

Association of Irish Riding Clubs

An Introduction to Showing

Introduction

The information in this document is provided for guidance purposes only. This should be read in conjunction with the Rule and Regulations (D04/12) of the Association of Irish Riding Clubs.

For the purposes of clarification the Rules and Regulations (D04/12) supersedes information contained in this guide.

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Preparing for the Season

As there is a curtailed amount of showing held throughout the year under the auspices of the Association of Irish Riding Clubs, most members of the Association will be using their horses for other riding club activities as well and will need to have them at a certain degree of fitness to suit these.

Show horses too have to be fit as judging can take a long time and, if the classes are well-filled, the initial stages can be particularly lengthy. Hacking out every day for between 30 minutes and an hour with a little cantering work twice a week will help develop the fitness of both your horse and yourself.

Horses should carry plenty of condition but this should not be confused with fat. They should be sound with unblemished limbs and clear wind.

Show horses need to accept other horses around them – coming up behind, overtaking, etc – so get your horse used to this. Take them to different places to school them and go out with friends so they get used to being in a group situation. Try going to local shows and/or hunter trials and ride in the warm-up rings when they are busy. This will get both of you used to the hustle and bustle of a show class.

One should also get horses used to others riding them as they need to accept judges' different styles. Ask some of your more experienced friends to get up and down from your horse and then ride it in open fields outside the confines of a school or arena.

Some regions now hold showing clinics which have proven very helpful. These will give you a chance to compare your horse to others and assess what category of horse you have.

The Classes

With entries for the Festival and major shows closing in advance, it's important to enter the correct class as changes are not allowed on the day. While the rider may not be aware, it will be immediately obvious to the judge/s and spectators that a horse is in the wrong class.

Most classes are conducted at the judge's discretion, with safety being of paramount concern, and a judge could ask you to leave if they feel your horse is in the wrong weight section. It's not the judge's job to place your horse in the appropriate class so, if in doubt when entering, ask the opinion of a more experienced producer; most will be only too delighted to give you helpful advice.

Judges are not obliged to ride a horse that they consider to be entered in the wrong class but most will do so out of politeness and may mention to you that another class might be more suitable for your horse.

Show hunter classes

Show hunters are judged in three weight divisions and, as a general guide, lightweights have eight and a half inches of bone (measured below the knee), mediumweights have nine inches, while heavyweights measure over that. Lightweights should be capable of carrying up to 12st 7lbs, mediumweights up to 14st and heavyweights over that.

In all cases, a show hunter should have quality and presence with good, long, low movement and be well balanced. It should not be on its forehead and should carry its head in front of the vertical.

In the past, **lightweights** were often thoroughbred or nearly so but in recent years, there have been an increasing number of horses by Warmblood sires on the showing circuit in Ireland. A horse should stand about 16.1hh or 16.2hh, be well schooled and able to gallop.

The lightweight classes are usually the most competitive and nearly always the best-filled. They can take a long time to judge so don't make plans for yourself or your horse to be in another ring or arena at the same time.

The lightweight may often have a competition career ahead of him while the ideal **mediumweight**, which should be an inch or so taller, is more likely to spend his life hunting and should have the size and substance to complete a day's hunting no matter what the ground.

The true, quality **heavyweight**, standing around 17hh, is increasingly difficult to find and is highly sought after by the top producers. When they gallop, the quality horses really stand out making the judge's decision so much easier.

Small hunters

For most, the ideal small hunter is a mediumweight but only up to 15.2hh in height with a good deep body, character and presence. These classes are often very well-filled and a horse needs exceptional movement to stand out.

Cobs

Cobs should stand between 14.2hh and 15.1hh with short limbs, a deep body and powerful hindquarters. They are usually divided into lightweight (capable of carrying up to 14st) and heavyweight (14st and over). At some shows, there is a class for maxi cobs (over 15.1hh).

An eye-catching show cob is one that loves its job and lights up in the ring while at the same time remaining well behaved.

Side saddle

Nowhere at a show is there a more elegant and graceful sight than the side saddle class, which is growing in popularity again. Ladies can ride any type of horse in the class but the more elegant the overall picture, the better the chance of success.

It goes without saying that you should always go to an expert for advice and lessons first.

Riding horses

In these classes, which are usually divided into small (over 14.2hh but not exceeding 15.2hh) and large (over 15.2hh), horses are judged on ride, conformation and manners with the last being extremely important. They should have presence and straight, fluid action.

The judge may ride the horses in the line-up and/or ask riders to give an individual show of walk, trot and canter, a change of rein, a gallop and rein back. In the line-up, the horse should at all times stand still.

Coloured horses

Entries are defined by the visible external colouring of their body coat (animals with white on head, legs, belly, tail or mane in isolation do not qualify) and not by type. Piebalds are black and white while skewbalds can be any other colour and white. The lesser of the two colours should be of a minimum of 15cms x 15cms.

Classes for these horses are usually broken into heights and are conducted on the same basis as show hunter classes with the same rules applying to turnout and presentation.

Ex-racehorses

These classes are usually conducted to identify racehorses which make the transition to useful and suitable riding horses; in most classes horses must have raced either on the racecourse or in point-to-points.

Horses should show quality, substance, correct conformation, presence and true action. Manners and ridability are also very important. They are judged similarly to show hunters.

Ridden breed classes

The A.I.R.C. caters for a number of breeds at its annual two-day festival such as Thoroughbreds, Irish Draughts, Connemara's and Arabs and these are all judged in similar fashion to show hunters. The Connemara class has been extremely well-filled since its introduction to the programme and, here again, one should allow plenty of time for it to be judged.

Novice rider classes

Particular to the Riding Clubs Festival, there are three showing classes which are based on the rider not the horse.

The first is termed an **introduction to showing** and this is open to those riders who have never been placed first to third in a showing class at any show. Competitors in this class are NOT eligible to ENTER any other showing class at the Festival.

The **novice showing class** is open to riders who have never shown at the RDS nor have previously won a showing class at any show. Competitors in this class are NOT eligible to ENTER any other showing class at the Festival.

The **primary showing championship** is dedicated solely to those riders graded primary for dressage and show jumping. They may ride any type of horse but are not permitted to use a double bridle. Primary riders are NOT eligible to ENTER any other showing class at the Festival.

Working hunters

Horses entered in these classes should be good-looking with correct conformation, excellent movement and also be capable of jumping a course of rustic fences smoothly and quietly but at a good pace.

The class is judged in two stages, with the jumping stage taking place first. Advancement to the second stage, which is judged like a show hunter class, is dependent on a clear round but, should there not be a sufficient number of these, the judge has the discretion to bring forward those who had a fence down.

At the Riding Clubs Festival, there is a class for four and five-year-old horses while the other classes are based on the grade of the rider. At other shows, the classes are usually broken into age and/or weight division of horse.

Performance hunters

Horses entered in these classes should be good-looking with correct conformation, excellent movement and also be capable of jumping a course of rustic fences smoothly and quietly but at a good pace. The class is judged in one stage, over a course of rustic fences.

Turn out of Rider and Horse

A tip for nailing good turn-out is to go and watch the top show riders compete and take note of how they present their horses and themselves in the ring.

Rider

For most classes, one should wear a well-fitted tweed jacket with a cream or blue shirt and a bright (but not too bright) well-knotted tie; breeches should be beige or canary and gloves should be muted. Boots ideally should be plain black with garter straps and correctly-fitted spurs (if allowed for your grade) in place.

Riding hats should of course be clean, well-fitted and of an approved standard. If wearing a skull-cap, use a black or navy velvet cover and ideally try to have a neatly-fitted, flesh-coloured chin strap.

For ladies, the rider's hair should be tied in a bun and neatly-fastened in a hairnet with no earrings or visible piercings.

Horse

A well-groomed, clean horse with well-fitted shoes, hoof oil and no stains is the first essential. Cut the length of the tail to approximately four inches below the hock while in carriage; long tails drag horses down and can unbalance judges' overview of your horse. Do not plait the length of the tail to create waves; showing is not a hairdressing competition.

One should take care bandaging the tail for travelling so that rubbing is prevented and the tail hair lies flat. If disaster strikes and your horse sits on its tail in the trailer or lorry, remove the bandage as soon as you arrive at a show, dampen the tail and re-bandage.

Remove whiskers, trim ears inside and out and remove any chin hairs; use disposable razors and a sharp curved scissors or a mini trimmer if you're lucky enough to own one. Trim heels; it's advisable to get an expert to help you do this for the first time as visible scissor cuts do not look well.

Practice plaiting at home to perfect your skills; try to have approximately 11-12 plaits down the mane, using bands which match your horse's mane colour, and always plait the forelock. Generally, slightly larger and softer plaits are more complementary to show horses. If you feel really adventurous you could try stitching in the plaits like all top show producers do but this is not essential.

Cobs should have their manes hogged with their heels and tails trimmed. Registered Irish Draughts should be turned out like show hunters.

Connemaras and Arabs are shown in a natural state with their manes unplaited and discreetly thinned. Tails should look natural and not be pulled but may be squared off at the bottom. Ears can be trimmed flat but there should be no trimming inside the ear. While light trimming of long hairs in jawline is acceptable, whiskers should not be trimmed. There should be no trimming of feathers on the legs or heels of Connemaras.

A couple of tips ... for those with white bits on their horses, keep these clean with shampoo and water while blue bag may also be helpful. Most tack shops stock white chalk which helps whiten heels, legs, etc. Scars and blemishes, etc can be covered with a little boot polish in the appropriate colour.

Tack

Clean, well-fitted and appropriate tack is essential.

Depending on the class and grade of rider, one should use a double bridle. A pelham (with double reins) can be an alternative substitute with a suitable cavesson noseband (a wider noseband will make a plainer head look more attractive) and plain leather reins. If your horse objects to the biting of a double bridle or Pelham and is not riding well, it would be best to have him going forward in a simple snaffle which is quite acceptable in working hunter classes.

Your saddle should be well-fitted, comfortable with a neutral coloured girth. If using a numnah, it should be saddle shaped and of a neutral colour; riser pads and such like should not be used. Remember the judge may ride your horse in your saddle so it should be comfortable.

At all times, make sure all keepers, etc , are closed. Generally, the less obtrusive and neutral your tack is the better; remember it's your horse you are showing.

In The Class

How you present your horse in the ring can win or lose you a class.

Warm-up

As you would when attending any show to compete, ensure your horse is going well forward, quietly and calmly. Do not overwork but ensure that your horse is settled.

Riding in a class

Most classes follow a similar pattern. On entering the ring – usually on the right rein – on direction from the steward the class will collectively walk, trot and canter as directed. There may then be a change of rein followed by a request for a gallop, after which the class is asked to walk and the judge will direct the steward to call in competitors in the order required to line-up.

As judges take a risk riding animals they don't know, horses must be mannerly and well-behaved. If a horse starts napping badly or playing up in the ring, do the right thing and excuse yourself from the class. It's not fair to upset all the other horses or to expect the judge to ride a horse that is being difficult. Let the steward know you are doing this and, if you can catch the eye of the judge, from afar salute them before leaving.

Leg-up

Depending on the class, the judge may choose to ride your horse after the line-up. At most shows, the organisers will delegate someone to leg-up the judge but one shouldn't take this for granted.

Therefore, it's a good idea to practice legging lots of different people onto your horse at home so that when it comes to helping the judge up at a show, you can do it quickly and expertly without upsetting your horse. If you are concerned about your ability to leg someone up, then have an assistant to help you.

Standing your horse up

After the judge has ridden your horse, or if you have completed an individual show, you may then be asked to 'strip' your horse, removing the saddle so that the judge can better assess the horse's conformation.

How you stand your horse up for the judge is very important. When the judge is looking at your horse from the side, they want to see all four legs; never allow your horse to rest a leg when standing up for the judge. Be aware at all times of where the judge is and position your horse accordingly.

Trot up

You will usually be asked to walk and trot your horse up so remember to stay by their shoulder and make them move actively beside you (practice at home!). Walk about 20 metres away from the judge, turn your horse away from you and walk two steps back before asking your horse to trot. As you get near the judge, try to show more length to your horse's stride. Keep going past the judge and around the back of the line-up, returning to your position.

The result

When all horses have been inspected in hand and have been remounted, riders will be asked to walk out of the line-up on the right rein but keeping in order. The judge will then inform the steward of the order they want the horses called in for his or her final line-up and riders will be beckoned into position.

The championship

If you are placed first or second in your class you may be required to return for a championship later in the day. It is considered polite to appear for the championship but if, for some reason, you are unable to do so, let the show secretary know and apologise that you cannot stay.

A ridden championship is usually conducted in a similar fashion to the group riding phase of a ridden class. You will be asked to walk, trot, canter, possibly change rein and gallop as in a class with the judge/s then calling their champion and reserve.

One of the fascinations about showing is that so much depends on personal opinion.

A given judge, at a given time, may differ totally from another one somewhere else making it quite unlike racing or other equestrian competitions. Showing will be all the more enjoyable an experience if you, the competitor, accept from the outset that opinions may differ and that the result is only that judge's opinion at that time.

Accept the decision with a smile and live to fight another day.