

# **Trail Trials Rules and Guidelines**

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### **Section 1 INTRODUCTION**

Trail Trials have become a popular event in many areas. They are not new, just getting more well-known.

They consist of a trail ride, usually averaging between two and three hours, with trail obstacles along the way. Bear in mind that the later you start your competition, the longer your ride can be due to possible waits at some obstacles. Obstacles are natural, or simulate naturally occurring conditions (including urban) for the horse and rider to negotiate. However, emphasis should be placed on having natural obstacles. There are usually 8-12 obstacles to test the rider's knowledge and the horse's capabilities.

Trail trials are meant to be fun and enjoyable for everyone. As long as safety and common sense are kept in mind, everyone will have a good time. It is important to remember that the people doing the judging at sanctioned trail trials events are volunteers following this rule book and are doing the best they can. They are NOT paid professionals. *It must be understood that these rules are guidelines subject to various interpretations by (sometimes) inexperienced judges.*

This rule book was started in 1987 by members of Corrals 12, 22, 35, 54 and 63 (the original Trail Trials Committee) with the thought of standardizing the rules for all contestants and to give guidelines for those wanting to put on a trail trial event. A special "Thank You" goes to those members who gave freely of their time and knowledge to help bring this about.

## **Section 2 GENERAL RULES**

1. HORSE SHOW RULES, AS WELL AS HORSE SHOW OBSTACLES, ARE NOT TO BE USED IN TRAIL TRIALS. Examples: Boxes, Back Through L's, Side-pass (straddling) Over Logs, etc.
2. Safety and common sense are the number one priorities for all ETI-sanctioned trail trials.
3. Any attire normally worn for trail riding is accepted.
4. Enclosed footwear is required (no sandals or bare feet); boots are recommended.
5. Tack - A saddle, halter, lead rope, and hoof pick are required. Bridle or hackamore are required unless using a bosal. Draw reins or a halter as a bridle are not allowed.
6. It is the responsibility of the rider to have the judge's attention before starting on any obstacle.
7. Voice cues are permitted. Aids such as crops and spurs are permitted, but excessive use may cause penalties.
8. The rider should always check the cinch before doing an obstacle (Uphill, Downhill, Mount, or Drag) that could cause the saddle to slip. It is not required at other obstacles. It may be checked on or off the horse. It is the responsibility of the rider to be sure the judge has visually (not verbally) seen the check.
9. Emphasis should be placed on the methods the rider uses in obtaining a good smooth performance.
10. No coaching will be allowed at any obstacle. A penalty will be assessed to those observed violating this rule.
11. At the judge's discretion, a rider may be dismissed from an obstacle for excessive time or safety reasons.
12. Riders should maintain control of their horses with the reins or lead-rope during the entire event, except when the animal is tied or hobbled.
13. No foals at side or dogs are allowed on the trail, and no riding double during competition.

14. Stallions are not recommended, but may be approved by ride management. No one under 18 may ride a stallion.
15. A time limit and/or maximum number of refusals are highly advisable at each obstacle with NO TIME TAKEN FOR TRAINING.
16. After completing an obstacle, depending on the situation, riders may ask the judge about their score. It is recommended that the judge reply at the end of the event if there is anyone waiting to be judged at their obstacle.
17. *IT IS NOT ALLOWED FOR A COMPETING HORSE AND/OR RIDER TO PARTICIPATE IN PRE-RIDING, MARKING, OR TO FOLLOW A MARKED TRAIL ROUTE BEFORE THE DAY AND TIME OF COMPETITION.*
18. If a moving motorized vehicle is used as an obstacle, the rider will not be allowed to come within 6 feet of the obstacle.
19. If a question is used as an obstacle, each rider will be provided a concise, clear, informative, written handout answer in advance.

We recommend when putting on a trail trials using the information in this book and registering with the Trail Trials Committee, that you state on all advertising and premiums that your trail trials is an ETI-sanctioned event. Letters of comment to the ETI Trail Trials Committee are always encouraged and will be answered.

Any complaint or protest regarding an ETI-sanctioned trail trials needs to be in writing (a \$15.00 fee is to accompany a protest, refundable if the protest is upheld) and mailed within 10 days of the event in question to the ETI Trail Trials Committee, P.O. Box 1138, Acton, CA 93510. The Corral or Organization involved agrees to adjust placements, if need be, pending the outcome of the protest decision by the Trail Trials Committee. A decision will be made within 30 days after receiving the protest.

### **Section 3 OBSTACLE RULES**

The following are the most common obstacles used. However, they are not the only ones to be considered when you are planning a trail trials. Let your imagination go. Look for things that could be used when you go riding. Different situations are always coming up. In the following rules there should be one that would apply. If not, think of safety and common sense first for your new rules. You can also contact a member of the Trail Trials Committee for assistance. Avoid any situation where the horse and/or rider could get hurt. Remember, the more challenging your course, the more interesting and fun it is for your competitors! Just keep safety and common sense as your number one priorities for all riders - beginner and experienced alike.

Natural terrain should be used when available. Try not to have more than two unnatural or spooky obstacles.

*REMEMBER* - Horse show rules, as well as horse show obstacles, are not to be used in trail trials. Examples: Boxes, back through L's, side-pass (straddling) over logs, etc.

*ALSO*, not all obstacles require a cinch check; however, a cinch check may be required if the obstacle, or terrain in the obstacle, is likely to cause the saddle to move (Uphill, Downhill, Mount, Log Drag).

#### **Common Obstacles**

1. **Backup** - horse should back willingly and in control with the rider being observant by checking all directions prior to and during backing.
2. **Bridge** - horse should walk over calmly.
3. **Downhill** - check cinch; saddle should stay in place; horse and rider to remain balanced; rider's legs should not contact horse's legs; horse should be on light rein contact or less; horse should walk calmly in a straight manner, except when necessary to follow trail; however, on a wide trail a traverse is okay; forward position or Cavalry style will be penalized.
4. **Gate** - safe and smooth while mounted; contact with gate should be maintained; judge will state if gate can be opened dismounted without penalty (as for a ranchers gate of wire & sticks); horse to remain calm.

5. **Hoof Check** - horse to stand quietly; far side not to be checked from near side with hoof tool; rider to have a hoof tool; control of horse to be maintained.
6. **Lead** - horse to follow willingly, not crowd or lag; rider not to coil rope around hand; it is mandatory that the horse is led by a lead rope not attached to the bit.
7. **Log Drag** - check cinch; horse's hindquarters should not face log before mounting (judge may hand rider rope to save time); control of horse to be maintained; rope not to be wrapped around hand or coiled; rider should not dally (wrap rope around horn) more than one full turn unless mounted (dallying is optional) - NO TYING TO SADDLE; riders may use hand pull; horse to pull evenly and quietly; unless specified, the direction of a turn shall not be penalized so long as the rope does not contact the horse below the hocks.

For safety sake, a cotton rope should be used and should not be overly long. The "log" should not be excessively large or heavy. The judge should warn each competitor that if things start to get out of hand, the competitor should drop the rope.

8. **Mounting** - check cinch; stirrup does not need to be put over saddle; horse to stand quietly; rider to mount smoothly with reins in hand without unbalancing horse; style of mount not to be considered; rider should not be penalized for using available assistance to mount, i.e. rock, log, etc.
9. **Moving Obstacles** (i.e. bike, backpacker, etc.) - horse should walk quietly by; a horse's look of interest is okay. Think safety! NO POP-UP, SPOOKY OBSTACLES!
10. **Stationary Obstacles** (i.e. slicker, staple gun, map, etc.) - horse to stand still and calm; control of horse should be maintained with reins in hand.
11. **Step Over** - horse to walk over cleanly; relative size of horse and obstacle should be considered; controlled hop with small animal may be okay.
12. **Stop** - horse should stop on command and stand quietly for a specified time.
13. **Tack Check** - horse to stand quietly; rider should have a safe way of securing horse (halter and lead line or hobbles); rider should have some type of hoof tool; equipment should be in safe repair; anything beyond this should not be considered.

14. **Tie** - tie should be as high as reasonably possible for the rider; keep safety in mind for the horse; any type of quick release is allowed.
15. **Turnaround** - horse to turn willingly and in control; always face downhill side to reverse.
16. **Uphill** - check cinch; saddle should stay in place; rider should be forward and in balance with horse; holding mane is rider's preference; horse should be on a light contact or less; rider's legs should not contact horse's legs; horse should walk calmly; stopping to let horse blow is at rider discretion.

If rider is asked to stop on a hill, the rider shall turn their horse sideways (perpendicular) to the trail. If there is a drop off, the rider should face his mount to the drop off. The rider should not position the horse's haunches toward the drop off.

17. **Water Crossing** - horse should walk through water calmly; rider may allow horse to drink - to be without penalty it must be rider indicated.

## **Section 4**

### **HOW TO ORGANIZE A TRAIL TRIALS**

To put on an ETI-sanctioned trail trials, first set a date with the trail trials *Scheduling Secretary*, which is done annually with ETI Calendaring Board. Every attempt should be made to avoid scheduling trail trials on consecutive weekends. Pick a date not conflicting with any other trail trials or ETI function. The number can be found in the first few pages of the ETI Magazine or in the Directory section of the web site. If a Corral would like to add a trail trials or make any changes, you must seek approval with ETI National.

Send ETI Trail Trials Sanctioning Form with fees.

Get enough volunteers to make it easy to organize. Ideally, there should be a committee to share the work and collaborate on obstacles and course.

Find a good location for a trail route with enough room for parking.

Ride your course to find the best place for obstacles you have previously thought of and to find other obstacles along the trail. Ride it several times to see if you want to make any changes, need to do any trail work, and to see exactly where you want to put up any signs. We recommend that you have as wide a variety of obstacles as possible. Have obstacles which are natural, or simulate naturally-occurring conditions (including urban) for the horse and rider to negotiate along the way. However, emphasis should be placed on having natural obstacles.

Take into consideration the size of all equines, small ponies to 17-hand animals, when planning obstacles and routes.

Ribbons are given usually to 1st through 10th place in each division, though some go to 15th. Awards are usually given in each division only to 1st place, such as buckles, gift certificates, cash awards, items for horse or rider, etc. Small plaques are also popular.

Do you want to give awards for the worst score, oldest and/or youngest horse and/or rider, teams, Corral, farthest distance, etc.?

For fundraising, are you going to have any type of refreshments, a photographer?

You may want to have a poker ride in conjunction with your trail trials for contestants and anyone else just wanting to ride the trail and non-riders who want to try their luck.

To have a sanctioned event, you must have Novice and Open divisions. A Junior division is highly recommended and a Schooling class is optional.

**Novice - (REQUIRED)** for the beginning rider and/or horse to trail trials. Any horse and rider team finishing 5th or better in any three ETI-sanctioned trail trials MUST move up to the Open division.

**Open - (REQUIRED)** for the more experienced teams. Any team may enter this division, experienced or not, at any time. However, once in this division, teams must remain there until a new partner (horse or rider) has been acquired.

A team that has qualified in the Novice division for the Invitational and has competed, but not qualified in the Open division of that year may still compete in the Novice division of that year's Invitational. A horse/rider team placing 1<sup>st</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> in one ETI-sanctioned trail trial automatically qualifies to ride in that division at that year's Invitational. A team that qualifies in both divisions MUST compete in Open at the Invitational. ETI membership is not required to compete at the Invitational.

**Junior - (RECOMMENDED)** to encourage family and youth participation. Junior riders (those age 14 and under as of January 1st before the trail trials in question) may qualify for the Annual Invitational in the Novice division if a Junior division is not offered. However, Juniors may ride in other divisions at their own discretion, except at the Invitational where they may enter only the division in which they have qualified during the year.

Junior riders MUST be accompanied by a chaperone of 18 (eighteen) or more years of age. *NOTE: If a Junior chooses to compete in the Novice or Open division when a Junior division is offered, all such placings will later apply to determine their adult division in the first year they are no longer eligible to compete as a Junior.*

**Schooling - (OPTIONAL)** has been tried with success to help introduce riders to trail trials. Judges must be cautioned not to explain anything to someone in this division if judged contestants are waiting to be judged. We suggest that schooling riders be asked to wait at each obstacle until judged riders are not present. This will enable the judge to freely critique this rider.

Most groups give score cards to the riders for judges to mark down obstacle scores (3x5 cards with rider's number, name and number of obstacles). This makes tabulating faster than waiting for all the judges to get back to tally scores from their sheets alone.

For the sake of consistency to competitors and to make it easier for trail trials committees and judges, score sheets are provided for an array of



obstacles. *These are not optional and must be used.* Judging criteria will be kept more consistent and some of the difficulty for new committees will be eliminated. All competitors start with a perfect score of -0- (zero). Points are added when competitors do not meet the judging criteria on their judge sheets. Most criteria will have a range of points for the judge to go by. The maximum plus points at any obstacle will be 10 (ten).

The amount of obstacles will be at your discretion. Just remember the more obstacles you use, the more volunteers you will need. The average amount of obstacles is 10 (ten).

Once you have decided on your obstacles, go through the judging sheets for what you need. If you have an obstacle and find there is no judging sheet for it, there is a list of criteria with judging points that should help you with it. However, many times one of the existing sheets will have all the criteria you need and only needs a new obstacle name. The most important thing to keep in mind for your trail ride and all obstacles is SAFETY!

It's a good idea to have your general rules posted for all riders to read, such as no smoking on trail; groups of 2 or more let individuals or smaller groups pass; follow ribbons; bring problems to the management; best score is -0-, etc.

If numbers are used for rider identification, they can be purchased from tack stores (ask for horse show numbers). If grease markers are used to write numbers on the horse's hip, cocoa butter hand lotion has been recommended as a good way to remove it.

It's very helpful for the contestants and judges to have signs posted where to stop and state what the obstacle number is.

Don't short yourself on judges. Have a few people set aside as replacements. Don't hesitate to have a second person at any obstacle if it would be of any help in keeping things running smoothly.

Advertise in Corral newsletters, ETI Magazine, the classified horse calendar section of newspapers, tack and feed stores, etc.

Mark your trail very clearly - you don't want to lose any contestants or to have confusion. Be extra attentive at corners and intersections; also, too much space between ribbons will have contestants wondering if they missed a turn. Normal flagging is done on the right with clusters of three or more for turns.

Flagging should be within line of sight of each other, unless there is not an opportunity for turns off the main trail.

Attaching your flagging material (surveyors tape) to clothespins makes it easy to mark and unmark your trail. However, it also makes it easier for non-participants to remove them.

Mark your trails the day before if possible and pre-ride the course the morning of the event to make sure the ribbons are in place.

If trail route overlaps, it is suggested to use two different ribbon colors and post information at the registration desk about the colors used.

Flour is a good marking tool for arrows at corners or to line off a trail that is not to be taken.

Waiting riders should be separated from the obstacles by at least 50 feet and, if possible, out of sight of the obstacle. After completing the obstacle, have them continue on so they cannot mingle with the contestants who have not yet completed the obstacle.

Provide your judges with enough judging sheets to accommodate the maximum expected riders. Encourage judges to write comments when needed to help management make any needed decisions later in the day.

Instructions for judges should be written out as to what they should do, say to the contestant, look for, and how to score so the judge can give identical instructions to each contestant. You can also have simple instructions written on a sign at each obstacle for the contestant to read and follow.

Remember that your judges may be out there all alone and are not always well-seasoned trail riders, just willing volunteers.

It is highly recommended that all the judges pre-ride the course and practice judging other judges over the obstacles.

It is highly recommended to have a non-competing rider be the first rider of the day. Judges can practice on the first rider, who is not a competitor.

Encourage judges to judge hard using the same criteria on each rider from first to last. This will eliminate many ties and too many perfect scores. In the event of ties, we recommend using the best scores of preselected obstacles that will be posted after all contestants are on the trail. You would pick at random the trail trial obstacles being ridden (papers with obstacle numbers picked from a hat).

Ground tying is not to be used as an obstacle because we advocate complete control of your horse and ground tying does not display that.

Judges are not to change obstacles that have been pre-ridden and approved by the trail management team.

Judges and/or obstacles cannot be changed or moved once the first rider has completed that obstacle (including, but not limited to: umbrellas, coolers, chairs and drink containers that are in or near enough to be part of the obstacle).

Instruct the judges to be aware and not penalize the natural gait of the different breeds nor schools of riding styles (i.e. western, English, saddle seat, etc.).

It is recommended that score keepers tally scores away from the competitors to minimize distractions

If you need any information or have questions, contact the trail trials chairman. Committee members are available to meet with and assist any group putting on a trail trials.

## **Section 5**

### **A WORD FROM THE MANAGEMENT**

You may wish to post a notice for competitors to read, a word of encouragement and a few words to head off some problems on the trail. This is purely optional. The following is part of a notice Corral 22 posted for all their contestants to read:

*"Some of you are new riders and others are seasoned riders on horses that have a lot of trail miles. The course has been designed to try and give you an enjoyable trail ride as well as testing you and your horse on occurrences that could come up on a trail."*

*"If some obstacles seem a little too difficult or ridiculous to a few of you, don't take it too seriously - just do the best you can. There are a few horses and riders that will eat up the course easily and hopefully the ride will present a challenge to them."*

*"Our judges are all volunteering their time. Please be courteous to them, as they are trying to be honest and fair in their judgments. You have a right to know why you were scored as you were, so you and your horse can improve. But, please consult the judges or management after the ride so riders can keep moving. If you have any complaints, bring them to the ride management - not the judge. Complaints or questions of judgment given to any of the judges during the ride will be noted and may affect your score."*

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