

Judge's Perspective From Clyde Poarch

Easy Fixes To Improve

Hunter Show Ring Performance

There are lots of things that riders can easily fix to get better results in the show ring. I see these things as a judge, and I also see them as a show manager. You get different perspectives from each role.

Here they are, in no particular order of importance, but just as they come to mind.

1 In the hunter ring, you are supposed to wear gloves, in equitation classes on the flat and over fences. It's not necessarily that you are going to lose if you don't, but in a tie breaker, it comes into effect. Wearing gloves is in the rule book; it's part of the uniform. Associate shows are where you are supposed to be learning how to show properly, so you can step up if that is your goal.. Part of learning how to show properly is wearing the right thing.

2 Also related to "what to wear" is "what not to wear." It's a fad for small children to come into the ring with big ribbons at the end of their pig tails. The ribbons have gotten much too large and the pig tails too long, and they block their number. It's not my job as a judge to ask for your number. It's your job to make sure I can see it. I normally don't punish little children for this, but it's a mistake. Trainers and parents think it's cute, but I'm old school and believe your hair should be under your helmet.

3 Here's a really easy one to fix: Don't cut your corners and use your whole ring. Cutting corners sets you up for a bad approach to the next fence. Sometimes it may happen because a rider doesn't know how to balance their horse on a turn, but a lot of the time it happens because the rider is hurried. Take a deep breath. Make your turns smooth and even. Use the whole ring. I think most trainers out there today know it and preach it, but when people enter the show ring, sometimes they forget the basics. They are just nervous, and I understand that. But this is a simple thing to fix to improve performance.

4 I see a lot of coaching from outside the ring. I even see riders turn and look at the person doing the coaching instead of looking where they are going. Look where you are going. Trainers and parents should tone down outside- the-ring coaching and let the riders become more dependent on themselves.

5 I often see horses and riders that are over faced and not prepared. They are stepping up a little too quickly. It may take a rider once or twice to realized that they've done that, but once you do, you need to back down. Not to say that I have not been guilty of doing it myself. It's an easy mistake to make. Sometimes you're not doing well at shows because you're simply outclassed by better horses, but that's different than being overfaced.

It's hard to admit sometimes that you've got to back up, but that's why rules exist to allow you to reclaim green status.

6 Sometimes you may still get a ribbon at a show, even a good one, but you might just be the best of the worst. You have to be smart enough to know when you have received a quality ribbon. If you go in a class and everyone else falls off and you win, it doesn't mean you are the next McLain Ward. And it isn't all about the ribbons. If you achieve your goals and you improve, that's what you should be happy about.

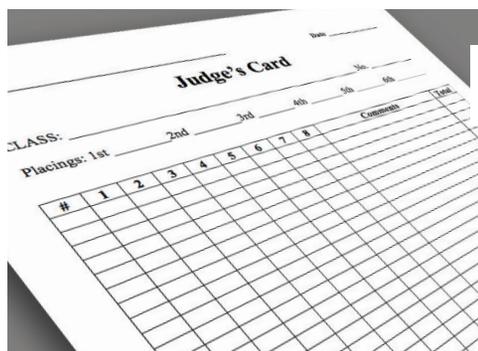
7 When you're judging, sometimes you are sitting there with a bit of time on your hands waiting for the next rider to come in the ring and watching the in gate. I see so many riders at the gate who are not prepared. There is far too much in-gate coaching going on, and they are wasting everyone's time, and it's rude. It's not a time to give riding lessons. If every rider takes two extra minutes at the in gate, that adds hours to the day at a typically sized show.

8 You don't need to own a \$500 coat or a pair of custom boots. But everybody should be neat and tidy. Appearance counts. It may not drop you down in the placings, but judges notice if you didn't make the effort to make yourself and the horse look presentable. It's called a horse show for a reason. It's about presentation. If you went to a dog show, you certainly would have groomed your dog and paid attention to your appearance.

9 I see kids and adults get flustered in the ring by small mistakes, whether real or perceived. Then they go into "hurry up" mode and make it worse. Sometimes you see a refusal and then they come back and approach the fence the same way again and get faster and faster about it. But you can make even a major mistake in the show ring, and, if you don't get flustered and don't get in a hurry, you can recover and maybe even win the class! If you make a mistake, relax, take it easy, think, put it behind you and ride the rest of the course.

The minute you walk in the ring until the minute you walk out of the ring, you are being judged. If you watch the people who are winning at shows, you will never see these people walk in the ring in a big hurry. Take a deep breath and relax. Make your transitions to the trot and canter smooth. Your entry and exit circles are given marks by the judge, and they can be tie breakers for placings when all the jumps were equal.

Remember that these are horse SHOWS and you are paying for our opinions as judges. Most of the judges in the world are fair and want you to go well; quite frequently they are rooting for you to have a good trip. But it is their opinion. Some judges think one kind of mistake is worse than another -- for example, a horse may swap off in front of a fence. Some judges won't care and others will kill you for it. Some judges will be more lenient about certain mistakes than others. It is just their opinion that day and that's how they judge. It doesn't make one judge right or wrong. It's just a matter of what one person thinks is more important.



About The Author: Clyde Poarch has spent several decades showing and training horses to multiple championships in horse and pony divisions at just about every level of horse showing. He has judged and managed horse shows for many years and has been chairman of the VHSA Associate Executive Committee since its inception, overseeing the Associate Program's growth to approximately 400-500 shows per year. He currently manages about eight or nine Associate shows a year and judges about 20-25 shows a year.