

A Balance of Power

The three components and fast pace of reined cow horse demand an NRCHA judge stay on their toes, as well as develop a well-rounded eye. It takes time for both to evolve to a level of expertise.

By Kate Bradley Byars



Five judges scrutinize every run at the NRCHA's premier events, like the Snaffle Bit Futurity. These shows are not for new judges, but rather the NRCHA's highest level of judge, a 3A.

Judging a reined cow horse competition requires knowledge of reining, cutting and taking a cow down the fence. And in today's industry, in which lower-level class entries are soaring, boxing is a key component of cow work. For these reasons, it takes a well-rounded and educated individual to successfully hold a National Reined Cow Horse Association (NRCHA) judge's card.

While the NRCHA has four premier events — the Celebration of Champions, Stallion Stakes, Derby and Snaffle Bit Futurity — there are numerous reined cow horse affiliates across the country in need of judges. In the NRCHA, a prospective judge has fewer requirements to fill than that of other associations, but they don't have any

less responsibility or need less knowledge.

"It is a true judged event, more so than a singular judged event," said Bill Enk, NRCHA director of judges and an NRCHA card holder since 1970. "Unlike the cutting, we can have ties [on scores] because we have three events. Judges don't have to find a half-point penalty or give a half-point to make up a new score. It is a true judged event that is realistic."

In this second installment of a three-part series on judging, Quarter Horse News explores what it takes to become an NRCHA-carded judge, the benefits of judging for the association and how becoming a judge can make someone a better trainer.

First, Apply

The first hurdle to becoming an NRCHA judge is to pay the association dues. Then, a simple phone call can start someone on the path to obtaining a card.

Next is a written test, requiring a score of 80 or above to pass, as well as a video test that requires a score of 70 or above to pass. In the video portion of the exam, herd work, rein work and fence work are all judged. Once those needs are met — membership and test scores — the NRCHA awards a "1A" judge's card.

It sounds so simple.

"There is real value to being a judge," Enk said. "Every mentor I've ever had has been a judge and also a high-profile trainer,

EVENT: _____ GO-ROUND: _____ DATE: _____ JUDGE: _____
 NATIONAL REINED COW HORSE ASSOCIATION www.nrcha.com
HERD WORK JUDGES CARD
 Effective November 16, 2018

CLASS: _____

1 POINT PENALTIES:
 A- (Miss) losing working advantage
 B- Noise directed to cattle
 C- Working out of position
 D- Toe, foot, or stamp on shoulder

3 POINT PENALTIES:
 A- Hot quit
 B- Cattle picked up or scattered
 C- Failure to make deep cut
 D- Back fence

5 POINT PENALTIES:
 A- Horse quilling a cow
 B- Losing a cow
 C- Changing cattle after a specific commitment
 D- Failing to separate a single animal after leaving the herd
 E- Blatant disobedience
 F- Spurring or hitting in front of the cinch at any time or excessively whipping or spurring the horse.

No SCORE:
 A- Abuse
 B- Lameness

NE - Failure of an exhibitor to attempt to complete the work.

NOTE: Judge may blow blower whistle at any time to terminate the work. A score of zero will be given if the work is not complete at that time.

#	HORSE	PENALTIES			RUN CONTENT							SCORE		
		1 point	3 point	5 point	Herd Work	Control of Cow	Degree of Difficulty	Eye Appeal	Avg Score	Working Time	Control		Score	Excessive Head Help

EVENT: _____ GO-ROUND: _____ DATE: _____ JUDGE: _____
 NATIONAL REINED COW HORSE ASSOCIATION www.nrcha.com
REINED WORK JUDGES CARD
 Effective November 16, 2018

CLASS: _____

12 POINT PENALTIES:
 - Hit changing leads simultaneously
 - Jogging first two strides
 - Over or under spin 1/8 turn
 - Out of lead
 - Spurring rein in the bridle
 - Over or under spin 1/4 turn

1 Point Penalties:
 - Out of Lead
 - Spurring rein in the bridle
 - Out of lead each 1/4 circle
 - Scotching or anticipating step

2 Point Penalties:
 - Lead missed around end of arena past second corner
 - Not ever changing leads or patterns where there is only 1/2 circle
 - Fencing up in turn
 - Bleating gait
 - Jogging beyond two strides
 - On top in the first 1/4 of the circle, after a lope departure

3 Point Penalties:
 - Spurring or hitting in front of cinch at any time or excessively whipping or spurring the horse.
 - Blatant disobedience including kicking, biting, bucking, rearing, and making or obviously unbalanced.

NO SCORE:
 A- Abuse
 B- Lameness

NE - Failure of an exhibitor to attempt to work the pattern.

NOTE: Judge may blow blower whistle at any time to terminate the work. A score of zero will be given if the work is not complete at that time.

MANEUVER SCORE: -1/2 Extremely Poor, -1 Very Poor, -1/2 Poor, 0 Correct, +1/2 Good, +1 Very Good, +1 1/2 Excellent

#	HORSE	MANEUVER DESCRIPTION	MANEUVER SCORE							Penalty Total	SCORE
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7		

EVENT: _____ GO-ROUND: _____ DATE: _____ JUDGE: _____
 NATIONAL REINED COW HORSE ASSOCIATION www.nrcha.com
COW WORK JUDGES CARD
 Effective November 16, 2018

CLASS: _____

GUIDE FOR NEW COW: (H) judge discretion; rider will receive new cow(s) as necessary to show horse(s)

1 POINT PENALTIES:
 A- Loss of working advantage
 B- Cow's head inside the plane of the 1 point marker
 C- Changing sides of arena to turn cow
 D- Not reach length horse runs past cow
 E- Working out of position
 F- Spurring rein
 G- Spurring
 H- Excessive halting
 I- Allow to three cow pass middle marker on test run
 J- Cow's front corner of arena before turning cow
 K- Fail to make a separation between the 2nd fence before being turned

2 POINT PENALTIES:
 A- Spurring or overworking before circling cow
 B- Circling or overworking before circling cow
 C- Hanging on an fence (refusing to turn)
 D- Knocking down cow without being working advantage

3 POINT PENALTIES:
 A- Fall of horse or rider
 B- Spooling between rein work and cow work
 C- Spooling between cows, if new cow is awarded

NO SCORE:
 A- Abuse
 B- Lameness

NE - Failure of an exhibitor to attempt to work the pattern (fence work)

NOTE: Judge may blow the whistle at anytime to terminate the work. A score of zero will be given if the work is not complete at that time.

Lift a rider's ribs or kicks the animal being worked with the total or reins, in an abusive manner
 N- Improper Western Attire
 O- Failure to work in the proper working order

MANEUVER SCORE: -1/2 Extremely Poor, -1 Very Poor, -1/2 Poor, 0 Correct, +1/2 Good, +1 Very Good, +1 1/2 Excellent

#	HORSE	MANEUVER DESCRIPTION	MANEUVER SCORE					Penalty Total	SCORE
			1	2	3	4	5		

like Don Dodge, Bobby Ingersoll and Tony Amaral. They had judge's cards and were pillars in our industry.

"You don't have to win a million dollars to be a great judge, but you should be involved in the horse industry," he added. "I don't believe you can be a pharmacist during the week, judge on the weekends and be as efficient as someone who is involved with horses daily."

Enk followed his passion for horses to the Los Alamitos Race Course, then to a job with horseman Ronnie Richards. After serving in the U.S. Army, Enk settled in Paso Robles, California, near the mecca of reined cow horse competition in the 1970s. He already had judge's credentials with the American Stock Horse Association and the NRCHA at the time.

His association with Don Dodge helped push him to obtain cards with the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) and the National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA). Today, Enk works with the NRCHA, is involved with AQHA judging decisions and also judges special events, such as Road to the Horse.

His main focus is making NRCHA judges the premier judges in the industry.

"We don't have as many shows as the other associations, so it is harder for a judge to move up. The 1As, they're just starting. They have education, but they need shows to gain expertise," he explained. "It is an easy move to 2A — judge three or four shows with no bad reports. But, the higher you get, the more

expectation [there is] to be perfect."

Enk occasionally brings in a 2A rookie to judge a premier event, but mainly it is longstanding judges who've achieved the NRCHA's highest level — the 3A — that work the NRCHA-produced derby and futurity events. The four majors require only 20 judges a year.

"NRCHA has an education system where the older judges help the younger," he said. "We have a team of judges; five judges work every premier event. It's not me serving as coach, but all of us searching for the best way to judge a class. The better judges make fewer mistakes [in their scoring] but aren't mistake-free. Every good judge I know, when they're done judging a show, they would change something from a class. It is a constant challenge."

Know the Rules

The NRCHA has changed how runs are scored over the years by incorporating a score sheet that shows accountability using a "box" to mark each element of a run. The score sheet breaks down the rein work, for example, into seven maneuver columns that follow the pattern. Each maneuver has a row for penalties and scores. Penalties can be assessed a half-point (for things such as over-

or under-spins) to 5-point penalties (for blatant disobedience, like bucking).

The maneuver total minus the penalties equals the score. Yet, penalties or credits aren't all that place a horse-and-rider team.

Jaime Beamer of Weatherford, Texas, grew up in California and obtained his NRCHA judge's card in 1994. With more than 25 years of experience, he judges a premier event annually and has judged AQHA and National Cutting Horse Association events. To him, it isn't the penalties or the credits that challenge a judge, but the run content.

"The rulebook defines the penalties a judge applies. The run content isn't defined, and there isn't any actual quantification on [the score sheet]," Beamer said. "That's the tricky part of judging! The run content is hard to explain to someone who hasn't been on the

PRIMO MORALES



Over the years, reined cow horse competition has become even more dynamic. With such skilled athletes riding in multiple events, the NRCHA has worked hard to continually evolve the judging system to give credit where it is due.

back of a horse or gone down the fence.”

Beamer trained under Greg Ward in California before going out on his own. He trained cow horses until 2005, when he moved to Texas to pursue cutting. However, he never gave up his NRCHA card and continued to judge in the discipline. In 2019, he is showing a 3-year-old at the NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity. He knows what it is like both in the trainer's hot seat and in the judge's box.

“You can read, watch videos and hear people talking about a good cow horse run, but ultimately it comes down to doing the event,” Beamer said. “For example, on a fence work, the turn is actually a three-part process for one box. There is the entry into the turn, the turn itself and how the horse exits the turn.

“There are penalties, credits, degree of difficulty and eye appeal thrown into a 30-second run, mixed around. And as a judge, you have to come up with a number,” he explained.

While the score sheet can offer guidance, judges must assess final scores. Beamer said that one trap a new judge may fall into is assessing penalties liberally. That results in a negative outlook for the judge.

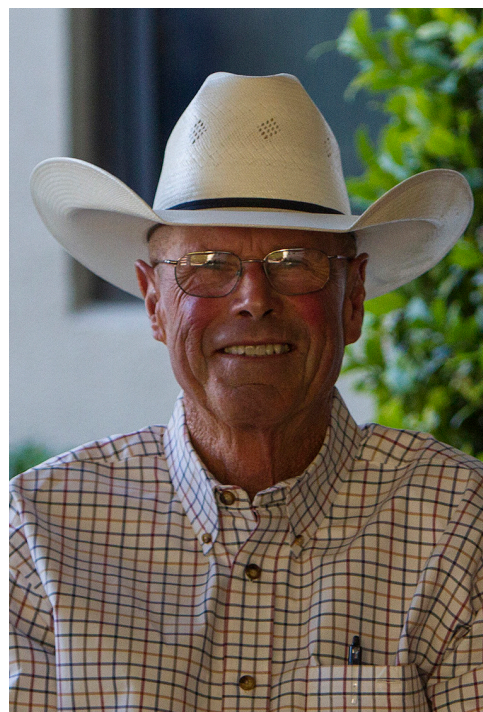
“Back in the old days, we had a couple

boxes to fill in [on a score card] and you came up with a number, and that was it. Now, we are held accountable,” Beamer said. “It is harder to learn at first, but easier in the long run. For me, I stay on the high side of a run content number — if I'm stuck between a 72 and 73, I mark a 73. A judge that is quick to award penalties and more apt to mark a run lower than higher, they have a negative attitude.

“You need to be open-minded with a positive attitude to go far in judging,” he continued. “Being a negative judge, you lose the competitor's confidence in you. You have to judge according to the rulebook, but remember that we don't award many 80s, which is a perfect score.”

The judge's scorecard is set up to hold the judge and competitor responsible for each maneuver. But, it is hard to show favoritism when the fence work or boxing portion of the event requires a cow's cooperation.

“The thing that makes the NRCHA special and exciting is the cow work,” Enk said. “We don't care how much money you've won because you still have to draw a cow and work him. The luck of the draw plus the ability to work that draw successfully is the ultimate reward. That keeps the playing field really level.”



NRCHA Director of Judges Bill Enk

ROSS HECOX

While competitors, and cows, aren't always perfect, Enk does expect NRCHA-carded judges to be as close to spot-on in their scoring as possible. And if a mistake happens, he expects a judge to take ownership.

“Judge on the facts first, not opinion. Did he turn? Yes or no?” Enk explained. “Now, how good he turned allows for the judge's opinion, which they are entitled to have.”

Practice Patience

Expectations are higher for a judge who is marking a premier, high-stakes event. It isn't the place for an inexperienced judge. Instead, both Enk and Beamer suggest starting out small.

For Beamer, that meant not only judging on the cow horse-heavy West Coast.

“The first time you judge, you're usually a [nervous] wreck,” he said. “When you start out, all eyes are on you. Don't judge in a hot spot of tough cow horses. Find [an affiliate] or local associations to get some experience watching slower runs and fewer horses.”

Being relaxed and not panicked about each run is important to help a judge stay focused. Judging often requires long hours, during which the judge has to be attentive for a long time, Beamer explained.

“The horses and the cows don't wait for

“Fairness and consistency are the keys to good judging. ... Then, be consistent in your scoring. Finally, be determined to get it right

—Bill Enk

you to fill in your judge's boxes [on the score sheet], and it can be overwhelming,” he said. “In the rein work, you have each maneuver, usually with a pause that lets you analyze and the scribe [record the] score before the next maneuver. In the cutting, there is a break between cow one and cow two. But the fence work — that is 30 seconds of high-speed action! Don't panic.”

There is no better teacher than experience. For Enk, any time in the arena can help grow a judge's knowledge. If area shows don't need a judge, he suggests offering scribe services.

Scribes are used to record the scores while the judge stays focused on the maneuvers.

“Anyplace there is a cow horse show, you

can scribe all day and learn from that judge,” Enk said. “You have to pay in some way for your education, and that is one way to do it. Some of our scribes have made really great judges. You watch the same runs and can learn how to mark penalties.”

Enk said the scarcity of large shows in the cow horse industry can hinder a judge from moving up on the NRCHA judge's list; however, judges can gain experience by taking on other opportunities. This can include judging in other organizations, such as the AQHA, and adding expertise in events like ranch riding, which are added at some reined cow horse shows.

“Make an effort because you have to earn

stepping up from a 2A to 3A,” Enk said. “You have to apply, and no one gives you anything. Get up early, stay up late and work at judging. People like me will find you if you have the passion. I'm always looking for a new judge.”

A cow horse judge is one that can understand and score three events with consistency and accuracy. That is hard and, Enk said, it doesn't offer much hope of perfection. But it does offer rewards.

“It is hard to judge right,” Enk said. “You have to learn cow horse herd work, rein work, and judge it like you're at a reining or a cutting. It is very, very difficult to be that well-rounded. To judge for us, you have to be an expert. But, judging for us does make you an expert that other associations seek out.

“Fairness and consistency are the keys to good judging. Fairness means either the horse or the rider does not prejudice the judge. If the horse has a good work, he is entitled to a good score. On the other hand, if the horse has a poor work, he has earned a poor score. Then, be consistent in your scoring. Finally, be determined to get it right.” ★