

Competitive Western Horse Events

Competitive Activities

Many people choose to enjoy their horses in competitive events. These activities can be either individual or team events. Some are judged by a set of written rules and specifications, and other competitive activities are timed events. Each activity has its own rules, and most have organizations that plan the competitions at the local, regional, national, and sometimes international, level.



Western Competitive Activities

Some of the western competitive activities available for horse owners include:

- Horsemanship
- Western Pleasure
- Reining
- Cutting
- Roping
- Working Cow Horse
- Western Riding
- Trail
- Gymkhana
- Team Penning
- Rodeo

Horsemanship

Equitation and Horsemanship are terms used to indicate the rider's ability to sit on the horse in a balanced, correct and functional manner and to control the horse effectively. In equitation and horsemanship classes the rider is being judged, but a well-trained, smooth-gaited and responsive horse contributes greatly to a winning presentation. A pattern may be used to test a rider's equitation while executing specified maneuvers with their horse.

Western Pleasure



Pleasure classes are judged on the horse's ability to perform the required gaits in a quiet and enjoyable manner. The horse should appear to be a pleasure to ride, both in gait quality and manners. In most shows, the horse is required to walk, jog (western trot), and lope (western canter) both directions of the arena, as well as back quietly.

Reining

Reining horses perform a set pattern which emphasizes their responsiveness to and control by the rider. Flying lead changes, spinning turns, sliding stops and lengthening and shortening the stride are maneuvers required to exhibit the horse's ability to respond to the rider.

For more information, visit the [National Reining Horse Association](#).

Cutting

In cutting competitions the horse separates a cow from the herd and keeps it from returning to the herd by anticipating and outmaneuvering its attempts to join the herd. For more information, check out the [National Cutting Horse Association](#) website.



Roping

Roping events exhibit the horse's ability to track a running calf or steer, allowing the rider to lasso the animal and restrain it momentarily. There are several different roping events, for both teams and individuals. Team Roping consists of two riders, a header (who ropes the steer's head) and a heeler (who ropes the steer's heels). The team that ropes the steer in the quickest time wins. In calf roping, an individual must rope the calf, dismount and tie three of the calf's legs together in the shortest time possible.

For more information, check out the [United States Calf Ropers Association Website](#).

Working Cow Horse

Working cow horse classes test the horse's ability to work and control cattle and its maneuverability and control by the rider. The competition consists of two parts: prescribed reined work and actual cow work. Judging is based on good manners, smoothness, cow sense and ease of reining. During the cow working part, one cow is turned into the arena. The horse is required to hold the cow on the end of the arena, make at least one turn each direction along the fence, and circle the cow both directions.

For more rules or information, check out the [National Reined Cow Horse Association](#).

Western Riding

Western Riding horses are evaluated on their ability to perform a set pattern which emphasizes their ability to perform flying lead changes (changing the leading legs at the lope without breaking to a jog or walk). Quality and cadence of gaits, responsiveness to the rider and manners are also evaluated.

Trail

Exhibitor in a trail class

In trail classes in horse shows, the horse is shown over a series of obstacles mimicking those commonly encountered on the trail which test the horse's ability to safely, calmly and willingly negotiate these obstacles. Obstacles may include opening and closing a gate, walking over a bridge, opening a mailbox, backing through poles or weaving cones.



Gymkhana

Speed events are tests of the horse's agility and speed. Horses compete against the clock and the fastest time wins. Barrel racing is racing the horse around barrels set in a cloverleaf pattern. Pole bending is weaving the horse in and out of six tightly spaced poles. A stake race is running the horse in a figure 8 pattern around two poles. There are many other speed events for horses.

For more information, check out the following websites:

- [National Barrel Horse Association](#)
- [National Pole Pending Association](#)

Team Penning

Team penning is a timed contest in which a team of riders must separate specific cattle from a herd, move them into a pen and hold them in the pen. Team penning is especially popular in the Western United States, but is becoming more popular around the country. For more information, check out the United States Team Penning Association website.

Rodeo

Rodeo is an event containing a set of competitive activities that are based in the skills that cowboys needed to perform their jobs on the range. Common rodeo events are bareback and saddle bronc riding, where the rider tries to stay on an untrained horse for 8 seconds, and bull riding, where the cowboy tries to stay on a bull for 8 seconds. There are other timed events such as calf roping and team roping, which shows skills cowboys needed to catch animals in order to treat them or brand them for identification. Barrel racing is a popular event that shows the speed and quickness of the horse. The National High School Rodeo Association and the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association are two of the organizations that oversee rodeos in the United States.