

**LEISURE DIVISION
JUDGE'S MANUAL
2025 Edition**



**NORTH AMERICAN
TRAIL RIDE
CONFERENCE**



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NATRC™ LEISURE DIVISION JUDGE'S MANUAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Section 1. Purpose	1
Section 2. Enrollment	1
Section 3. Prerequisites and Requirements	1
Section 4. Responsibilities of Leisure Division Judges	3
Section 5. Regulations Governing Judges	4
Section 6. Role of the Leisure Division Judge	4
Section 7. Judging Procedures	6
A. Scorecards and Scoring	6
B. Check-in and Check-out	8
C. Trail Equitation.....	9
D. Maneuvering Trail / Behavior	13
E. Safety and Courtesy	14
F. Judging Riders with Special Needs	14
Section 8. Penalty Points	15
Section 9. Scorecards and Scoring – General.....	15
Index	
Sample Scorecard Front	
Sample Scorecard Back	

SECTION 1. PURPOSE

- A. This manual is intended as a guideline for Leisure Division judges of the North American Trail Ride Conference (NATRC). At all times the standard basic objectives and concepts of NATRC must be kept in mind:
 - 1. To stimulate greater interest in the breeding and use of good horses possessed of stamina and hardiness and qualified to make good mounts for trail use.
 - 2. To demonstrate the value of type and soundness in the proper selection of horses for competitive riding.
 - 3. To learn and demonstrate the proper methods of training and conditioning horses for competitive riding.
 - 4. To encourage good horsemanship as related to trail riding.
 - 5. To demonstrate the best methods of caring for horses during and after long rides without the aid of artificial methods or stimulants.
- B. NATRC does not discriminate against any animal because of breed, type or conformation as long as the animal performs satisfactorily. Type and conformation will be reflected in the performance of a given animal.

SECTION 2. ENROLLMENT

- A. Any qualified individual may file an application to become a Leisure Division judge.
- B. Leisure Division Judges' application forms may be obtained on the national website at www.natrc.org.

SECTION 3. PREREQUISITES AND REQUIREMENTS

- A. Prerequisites:
 - 1. Must possess an interest in competitive trail riding and have a thorough understanding of the purpose of NATRC.
 - 2. Must be a member in good standing of NATRC.
 - 3. Minimum age of applicant shall be 21 years of age.
 - 4. Must have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the current NATRC rules (see Rule Book).
 - 5. Must have a thorough understanding of the Leisure Division Judge's Manual and the Management Manual.
- B. Requirements
 - 1. Must have completed a minimum of 750 miles. At least 500 miles must be in any combination of Open, Competitive Pleasure or Novice Division classes. The additional 250 miles may be in Leisure Division classes.
 - 2. Must have fulfilled the duties of horsemanship judge secretary.
 - 3. Must file a completed application with the NATRC office. The applicant must list six references. Four of the references must be members in the applicant's own region, two or more of these being NATRC approved judges.
 - 4. Must pass a written exam, and upon completion, must participate in an official Leisure Division Judges training/ orientation seminar.
 - 5. Upon satisfactory completion of the above, the judges committee may

approve the applicant as an apprentice judge.

6. Approved veterinary and horsemanship judges must participate in an official Leisure Division Judge's training seminar before judging the Leisure Division.

C. Apprenticeship (Not required for approved veterinary and horsemanship judges.)

1. Must work at least one mentoring and one apprentice ride with a supervising judge who is an established, approved horsemanship judge and is also an LeD judge.
2. Upon satisfactory completion of an apprentice ride and with the Judges Committee approval, the applicant becomes a provisional judge and may independently judge at least one ride.
3. The apprentice/provisional judge must provide a [progress report](#) to the supervising judge, the ride chair and/or rules interpreter, and the judge's secretary.
4. The application – apprentice – provisional process must be completed within 3 years.
5. Upon satisfactory completion of the above, the Judges Committee shall present its recommendation to the NBOD who will vote to approve the applicant as an approved judge.

B. Annual Renewal of a Leisure Division Judge's Card:

1. A judge shall be an NATRC member in good standing.
2. Within the 12-month period preceding the card's renewal date, a Leisure Division Judge must have accomplished at least two of the following activities:
 - a. Judge a minimum of one Leisure Division ride.
 - b. Attend the national or a regional convention and be present at all seminars related to judging and horse care information.
 - c. Conduct, assist with, or judge an approved introductory clinic.
 - d. Complete in a minimum of one sanctioned ride in any division.
 - e. Serve as ride chair, rules interpreter, P&R chair, judge's secretary, or trailmaster on at least one ride.
3. After receipt of the annual notice of the requirements for renewal, each LeD judge will be responsible for adhering to the requirements. Non-compliance may result in deletion from the LeD active judges list at the discretion of the Judges Committee.
4. Equivalent experience or qualifications may be accepted by the Judges Committee as a substitute for some of the above requirements.
5. Judges who have not judged a ride in 3 consecutive years will be dropped from the active judges list. Under special circumstances, an LeD judge may request in writing to the Judges Committee to remain on the active list.

C. Reinstatement of a Previously Active Leisure Division Judge

1. A judge with an expired/inactive card may request reinstatement.
2. The judge may be required to complete a written test or other requirements satisfactorily as directed by the Judges Committee.

SECTION 4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEISURE DIVISION JUDGES

- A. Judges must have a thorough working knowledge of all NATRC rules and manuals. (See Rule Book, LeD Judges Manual, Judges Manual, Rider's Manual, Management Manual).
- B. Judges are responsible for arriving in time to check horses in for the competition. Failure to comply is grounds for a valid complaint by the ride management against a judge.
- C. Judges should know what the riders know by reading the ride information page and other instructions. Attendance is required at the ride and map briefing.
- D. The Leisure Division Judge must do a basic soundness and surface assessment of the horse at check-in. The role of the judge is NOT to diagnose or offer veterinary advice; it is to determine if the horse is fit to start the ride. The same assessment must be done at the completion of the ride.
- E. A judge shall make evaluations of horse and rider at each observation point. The outcome is scored as a team, with the horse's performance valued at up to 5 points, and the rider's performance valued at up to 5 points for a total of 10 possible points at each trail observation.
- F. A judge is not required to discuss the judging in progress with anyone, however may answer competitors' questions for educational purposes or clarification of observation instructions. Judges are encouraged to discuss safety concerns with competitors as soon as possible.
- G. Safety Considerations - General
 1. Verify course (trail) is natural and native to the local terrain.
 2. Notify management of any unsafe situations in camp or on the trail.
 3. Err on the side of safety.
 4. Complete and sign liability release.
- H. Safety Considerations - Obstacles
 1. The use of artificial or unsafe obstacles is prohibited.
 2. Discuss obstacles with management.
 3. Notify management if you feel a selected obstacle is unsafe for the level of riders competing.
 4. Ensure safety of rider and equine first, versus level of difficulty of obstacle. The judge must consider the safety of an obstacle in light of the fact that there are green horses and novice riders on many rides. When deciding on an obstacle, the judge should consider if it will remain safe after a number of horses have gone through. The size of the horses and ponies entered should also be a consideration.
 5. Brief riders at each ride meeting to ensure they understand they are to use their own judgment when doing obstacles. If they believe the obstacle is unsafe for them or their equine, they have the option to bypass, recognizing it will affect their score.
 6. LeD can be more challenging in accessing five different observation points on trail given the lesser mileage, and particularly in the event of a

full ride. If you are able to remain in one location for two observations, or execute two skills in one observation you can maximize your time and provide competitors with more opportunities and feedback.

- I. Keep in mind that the ideal relationship between judges and riders is one of mutual trust. It begins with the judge in aiming to do best by the riders and in assuming their altruistic aims to do best by their horses.

SECTION 5. REGULATIONS GOVERNING JUDGES

- A. A judge shall not adjudicate a Leisure Division ride in which a member of said judge's family or any horses owned by said judge is competing unless the team is riding Distance Only (DO). The team may not earn placings or points.
- B. A judge may not serve as a rules interpreter, chair or other ride official for any ride in which said judge is officiating.
- C. A judge shall not discuss the purchase, sale or lease of any horse from the check-in until the final awards at a ride in which said judge is officiating.
- D. Failure of a judge to attend a ride to which the judge is committed to officiate will constitute grounds for revocation of his/her judge's card unless illness or accident can be proved. In any case, a ride should be notified as far as possible in advance to allow time to acquire another judge.
- E. Judges at sanctioned NATRC rides and events are serving as ambassadors of the organization as well as performing their official duties. Therefore, the Judges Committee will recommend to the NBOD a reprimand, suspension, or revocation of the Judge's Card for any judge who is found guilty of any of the following acts or offenses:
 1. Disrespectful, abusive or offensive language or behavior toward riders, volunteers, management or others in attendance.
 2. Habitual intoxication or use of illegal drugs while in attendance at a ride or any NATRC event.
 3. Inequity in judging, dishonesty, lack of impartiality or integrity, or dishonorable conduct while judging a ride.
 4. Repeated or habitual delegation of duties as a judge.
 5. Professional incompetence.

SECTION 6. THE ROLE OF THE LEISURE DIVISION JUDGE

The primary functions of a Leisure Division Judge are to evaluate horsemanship as it relates to the riding, management and safety of competitive trail horses; to evaluate a horse's trail maneuvering and behavior; engage in a teaching role; and to serve the sport of NATRC by what might best be termed public relations. As a Leisure Division Judge, the ride you judge may be the first encounter a competitor has with our sport, and first impressions are critical to someone's decision to return. You are an ambassador at all times, and your role is significant.

To do justice to the job, the judge should utilize as many of the five observation sites as possible. The more observations, the less the effect of luck--

as in the unfortunate situation wherein a good team has a bad go at one out of a mere two or three trail observations.

Maximizing the number of observations involves numerous techniques, some to be dealt with before the ride. The first is to appeal to management for a list of all--or many--reasonable access points to the trail. Thus, if it is not possible to get ahead of the first rider, a judge can leapfrog to the next nearest site and continue in that way throughout the day. At times, an extraordinary observation spot might have to be sacrificed, but in the long run it is far better than waiting at the special site for over an hour and sacrificing a number of other observations down the trail. The judge needs to have a meeting with the manager and trailmaster to determine the best strategy for maximizing trail observation opportunities, particularly with the shorter ride structure of a Leisure Division ride.

For judging inside the last 1 mile, or point of forward motion, it is important to remember riders cannot be held up or asked for anything technical. This is a perfect opportunity to watch forward motion equitation such as an uphill, downhill or transition where available and to observe how the horse negotiates the trail.

In general, the primary purpose for hiding at any time is to free the riders from distraction. For purposes of the Leisure Division ride, a judge hiding is discouraged as it does not benefit the riders in this particular ride structure. Judge interaction and visibility are important in the shorter rides. A counter purpose for hiding would be to catch riders at fault. A negative aim of that kind indicates a poor approach to the philosophies of NATRC.

The Teaching Role

Teaching is not a judge's required duty, but many newer riders often expect and desire the function. On the other hand, judges who assume a teaching role might offend some experienced riders. The subject is one of many dilemmas facing judges. Leisure Junior and Leisure Adult riders may be more readily open to direct education versus Leisure Experienced riders for example. Some of your LeD Experienced riders could have more NATRC miles and experience than you do. They could also be judges in our sport. Know and understand your audience.

Directly teaching new riders depends first on their need for safety instructions at the instant and secondly on their personal requests to be taught. Whether or not the latter is forthcoming, the judge should project a demeanor of openness to questions and respond as time and circumstances permit.

Instructions can be especially meaningful when delivered by the judge at briefings. Scorecard comments accompanied by explanations and recommendations give riders a reference source for future rides.

For competitors in any sport, learning comes largely from within by experiencing what works best and what does not. However, a good teacher expedites the process. In NATRC, a judge's helpful remarks can also stimulate riders to pursue further in the sport.

The Public Relations Role

In addition to good judging, serving NATRC can be accomplished in easy person-to-person ways at a ride. For bystanders, explain about the sport as much as time allows. The bystanders might be parents of juniors, prospective NATRC riders, the ride's property owners--to whom you offer respect and gratitude--or park personnel to whom you can also remark on the sport's

wholesomeness for taxpayers. For ride management, understanding the stresses of their work efforts and relating to them accordingly is important to their weekend's enjoyment.

The ideal relationship between judge and riders is one of mutual trust. It begins with you by trusting their integrity and their aims to do best by their horses. Overlook personality traits that appear negative. A frowning rider might merely be concentrating. A rider who looks bored might instead be tired or even ill. A face that rarely shows a smile could be simply structured that way rather than reflecting a poor spirit. The rider's trust in a judge comes ultimately from the quality of judging. In the meantime, however, the judge's attitude and demeanor hold sway.

There is a prerequisite to the appropriate attitude. It is that you want the rider--all the riders--to do well. Given that feeling, you will automatically project whatever is appropriate in the way of being friendly, open, caring, and understanding of rider concerns. At the same time, you have been selected to handle a job, and in that regard your demeanor is also professional.

After the awards ceremony, listen willingly to questions or complaints regarding the judging. Take no affront by the latter. Instead, think with care before responding. Try first to identify with the rider's point of view, and then analyze the complaint for its possible merits. In other words, try to view the situation through the "lens of the rider". A judge who has kept the feeling of a rider will be alert to riders' concerns such as poor maps, markings, timing, etc. and will take those matters into consideration when warranted. If you still find no errors or flaws in your judging, appeal to the rider's mind by presenting your own point of view and the reasoning that led to the judgment call in question.

An easygoing, rational, person-to-person exchange of views can have a good effect on both judge and rider--with each coming away having learned something.

SECTION 7. JUDGING PROCEDURES

A. SCORECARDS AND SCORING

Scoring is based on a system of positive response for performance and achievement. Up to five (5) trail observations may be conducted during the course of the ride. Each observation is worth a total value of ten (10) points; the rider can earn up to five (5) points and the horse can earn up to five (5) points, with the points added together for a total team score on each observation. There are times the rider does everything "right", however the horse just isn't cooperative, so the rider may score a 5, while the horse scores a 2 for a total team score of 7 on that observation. There may be times where the horse is willing, quiet and responsive, but the rider is giving confusing cues so the point values may be opposite of the previous example.

At the right end of each observation on the scorecard is a box titled "Partnership" with a plus and minus. If appropriate, mark the selection as you consider the overall teamwork on the performance similar to a teacher giving a grade in school (A+, A, A-, etc.). The basic letter grades (A, B, etc.) are equivalent to a neutral feeling about the partnership and therefore neither box would be checked. Keep in mind the pluses and minuses could break ties, so use accordingly if you feel a strong indication either way of the partnership demonstrated at each observation. This mark is for a facet of the performance

not captured by only the rider or only the horse points.

Encouraging, constructive and educational comments should be entered in the comments box to provide the rider feedback. Please note: **trail observations are not to be conducted in camp**, with the exception of an observed mount before they time out, as long as it doesn't interfere with the designated start time of the ride. You must arrange this with the ride manager prior to checking in teams and communicate the request to riders during the briefing to ensure timing requirements are met.

The Surface and Soundness section is not scored. It is designed to reflect educational comments, to indicate if the team is permitted to start, to note if there is a change/no change in surface factors from check-in to check-out, or if the team is determined to be Completion Only (CO) or pulled for lameness or serious surface factor changes (wounds, sore backs rubs, etc.) that would prevent continuing.

The Pulse & Respiration section is scored and worth a value of twenty (20) points. The pulse is worth five (5) points, the respiration is worth five (5) points, and absence of holds is worth ten (10) points. Criteria for accruing the maximum point value are a pulse that is 12 or less and a respiration that is 9 or less in a 15-second count. Scoring for readings over 12 and 9 are noted on the back of the scorecard. Horses that are above a 12 on pulse and/or above a 9 on respiration may request a recheck. The recheck is final and is the reading that will be recorded on the P&R card, even if the initial count was lower.

On an Open/Novice/CP ride, the veterinary judge establishes the P & R hold criteria. Due to the absence of a veterinary judge on a Leisure Division ride, a standard criterion of 17 or above in 15 seconds on pulse and/or respiration results in an automatic 10-minute hold. Both pulse and respiration will be checked again, and if either is 17 or above, the horse will be held an additional 10 minutes. **There will be one final check, and the horse will be automatically pulled if not recovered below 17 on pulse or respiration after a total of 30 minutes of recovery time.** These additional P&R's are for welfare only to see if the horse has recovered, as only the initial outgoing P&R is scored for the specific readings. If a horse is not held, it receives the full points credit of ten (10) for the hold section. If a horse has one hold, it will earn five (5) points, and if there is a second hold, the team is given zero (0) points on this portion of the scorecard. The pulse and respiration criteria and scoring are located on the back of the scorecard.

The Safety & Courtesy section is reserved for scoring at the end of the ride. If the team had no safety infractions during the ride, they are granted the full five (5) points. If safety issues were noted (i.e., crowding, bunching, dropping reins, moving horse too close to judge or others for safety etc.) the specific comments should be entered into the comments box and an appropriate score given.

There is a section on the card for penalties. This is used for rule infractions or time penalties only. The penalty point value must be noted in the Penalty Points box, and a clear explanation citing the specific rule infraction noted in the Penalty Point Explanation box. The Leisure Division employs a specific bracketed system for applying time penalties to keep it consistent and fair for all competitors. Please refer to the LeD Penalty Points on the back of the Leisure Division scorecard.

The easiest way to complete the scorecards at final check-out is to be sure that all entries prior to final check-out have been entered and scored. This includes the P&R scores. Keeping up with the cards throughout the ride

expedites check-out, final tabulations and awards presentation.

NATRC does not allow ties in the placings of the top six teams in each Leisure Division class (Adult, Experienced and Junior). Breaking ties should be done using a full evaluation of the tied teams' cards, with the team winning the tie possessing more pluses in partnership, a horse with more pulse and respiration point credit, and the team with more safety and courtesy point credit. If all aspects are still equal, consider an observation that was more challenging than others.

Scorecard comments reflect the brief snapshots we have of riders and horses on the trail and impart our views on the capabilities and limitations of the team. Riders use the cards to help them achieve these goals. It is through our expertise that we influence riders to hone their understandings and abilities to achieve their goals for themselves and their horses. Scorecard comments should help the rider know what to do to better help the horse. Good trail notes are critical to accuracy of the scorecards and to answer any questions that may arise following the ride. A sample scorecard can be found after the index.

B. CHECK-IN AND CHECK-OUT

The Leisure Division judge must perform a basic assessment of each horse to determine if it is fit to start the ride. Every horse should be observed in the same manner to ensure consistency and fairness in the initial evaluation. The assessment is NOT conducted to diagnose or provide veterinary advice in any capacity; the role of the judge is to determine if there are any surface factors or soundness issues that would negatively impact the horse's comfort and well-being during the ride within the bounds of good horsemanship.

Begin the check-in by saying "hello" to the competitor! Introduce yourself and let them know you are there to help them and make them feel welcome. Being approachable is key! Competitors should be comfortable coming to you with questions or concerns.

Begin the check-in assessment by glancing at the corners of the mouth and under the chin looking for cuts, rubs or bruises from the bit or curb chain/chin strap. Look at both eyes and the head in general. While observing the horse, feel the chest and girth areas for tack rubs, calluses, lumps, bumps, and cleanliness. If the horse needs more grooming, particularly in tack areas to prevent rubbing or chafing, politely show those areas to the rider and explain why. Carefully palpate the back and loin areas using varying pressure of the fingers and heel of the hands. Use a flat hand; don't dig. You are simply determining if there is any soreness in the horse's back or loins that would prohibit the horse from starting the ride. Mild tenderness may not be soreness, as some horses are more sensitive than others, so be cautious to not hastily prevent a team from competing. If you are in doubt, leave the decision up to the competitor, but allow them to start.

Conduct a brief visual inspection of the legs. The leg observation should be limited to this scope, and no palpation, leg handling or flexion should be done. To complete the check-in, observe the team trotting **straight away and back**, not longeing in circles. Mark where you want them to stop and turn around. Remember, you are only working to prevent an obviously lame horse from starting the ride, not diagnosing or advising where you believe the lameness to be. If lameness is not consistent or readily visible, allow the team to start, but let the rider know you are uncertain, so they may be watchful or choose to not start.

The complete exam should take less than two minutes. Be cordial, but not overly chatty as you need to keep the check-in flow moving.

The check-out assessment should be identical to the check-in assessment. Again, this is simply for purposes of identifying surface factors negatively impacting the horse and for educational purposes for the rider. Check-in and check-out are not scored. If a horse is consistently and visibly lame at check-out, the team may be granted Completion Only (CO) or pulled. Suggested guidelines are located on the back of the Leisure Division scorecard.

There are three scenarios available regarding soundness: 1) If the horse has a serious lameness at check-in, share that with the rider, express your concern, and, based on the back of the card, the horse should not start the ride. 2) If the horse has a serious lameness during the ride, share that with the rider, express your concern, and explain that based on the back of the card, the horse should be pulled at that point. 3) If the horse has developed a serious, consistent lameness at the end of the ride, share that with the rider, express your concern, and explain that based on the back of the card you are going to give a Completion Only or a Pull.

Similar scenarios for dialog with the rider would apply for surface factors: sore back, mouth/ bit rubs, or girth rubs/ edema; or significant lesions on the legs that would prevent continuing. The team may be granted Completion Only or pulled.

Use the presentation aspect of the check-in/check-out as an educational opportunity for safety issues. Make constructive comments when appropriate. A comment and score on an unruly or dangerous horse – kicking, biting, running over the handler or judge - could be noted in the Safety & Courtesy scoring box. Likewise, a comment relating to a handler for such things as positioning the horse unsafely close to the secretary, winding the rope around his/her hand, or dragging an excessively long lead could be made at the time or noted in the Safety & Courtesy scoring box. Maintain a common-sense approach on safety issues that most reasonable horse people would be aware of. **Focus on the safety issue itself rather than being picky about a technique.**

C. TRAIL EQUITATION

The purpose of good trail equitation is to ease the horse's effort in carrying the rider over a long distance and to enable the horse to perform smoothly and safely, thus conserving energy and preserving soundness as much as possible throughout the day's course.

From that functional definition, the judging of trail equitation is to be based on its relevance to the sport of NATRC distance riding. The competitor should use riding form appropriate to preserving the horse's soundness and conserving the horse's energy as much as conditions permit. Related to that is judging the rider's endeavors to deal with horse behavior to accomplish smoothness in horse performance and safety for self and others.

The Mount

The main concerns in judging the mount are the rider's handling and timing to initiate the mount, smoothness going up, lightness into the saddle, and rein control throughout. The judge will also evaluate the horse's behavior and response to cues.

The use of natural aids and terrain (logs, rocks, benches, etc.) makes the mounting process easier on the horse because it produces less torque on the back from pulling the saddle over to the side.

The following actions are not desirable: mounting on downhill side of horse; dwelling in stirrup on side of horse; dragging foot over rump; not resetting saddle after mounting; permitting horse to walk off before mount is completed; and so forth. As LeD is judged as a team, it is important to look at the big picture. If the horse “stepped off” during the mount, did the rider inadvertently cue it with a dragging leg? Were the reins too long for ready control? Perhaps the horse merely took a balancing step as the rider landed heavy and off centered due to the rider positioning too far from the mounting block or terrain being used. Looking at each part critically helps in assessing the horse and rider equitably for their role in the mount and assigning the appropriate points for each.

In “Comments,” the judge can use the scorecard to offer suggestions for improvement. Example: “Square up horse for better balance.” For a cantle mount, the judge might write: “Better to use right side of pommel for lift.” If the cantle mount is performed smoothly, it should not be faulted since a cantle mount might be necessary for some elderly or disabled riders.

Ascents

To ease the horse's effortful push from the hindquarters, the rider should be over the horse's center of gravity (near the withers), light in the saddle, and with the upper body angled forward, folded from the hips (not waist), to some degree. How light in the saddle and how far forward depend on the slope. A slight slope, for example, might not require much change in position or forward lean. If the ascent is steep, some calf pressure might be needed to help the rider keep his/her legs and seat in the most effective position. It is acceptable to use the horse's mane to help stay forward during a steep climb as long as balance and control are not sacrificed. Riders should have light contact with the saddle and not be “perched” above it with daylight in between. This is an unstable and insecure position.

To evaluate the rider, the judge's best view is from a location perpendicular to the rider. Here the appropriateness of the uphill position can be clearly seen as the rider passes by. Beyond that, the judge's perspective becomes distorted as the rider ascends away from the spot.

Examples of comments as the judge might write them on scorecards:

- Use leg support to be light in saddle
- Better control with shorter reins
- Relax ankles and let heels drop down
- Use quiet hands
- Use more subtle leg cues
- Line your heels under your hips for best balance

The horse will be evaluated on behavior, responsiveness to the rider, managing its foot placement in relationship to the terrain or trail obstructions and willingness to negotiate the trail.

Descents

As on any terrain, the rider should be well balanced--neither too forward nor back--and should ride “light in the saddle,” using the legs for their muscular effort

in maintaining lightness.

For judging the descent, two angles of view work best. The first is directly opposite the slope for viewing body and leg position and the reining hand(s). Note if the feet are planted forward and the rider is leaning back. Both those actions put the rider's seat down hard and back in the saddle, thus interfering with the working of the hindquarters needed for the animal's control on a descent.

Continue the observation of the rider descending away from your spot. Is the rider evenly poised and smooth despite the horse's side to side motion, or is the rider's body swaying? The ill effect of body sway is two-fold: It makes for heaviness first on one side, then on the other, and it can also cause the saddle to rub. However, in observing slight body sway, the judge needs to also look at the horse's motion before faulting the rider. If the horse's hindquarter swing is inordinately strong, leniency would be appropriate in evaluating the rider.

Although holding the cantle may suffice as a psychological aid on a steep descent, the practice tends to twist the rider's body and interfere with balance. Oppositely, a light non-reining hand on the pommel, horn, or swell can aid the rider's balance, thereby helping the horse as well. It may serve the rider from a safety standpoint if the horse stumbles. It would not be desirable, however, for the hand and arm to be jamming down and putting extra force over the withers.

The horse will be evaluated on behavior, responsiveness to the rider, managing its foot placement in relationship to the terrain or trail obstructions and willingness to negotiate the trail.

Down / Up (Transition)

It is strongly recommended that the judge observe at least one down/up on a ride. A gully with a steep descent into it followed by an immediate sharp rise is ideal for observing trail equitation skills.

For a smooth performance, the rider needs to apply not only all the body and leg principles of the descent and climb positions vital to balance and lightness, but the rider also must rein with tactfulness based on the horse's ability and temperament. Most importantly, the rider needs to make the transition from the descent to the climb position smoothly in order not to interfere with the horse or jeopardize its balance and safety.

The rider who does not move readily into the climb position at the instant the climb-out begins will be put behind the action of the horse. The cause might be inadequate body alertness and/or inadequate rein control, the latter allowing the horse to rush or lunge. To compound the problem, the rider may be forced to use the reins for balance if the body lurches back.

The horse will be evaluated on behavior, responsiveness to the rider, managing its foot placement in relationship to the terrain or trail obstructions and willingness to negotiate the trail.

Judging Observations and "Obstacles"

The word obstacle suggests interference with progress such as in a forest where downed timber must either be surmounted or circumvented or where a mounted rider must travel down a creek-bed to pick a safe route between boulders. In NATRC an obstacle situation might be simpler, such as riding into a dead end and backing out or being halted to make an offside dismount/remount in a tight spot on a hillside.

Although good riders on good trail horses should be able to handle the above natural difficulties with relative ease and safety, others might not. The judge, therefore, must be circumspect in selecting an observation--particularly where a section of trail might deteriorate grossly after a number of horses has passed and affects both fair comparison and/or safety.

Another dilemma facing the judge is whether or not an observation's delay will excessively affect the ride's timing. As for the team's time, the judge must have another person record any lengthy waiting time and have that added to the maximum time for those who are delayed. Aside from that complexity, there are at least two other reasons to avoid a long-delaying observation: some horses will benefit from the rest whereas others will be made overanxious by the delay. Neither extreme is fair. Keep in mind that although special observations may require halting the teams briefly, frequent or lengthy interference detracts from the progress of a true trail ride.

The main purpose of an obstacle/observation is for the judge to observe the rider's skills in cueing the horse, a matter which involves the rider's rating of the horse, timing, reining, leg aids (often properly unnoticeable), possibly voice cues, and so forth, plus the horse's abilities and responsiveness to cues. For the good competitive rider with a well-prepared horse, a complex, challenging situation offers an excellent opportunity to demonstrate skills. Such an observation is also desirable to aid the judge's job, but here again the judge needs to face the dilemmas regarding time and safety.

In any situation where a precise route is important to the judging, the course must be exactly marked with ribbons perhaps as close as every three feet so the course is clear to the rider. If oral instructions are necessary, the wording must be carefully thought out for clarity and simplicity. The exact instructions must then be stated distinctly to each rider face-to-face, preferably twice for dealing with hearing problems and/or the phenomenon of mind-gone-blank in a moment of anxiety. If a rider starts the route off course, the judge would do well to call out to the rider to begin anew.

For log observations, the judge must indicate whether they are to be gone over or around. Bear in mind that riders too have dilemmas of what is expected of them.

Whatever the situation, the judge needs to hold fast to the observation's purpose--that is, to judge horse and rider skills in maneuvering and handling the situation itself.

Observations deliberately devised to trick riders are unjust and have no place in NATRC.

Riders in a natural back-up observation where such things as rocks, brush, or limbs need to be avoided should look behind before cueing the horse to back. Therefore, the judge may fault those who do not. In a quite different situation where riders have been directed to trot to the judge along a flat, clear road, then halt and back the horse; the riders most likely do not need to check behind within the mere seconds of trotting the space--especially when they have been started individually.

The application of leg aids in a back-up can be so subtle as to be unobservable with a skilled rider on a well-trained horse. Therefore, if the horse backs perfectly, the judge must not fault for what may appear to be non-use of leg aids. (This would be an example of where a "plus" could be applied in the

Partnership section at the end of the observation). Awarding fewer points is justified when a rider incorrectly applies leg aids--such as on the wrong side of the horse--or does not use them at all to correct a crooked back-up. In either case, the judge must be appropriately positioned for observing both legs--that is viewing from straight on, either ahead or behind.

Seeing the whole picture in a judging scene--such as horse/rider interaction and the influence of nearby horses--precludes faulting superficially or too hastily.

Competitors who attempt an obstacle, but are unable to complete it, should be given more point credit than competitors who do not attempt the obstacle. Or said another way, no matter how badly a competitor does, they do better than one who didn't try it at all. Missed observations are scored 0/0.

Remember that artificial or unsafe obstacles are prohibited. Ask yourself:

- (1) Is the obstacle safe for horse and rider?
- (2) Is it appropriate for the sport of competitive distance riding?
- (3) Does it adversely affect the flow of the ride?

Give instructions clearly and consistently to each competitor. In setting up an obstacle, think about "How does this teach, or demonstrate, the best care and safety of the horse and rider?"

General

Deviations from good trail equitation have the potential to affect the horse's carrying ability, soundness, and mental attitude--sometimes grossly, sometimes minutely. In any case, the horse is not well served, and the deviations receive less credit in points relative to their importance.

A judge must also look for good qualities. With that positive philosophy plus a sensitive eye, a judge will be able to pick out good aspects of a rider's equitation regardless of any imperfections that seem to dominate the picture.

D. MANEUVERING TRAIL/BEHAVIOR

Maneuvering Trail/Behavior for the trail horse presumes, above all, that it shall be a safe horse! Then, consideration may be given to the features that make a horse pleasant during the rigors of traversing challenging terrain.

A pleasant horse performs the task without undue harassment to or from the rider; it allows the rider to relax, subsequently see the scenery, and enjoy trail riding even more. The scoring of behavior should reflect this priority. Equally, understand how a rider's equitation or cues could be negatively impacting the horse's performance or attitude (i.e. confusing cues, yanking on the reins, excessive kicking etc.)

The traits considered important are: standing quietly for an exam or P&R check, standing for the mount, readily responding to aids and cues, being respectful and responsive to the rider, willingly stepping through obstacles, lightly traveling at the rider's set pace, trotting in hand willingly and safely, and socializing with other horses.

Dangerous behavior by the horse may be grounds for disqualification and removal from the ride. A fractious or unruly horse, especially at exams or P&R stops, should not be allowed to compete. It endangers the volunteer help, other competing horses, and riders. Please refer to the Dangerous Horse Policy.

E. SAFETY AND COURTESY

Safety and courtesy tend to be interwoven in this category in that courtesy is practical from a safety standpoint--and vice versa. In general, an attentive competitor who understands the safety aspects of horsemanship and who respects the rights of others will ride accordingly. Some of the following comments illustrate the connection.

A long-established standard dictates that a rider should keep at least one horse-length behind another except when overtaking to pass. A minimum of two horse-lengths, however, might be necessary on uneven terrain to allow for better visibility and reaction time. The judge should note on the scorecard, "Following too closely" or--more seriously--"Following nose-to-tail."

Wearing apparel (footwear, headgear, shorts, and so forth) per se is not part of the Leisure Division evaluation. However, if the rider shows up for check-in wearing unsafe footwear, such as sandals or flip-flops, simply tell the rider that you'll be happy to examine their horse when they return wearing safe footwear.

Approved safety headgear is required for all juniors while mounted whether on the trail or in camp.

The judge needs to look for contingencies when observing "crowding" at a particular location. Thus, a judge's shortsightedness and unfair deductions can be avoided. At water stops, for example, crowding situations often occur that should not necessarily be faulted. The main considerations are the limitations of space and the ride's timing. For a judge to expect riders to wait courteously in line at a trough or small stream may be out of proportion to the needs of concerned riders with thirsty horses and little time to spare.

Often the scorecard notation of "crowding" is misapplied. The word itself implies push-and-shove. Hence, for a rider who is simply inattentive, the judge would do well to phrase the comment more appropriately or specifically--for example, "Placed horse unsafely close to another," "Inattentive to the risks of crowding," or the like.

Commenting for "bunching" on the trail is sometimes necessary in order to be fair to non-bunched competitors whose equitation is readily evaluated. Thus, riders who pass an observation site in packs so tight that they cannot be judged individually can receive less point credit under "Safety & Courtesy".

It is important that the safety of ride personnel, volunteers and judges is included in this section as many times riders are oblivious to those on the ground as they are executing tasks such as judged observations or handling their horse in a P & R. This section includes the safety of everyone involved in the ride around all competitors.

Positive scorecard comments for the category of "Safety & Courtesy" might include exemplary sportsmanship, consideration of other competitors, ride personnel, and property owners, helpfulness to riders in need, and the like.

F. JUDGING RIDERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Refer to the current Rule Book. Riders needing assistance may be so permitted at the judge's discretion. For example, a judge could allow the rider to use assistance in hauling water buckets and for placing the saddle on the horse or removing it. Further assistance becomes problematic in judging but should be considered at the judge's discretion. A rider may pass, or complete an observation in an adapted manner; however fewer points should be credited if

the desired outcome could not be completed. Granted that NATRC is a competitive sport which includes human athletic performance, a judge can deal with riders with special needs on a basis that is reasonably fair to all competitors.

SECTION 8. PENALTY POINTS

- A. If there is a rule infraction that does not specifically call for disqualification, the judge may evaluate that infraction and assess penalty points. The ride chair shall inform riders of any penalty points assessed by judges as soon as possible by the end of the ride. The judge will assess the penalty point(s) prior to finalizing cards. This is the only section of the Leisure Division scorecard where a deduction can occur. (See sample scorecard on page 21 and current Rule Book regarding penalties).
- B. Timers must inform the ride chair who must in turn inform riders and judge of any time penalty points. This should be done prior to awards. These penalty points shall be deducted from the total score just prior to placing.
- C. Off-Trail Penalty Points
 - 1. Penalty points may be assessed against a team for being off-trail, but it must first be determined that a competitive advantage was gained by traveling the off-trail route.
 - 2. Don't give penalty points for slight off-trail infractions. You may, however, use slight off-trail infractions in consideration of breaking a tie since it is considered poor horsemanship to be unable to follow a well-marked trail.
 - 3. Considerations prior to assessment of penalties:
 - a. Did the rider retrace his/her steps and come back on course at the point of leaving the trail?
 - b. Was it rider error or poor marking by management?
 - c. Did the rider have to be told of being off-trail by the judge or management?
 - d. Did the horse take a longer or shorter route by being off-trail or was a particular stress point in the trail (climb, descent, slide, etc.) missed or avoided?
 - e. If a shortcut occurred, to what extent did it give a distinct competitive advantage?
 - f. Was the act intentional or unintentional?
 - g. Was the rider exercising good judgment in avoiding a dangerous obstacle? (Bog, wire down, etc.)
 - h. Trail "make-up" is not an acceptable alternative to adjudicate missed trail or observations.
 - i. We are dealing with reality and not minutia.

SECTION 9. SCORECARDS AND SCORING - GENERAL

- A. Carefully read over the cards throughout the day, and prior to check-out to ensure the accuracy of scorecard comments and consistent scoring.
- B. Look for quality in performance. The use of positive scorecard comments affirms the judge's awareness and also reinforces the learning process for riders. Selection of a plus or minus in the Partnership section may be used

to indicate the quality of the teamwork.

- C. Pulls. Write "PULL" clearly and largely across the front of the scorecard and indicate the pull code as indicated on the back of the scorecard:

L = Lameness
M = Metabolic (P & R Pull if not recovered within 30 minutes)
DQ = Disqualified
RO = Rider Option (rider sick, didn't want to ride in the rain...)

For this to work be sure to be true to the codes. For instance, if the horse is slightly or inconsistently lame, the rider may wish to opt out of the ride. That is fine, but add the pull code as lameness. This information helps us understand what is happening to horses at our rides.

- D. Confirmation of a tie-break must be indicated for NATRC's official purposes. If a tie is broken by the use of plus and/or minus marks from the Partnership boxes, place a plus mark next to the total score of the prevailing rider. In the case of a 3-way tie or more, add more pluses by the scores. For example, indicate a tie-break between three riders each with a score of 70 by 70++ for the highest, 70+ for the next highest, and simply 70 for the lowest placing. A 3-way tie could also be differentiated by using 70+, 70, and 70-.
- E. Disqualification. If a team is disqualified after awards, the places will automatically be moved up. Break ties in 7th place to avoid later problems.
- F. All scorecards shall be complete with judging notations before the cards are presented to the competitors. Simply placing a score on a card is not acceptable. Placings for LeD are publicly announced and/or awarded through sixth place for each class at rides.
- G. Scorecard errors. The NATRC data team will send copies of the cards of the team(s) involved in a dispute to the judge aiding the judge in making any corrections in placings. Riders involved will subsequently be notified.
- H. Judges' secretaries. Judges are encouraged to make efficient use of their secretary. Start right off by giving instructions as to what you expect and tell how the data will be recorded. Give notes you have taken to the secretary as soon as possible in order that he/she may record them promptly. Thus, when the ride is over all notes will then be in their proper place on the scorecards and you may proceed with your evaluations. Efficient use of your secretary will make your final judging easier, faster awards for management, and happy riders when they get a completed scorecard at the end of the ride. Remember to keep your notes for the rest of the ride year, labeled and in order in case there is a need to refer to them later to resolve any questions, complaints, or protests after the ride.

INDEX

- aid, 1, 11, 12
- aids, 10, 12, 13
- apparel, 14
- artificial, 1, 3, 13
- ascent, 10
- attitude, 6, 13
- awards, 4, 6, 8, 15, 16
- back, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16
- backing, 11
- balance, 10, 11
- behavior, 4, 9, 10, 13
- behavior, 9, 13
- briefing, 3, 5
- camp, 14
- courtesy, 7
- climb, 10, 11, 15
- conditions, 9
- control, 9, 10, 11
- courtesy, 14
- Courtesy, 9, 14
- crowding, 7, 14
- cues, 6, 9, 12, 13
- disqualification, 16
- descent, 11, 15
- dismount, 11
- disqualification, 13, 15
- distance, 9, 13
- Distance Only, 4
- drugs, 4
- equitation, 5, 9, 11, 13, 14
- eyes, 8
- feet, 11, 12
- foot, 10, 11
- footwear, 14
- handling, 8, 9, 12, 14
- hands, 8
- head, 8
- headgear, 14
- juniors, 5, 14
- lameness, 7, 8, 9, 16
- leg, 11, 12
- loin, 8
- marking, 6, 15
- mount, 7, 9, 10, 13
- obstacle, 3, 11, 13, 15
- obstacles, 3, 13
- off-trail, 15
- oral, 12
- P&R, 2, 7, 13
- pace, 13
- penalty, 7, 15
- Regulations, 3
- rein, 9, 10, 11, 13
- renewal, 2
- requirements, 2
- responsibility, 3
- rest, 12
- requirements, 1
- rubs, 7, 8, 9
- rule, 7, 15
- rules, 1, 2, 3, 4
- saddle, 9, 10, 11, 14
- soundness, 1, 3, 8, 9, 13
- Soundness, 7
- started, 12
- stress, 15
- sway, 6, 11
- tack, 8
- terrain, 3, 10, 11, 13, 14
- ties, 8, 16
- timing, 6, 7, 9, 12, 14
- trailmaster, 2, 5
- trot, 12
- trotting, 8
- water, 14
- withers, 10, 11

SAMPLE LEISURE DIVISION SCORECARD – FRONT



LEISURE DIVISION SCORECARD

OBSERVATIONS									
Horse's Manoeuvring Trail / Behavior and Rider's Equitation & Communication									
Horse Rider	Designated	Track (MC)	Hocks/Walk	Sustained	Day/In	Expert	Participating	Points	Comments
	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	0-5 (max)	1-5 (max)	
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Comments:									
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Comments:									
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Comments:									
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Comments:									
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Comments:									

Rider #	Name	Age	Sex	Date
DO	Name			
	TYPE: 0-100 (0-100)	NO. OF ROUNDS	CLASS	EXPERIENCE

Surface & Soundness			
Check In	Charge at Check Out		
No / Minor	Spouse / Lame		
Mouth			
Girth			
Back			
Legs			
Soundness			
OK to Start <input type="checkbox"/>	Finish <input type="checkbox"/>		
DO	PUB		
Pulse & Respiration: 16 go / 17 hold			
Pulse	1st Hold	2nd Hold	Points
Respiration	0-8	0-8	0-8
Holds	1-4	1-4	0-8
IKAR Points 0 - 20 (Refer to back for scoring)			
Safety & Courtesy			
Comments:			
Subtotal			
Penalty Points			
SCORE			
PLACE			

