

Guidelines for Rider Classes

The performance of the horse can be the best guide to the ability of a rider. Generally a horse will only go as well as he is ridden (if you look to the rider you will usually see why the horse travels the way he does both good and bad). The exception being the passenger or sitter who has a well behaved and educated mount on which he merely sits and steers. Workouts will easily sort out this rider.

There is only one correct way to sit on a horse and pictures of this can be found in any good dressage textbook. It is when deviations from this standard occur that the effectiveness of the rider is impaired.

The rider should sit with a firm, relaxed deep seat, allowing the horse his freedom of movement but at the same time demanding that he has self-carriage.

The shoulders, hips and heels should be in a vertical line. Any forward inclination of the upper body (usually starting at the head) will mean the rider is ahead of the movement and he will encourage the horse to fall on the forehand. The seat will not effectively be in the saddle to drive the horse on the bit. If the legs are too far forward, they too are less effective.

Any backward inclination means the rider is behind the movement, although he is in a better position to ride the horse forward. Often leaning back can go with shooting the legs forward.

Elbows should hang directly down from the shoulder, lightly resting by the sides. Outward pointing elbows, while aesthetically unappealing can also create a false and incorrect hand position.

Hands should be held with the thumb uppermost, knuckle-to-knuckle and just above the horse's wither. Reins that are too long is a very common fault and a bad one for it reduces the rider's control.

Never should a rider neck rein (pass one rein to the opposite side of the horse) as this creates a false flexion (bending in the neck only) or worse still, a sideways tilting of the horse's nose. There should be a direct line from the elbow, through the hand to the horse's mouth, otherwise the hands are being carried either too high or too low. The former case often results in the horse being above the bit, the latter can occur when the rider tries to drag down the head with the hands into a position, which might resemble being on the bit.

The seat should be in the lowest part of the saddle (and hopefully the lowest part of the horse's back). It is common to see a flat seat—that is one, which is likened to sitting on a dining chair. The thighs should be firm but not so as they squeeze the rider out of the saddle. Any movement here and at the knee must be viewed with disapproval.

Many riders grip with the back of the leg right from the thigh down to the heel, leaving a gap with a nice view of the countryside between it and the saddle. Overly outward pointing of the feet are a manifestation of this.

The knees should be bent to allow the calves to be carried in the correct position against the horse's side. The legs should be in contact with the horse at all times, to a lesser or greater degree according to needs. The rider should have good coordination and body control to enable him to give subtle aids through the hand and the seat, and also the leg pressure.

The heels should be slightly bent downwards. If jammed down it will cause rigidity throughout the leg and possibly to the whole of the body. Toes pointing downwards can mean the stirrups are too long or that the rider is pushing himself right out of the saddle. Many riders lengthen their stirrups excessively to look longer in the saddle, but only succeed in making their seat loose and ineffective.

Viewed from behind, the shoulders, hips and head should be in a horizontal line, otherwise the rider is crooked or one sided and this can be reflected in the horse.

The whole picture should be of harmony and competence and any communication between the horse and rider should be as invisible as possible.

On attaining the age of 18 years a successful junior rider may compete as a maiden adult.