

AQHA Trail Challenge Rules Summary

The AQHA Trail Challenge is a judged course that tests a horse and rider's ability to work as a partnership and navigate obstacles they might experience on a trail. The obstacles should be designed to enhance the horsemanship skills riders need on the trail, while maintaining a natural feel.

There are generally six to sixteen obstacles in any given Trail Challenge. A judge or judges are located throughout the course evaluating a rider's skill to maneuver his horse through the obstacle. Each horse and rider team starts out with a value of 70 points and then gains or loses points depending on their ability to navigate the course.

AQHA will recognize an American Quarter Horse and an All Breed division at each Trail Challenge. Every division will include a youth and adult category. Within the categories are three levels: Training (beginner), intermediate and master. Those riding a registered Quarter Horse will have the opportunity to earn merits. Merits are recognition of deserving top placing Partnership and will be noted on the Horse's achievement records at AQHA.

Each obstacle will be judged on how the Partnership works together. This working team should negotiate each obstacle with calmness and patience. To score well a horse should move safely through the obstacle, show awareness, be attentive and not do things like spook, shy or spin. The partnership should demonstrate the ability to pick its way through the course when obstacles warrant it. The horse should willingly respond to the rider's cues on more difficult obstacles.

It is important the horse exhibit manners, responds to the rider, be relaxed and not display resistance. Credit will be given to Partnerships negotiating the obstacle with style and appropriate rate of progress, providing safety is not sacrificed. Merits are secondary to safety.

The judge has the right to ask the rider to pass an obstacle if he/she feels it will be unsafe. Control of the horse must be maintained throughout the event.

All general trail rules are listed in AQHA's Trail Ride Program Guidebook. Stallions may compete in adult classes. No youth shall exhibit a stallion in any class. Minimum age of horse is three (3) years of age. If a Trail Challenge is held in conjunction with an AQHA Trail Ride, stallions cannot attend.

REGISTRATION:

Each rider must complete an official Registration/Release Form. Registration fee, sign up and starting time will be determined by the Trail Challenge host.

OBSTACLES:

There are generally six to sixteen obstacles in any given Trail Challenge. This will vary depending on land and terrain. Obstacles should test if the partnership is able to trust each other. Natural obstacles are highly recommended; however, manmade obstacles may be used and can be permanent obstacles on a designed course. Manmade obstacles should be designed to emulate natural obstacles; items made from wood or using telephone poles are acceptable on the other hand items of PVC and foam rubber are not in accord with AQHA's idea of what obstacles should consist of. Caution should be taken to avoid injury. Some obstacles can have sharp edges and can be slippery. Caution also needs to be taken when jumping logs in a western saddle.

Course should be posted at least one hour before the event starting time, a preview ride of the course is permissible as long as participants are not doing the obstacles.

It is suggested that obstacles have three levels of difficulty to accommodate the three levels of participation. All riders are required to attend a pre-ride meeting. All judges must be present at the meeting, be identified to the participants and answer any questions riders might have before beginning the course.

Judges will be happy to answer any questions or demonstrate an obstacle. The Trail Challenge is considered an educational experience and each partnership should have the opportunity to understand what is being asked of them.

Each obstacle will receive an obstacle score. Riders will be limited to three (3) refusals at each obstacle, or a maximum of three (3) minutes to successfully navigate the obstacle. Judges have the right to ask the Partnership to move on the next obstacle. Riders will be encouraged to attempt an obstacle, as no attempt will constitute a deduction of 18 points on the participants score. Riders should complete obstacles in the order they are laid out.

SUGGESTED OBSTACLES:

The Course is at the discretion of the Trail Challenge Coordinator, AQHA Recreational Advisor and judges. Obstacles should be construction of safe material, consider safety of the various levels of Partnerships and test horse and rider skills. Always attempt to utilize the topography of the landscape to design the course.

Bridges and water crossings are always good obstacles, gates, this could be a rope strung between two posts, moving a slicker or tarp, wind chimes, this could be 1" x 2"s x 4' or bamboo hanging 4" apart for a distance of 8' that a rider is asked to go through. Log crossings, dragging a log, a junk pile is an array of logs or brush that a horse and rider navigate, step ups and step downs can be a series of railroad ties one high, two and three high and back filled. There are no set or required obstacles; however, one should always keep in mind that obstacles should represent things that could be encountered on a trail.

JUDGES:

Judges for the Trail Challenge Course must be knowledgeable horsemen/horsewoman. Under the Trail Challenge Program, a judge must have the ability to evaluate horsemanship skills, such as a rider's skill controlling and maintaining the horse. Additionally, the judge should be familiar with the natural movement of a horse. Holding of any special judging card from AQHA or any other organization is not required.

The number of judges needed depends on the course, the number of obstacles and how they are located. Depending on the course, usually one to three judges will be needed. The designation of a senior judge will apply to the appropriate judge, if there is more than one judge. The same judge should judge the same obstacles throughout the Class to insure consistency.

A rider meeting must be held before each Trail Challenge starts: (1) to introduce the judges, (2) to give a description of the course (3) to describe how the course will be judged (4) to answer any questions riders might have before beginning.

ATTIRE & TACK:

Attire should be presentable, clean and free from torn or frayed items. Boots with a closed toe and heel are required. Tack should be clean, in good repair and fit the horse properly. Splint boots are allowed in the Trail Challenge unless the judge determines it is unsafe because of terrain or obstacle.

The senior judge or event management shall have the authority to require the removal or alteration of any piece of equipment or accoutrement which is unsafe, or in his/her opinion, would tend to give a horse an unfair advantage of which he/she believes to be inhumane.

Please refer to AQHA's Official Handbook Rule SHW#) for western equipment and Rule SHW310 for English equipment on a list of legal bits.

No rider will be allowed to ride double or bareback.

DIVISIONS: The following divisions will be recognized by AQHA

All Breed Class - (applies to all breeds of horse and mule)

No official merits will be given to any horse in this class. There can still be a first through tenth placing at each Trail Challenge event. Additionally, the Trail Challenge Coordinator will have to report the placing on an official TCP Reporting Sheet. All Breed Challenge Class will include a youth and adult division along with the different levels of competition listed below.

For consideration of merits in the Youth or Adult Quarter Horse Class a rider must present official registration certificate for each AQHA horse competing in any class. Additionally, the rider must show proof of current membership for AQHA or AQHYA. A rider may sign up for AQHA or AQHYA membership at the registration desk. A rider who falsifies registration certificate or membership requirement will be disqualified and may be subject to suspension under AQHA rules.

Youth Quarter Horse Class – (applies to participants 6 to 18) AQHA minimum age to compete is 6, other organizations may have different minimum age restrictions. Helmets are necessary when required by state and or local ordinance. A youth may not exhibit a stallion.

Adult Quarter Horse Class – (applies to participants 18 and older)

Level 1 – Training Level: this is considered a new Partnership, The rider and horse may not have established trust or are unsure about one another's ability to negotiate obstacles. Obstacles should be easy to explain with basic maneuvers or technique needed to complete the obstacle.

Level 2 – Intermediate Level: this is considered an established Partnership. The rider and horse are familiar with each other, exhibit trust when negotiating obstacles and are conditioned to ride a longer more difficult course.

Level 3 – Master Level: this is considered a Partnership where horse and rider have established trust, can negotiate difficult obstacles and are conditioned to travel through more difficult obstacles with a higher level of cooperation and exhibited skill between horse and rider.

Equestrians with Disabilities

Allowances for riders with permanent physical or mental disabilities are permissible. For example a rider that is unable to pull themselves up to mount should be allowed to use a mounting block. Riders with a temporary or permanent disability must advise the senior judge during the rider's meeting.

This rule does not apply to a person with a temporary cast, etc. which is not considered a disability and will be up to the property owner, Trail Challenge Coordinator, senior judge and/ or AQHA Recreational Advisor or management as to whether this person can compete. Final say will be based on the senior judge, and that decision will be final without recourse of any nature.

SCORING:

Scoring is based on the Partnership's ability to navigate the course and how they work together. Each partnership will start with a value of 70 points and will earn values in a (+) or (-) system on obstacles throughout the course. The Partnership with the highest overall value is named 1st. Score sheets should be posted at the end of the event and then sent to AQHA following the event.

Obstacle Scores: Scores of up to +3 or -3 in ½ point increments may be given on each obstacle depending on the Partnership's ability to work together. Neither a plus or minus would indicate the rider accomplished the obstacle in an average manner.

Penalty Points of ½, 1, 3, and 5 are appropriate for performing obstacles incorrectly or other than in specified order, no attempt to perform an obstacle, knocking down an obstacle etc. A refusal for example is a penalty of 5 points.

Riders May be Disqualified for any type of inhumane treatment of a horse, including, but not limited to excessive spurring, or whipping or excessive jerking of the reins, unsportsmanlike conduct or any other form of misconduct that is irresponsible, illegal, indecent, profane, intimidating, or abusive.

Tie Breaker:

The senior judge will designate an obstacle as the “tie breaker obstacle”. A second and third “tie breaker obstacle” will be chosen and used only if the first tie breaker obstacle does not break the participants’ tied score. These will be designated before the competition commences. The participants will not know which obstacles are designated tie breakers.

A Rider who does not complete all obstacles cannot place above a rider who does.

NOTE..... For assistance with AQHA Trail Challenge Rules, coordinating an event, filling out and filing the correct reports and forms feel free to contact AQHA Recreational Advisor, Larry O. Voecks of Norfolk, NE., 402-649-4474 or lvjv@telebeep.com.

You may also contact Larry for help and advice with an introductory Trail Challenge Workshop or to see if your club or group qualifies for financial assistance putting on a Trail Challenge event.