leg. One front foot crosses over the other foot (depending on the direction). It is a controlled maneuver done in four beat walk time. Can be done in 90,180,360 degree turns, or whatever choice the course designer has requested. The hind end of the horse should not swing out (i.e. like a bottle spinning).

**Side pass:** The horses body needs to be straight or very slightly counter flexed as he steps directly sideways. Crossing over front *and* back is a plus however some horses don't cross over at all. Ideally the left leg should cross over the right if the move is to the right.

**Simple Lead Change:** A lead change from one direction to another with a break in stride in between. This break can be a stop, or a prescribed number of strides at a walk or jog at a designated location. The change should be done smoothly.

**Flying Lead Change:** This is a change *in the air* between two lope strides from one lead to another with the front and rear legs changing almost simultaneously.