

The Classic Reference—Revised and Updated for Today's Competitor

# JUDGING HUNTERS & HUNTER SEAT EQUITATION

A Comprehensive Guide for Exhibitors and Judges

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FORMER "R" JUDGE



FOURTH EDITION

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# Equitation on the Flat

## Position

### *Lower Body—From Heel to Pelvis*

"Put your heels down!" is heard frequently in equitation lessons, not simply because this command produces a certain look, but because it causes the rider to be more securely fixed on his horse and gives him a position from which he can be more effective. When a rider's heels are down, he has allowed his weight to drop as far as it can and, consequently, he'll be much less likely to fall off than a person who doesn't exert this downward pressure.

It is important that the weight not only be distributed downward, but also that it be distributed equally on each side of the horse. When a rider leans to one side, causing his weight to shift off the horse's center, he is apt to fall off on the side he is leaning toward if the animal suddenly moves in the other direction. If he remains in the center of his horse, however, he'll be able to stay on through balance and not

become unseated unless the horse has a major mishap, such as falling and rolling over.

The concept of staying on through balance and downward weight distribution becomes clearer if the rider is compared to a sack of grain laid over a donkey's back. The bag of grain has no muscle to hold it on and only stays in place because the grain has settled equally on each side of the donkey. So it is with a rider who sits in the middle of his horse and does not allow his weight to shift more to one side than the other.

Unequal weight distribution presents a balance problem not only for the rider but also for the horse. When a rider leans to one side, the horse invariably leans in that direction, too. Sometimes you'll see a competitor trying to push his horse away from his leg while he is leaning toward the leg he is using, so that his off-center upper body is moving the horse inward, counteracting the leg aid as it attempts to push the horse outward.

It is essential, then, for the rider to remain in the center



**4.1** In this properly positioned leg, the rider's knee and toe are on the same vertical line, and the rider's calf is against the horse. The stirrup is on the ball of the foot, and weight is properly placed in the rider's heel.



**4.2 A & B** This rider's toe and knee are incorrectly turned out and the back of the rider's calf is against the horse (A). In contrast (B), the inner knee has contact with the saddle and the inner calf with the horse, so that these pressure points provide stability for the rider.

of his horse, for the sake of his own and his horse's balance, and for him to keep his heels pressed down at all times, so he will be securely fixed on his mount no matter what problem arises. These two principles are so basic to the rider's safety that a person who does not sit centered on his horse or press his heels downward during all phases of competition should be heavily penalized in every level of equitation.

In addition to the ankle being pressed downward, it should also break slightly toward the horse's side, bringing the rider's calf into contact with the animal. A small portion of the sole of the boot will be visible to the judge because the side of the foot that is away from the horse is upturned as the inner side of the foot is depressed (fig.4.1). Although the rider's toe will naturally be farther from the horse than his heel, the toe should not be turned out so far that the rider uses the back of his calf, rather than the side of it,

and lets his knee be pulled away from the saddle (figs. 4.2 A & B). This position—toe out, back of calf active, and knee out—should be heavily penalized because it takes the rider's security away as it pulls his leg from the saddle.

Lack of security in the leg causes a multitude of problems in the upper body. In general, a rider whose leg is thrust too far forward will be riding with his upper body "behind the motion," and, in, extreme cases, will be pounding on his horse's loins with his seat and pulling on the horse's mouth as he uses his reins to support his upper body (fig. 4.3 A). In contrast, a rider whose legs are too far back will be "ahead of the motion," and, in an extreme case, will be leaning on his hands to support his upper body and letting his horse move in an overly long frame because his hands and torso are rendered so passive that he cannot use them to balance the animal (fig. 4.3 B).



**4.3 A & B** The rider's lower leg has slipped forward (A), causing her seat to pound on the horse's back and her hands to hang heavily on the animal's mouth. At the other extreme (B), the rider's leg has slipped backward, causing her upper body to be ahead of the motion and her hands to be passive, only able to support her torso, but not to control the horse.

**4.4** In "at the girth" position—that is, positioned on the horse's flesh just behind the girth—the rider's leg provides a sound foundation for the upper body.

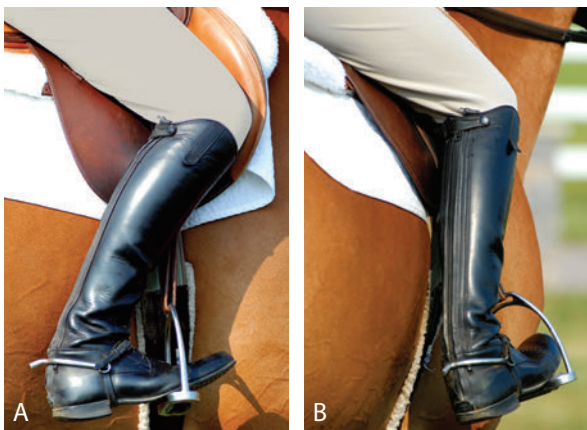
Since the leg thrust forward does not touch the horse's side, it is of no use in communicating with the animal; therefore, this leg position is severely penalized. A leg drawn back too far is weak, but is not penalized as seriously because it can communicate somewhat with the horse. Compared with these major leg faults, the ideal rider's leg is positioned just behind the horse's girth, with the steady leg providing a sound foundation for the upper body (fig. 4.4).

Finally, there are riders whose legs appear to be in the correct position when viewed from the side, but who from the oblique or rear view can be seen not to have contact with the horse (figs. 4.5 A & B). These riders appear balanced as long as their horses are cooperative, but will be pulled out of position if their horses become strong. This is often the case with a rider who is on a high-strung horse and is afraid to add leg pressure for fear of the horse becoming even more keyed up. Although the rider may appear to be positioned correctly from the side, he is actually committing a serious fault in not having his leg on the horse, for the leg is one of the prime sources of control of the animal.

It is preferable, however, for the rider to have this fault of seeming to have a good leg position, but not actually having the leg on the horse, than to have either of the other two faults mentioned—that is, leg kicked forward or drawn back too far. This is because in the case of the well-positioned, but inactive leg, the rider is at least supporting his own weight from his leg, and his upper body is not being thrown out of balance with the horse. A rider can learn to use his leg properly at this point, whereas riders who have their legs too far forward or back must first correct these errors and the many accompanying faults before they can learn to use the leg properly as an aid.

In summary, the major faults of the lower leg, ranging from most to least serious, are: legs too far forward; legs too far back; and legs that appear to have proper angles when viewed from the side, but are not actually against the horse. This last fault can best be seen during the canter, in which the motion of the horse's stride will generally cause the rider's leg to swing back and forth.

Now move up to the knee, thigh, and buttocks to



**4.5 A & B** Although this leg looks correct from the side while the horse is at a standstill (A), seen from a rear view, it is apparent that the rider's calf is not properly placed on the horse's flesh (B). When the horse moves, the rider's unstable leg will swing back and forth, making the error obvious to an onlooker from the side view, too.

consider faults that may occur in these areas. The knee should remain close to the saddle at all times, acting in conjunction with the rider's calf and thigh to produce a secure and effective leg. When a rider's knee is pulled away from the saddle, you should look for two possible causes: either the rider is improperly using the back, rather than side, of his calf against the horse (fig. 4.6), or the rider's conformation does not fit his animal's.

A long-legged rider on an animal too narrow-bodied for him will often exhibit this fault of the knee being away from the saddle, for he finds he must turn loose at the knee in order to press his lower leg against his horse. In the case of a mismatched horse and rider, it is preferable to see a gap at the knee than the other option the rider would have, which would be to keep his knee close to the saddle and not have his lower leg on the horse. Of course, the answer to



**4.6** The back of the lower leg, rather than the inside of it, comes into contact with the horse when a rider's knee and toe are turned out. In this position, the rider must grip with the calf to steady the leg, since it is impossible to receive any stability from the saddle if the knee is pulled away from it.

this dilemma is that the rider should compete on an animal that suits him and not on one too small or too thin; but if you are faced with pinning two riders with this problem of being poorly mounted, the one who keeps his lower leg on the horse, but has his knee off, should place above the one who has his knee close to the saddle, but his lower leg off the horse's side.

Moving upward visually, notice the rider's thighs and buttocks at various gaits. At the walk, you may see a rider using these portions of his body to push his horse forward, rather than motivating the horse properly with his legs. This obvious movement in the rider's seat is penalized because the thighs and buttocks should be following the horse's movement at the walk, rather than creating the impulsion.

At the sitting trot, many competitors have a problem keeping their thighs and buttocks relaxed, and they either bounce each step or slow their horses down to keep from bouncing. A well-positioned, relaxed rider who knows how to shorten and lengthen his horse's frame will not have to cut the animal's pace in order to sit the trot, but will be able to collect the horse—while maintaining the rhythm of the working trot—and sit quite comfortably and still, having altered the horse's center of gravity back toward his seat through collection of the animal's frame. Tension in the thighs, buttocks, and stomach, as well as a lack of knowledge concerning collection, is the cause of bouncing; and riders usually try to conquer this problem by gripping with their legs to hold themselves on, rather than letting their weight and balance follow the horse's movements and effortlessly keep them in the saddle.

In judging the sitting trot, call for a "working trot sitting"—not a "slow, sitting trot"—and penalize riders who evade the test by cutting the pace. If you request that stirrups be dropped for this test, ask the riders to cross them, so the irons won't bang against the horses' sides (fig. 4.7).

At the sitting trot, the rider's pelvis angle should be slightly closed—just a couple of degrees in front of the vertical, the same as for the walk. If the rider allows his upper body to go behind the vertical, he should be penalized for the forced appearance that accompanies this error; and an even greater penalty must go to the rider who



**4.7** It is very important for the stirrups to be crossed properly, as shown, with the leathers lying flat, rather than the leathers being a lumpy source of bruising for a rider's sensitive inner thigh. When requesting work without stirrups, give the riders time to cross the leathers so the stirrup irons won't bang against the horses' sides.

is at the other extreme, closing his pelvis too far forward so he is ahead of the motion, with his upper body rendered ineffective (fig. 4.8).

When asked to perform the posting trot, the rider will close his pelvis at an angle no greater than 20 degrees in front of the vertical. This hip closure will cause the rider to be posting on his thighs and crotch, rather than on his buttocks (fig. 4.9).

At the canter, the pelvis returns to the angle of the walk and sitting trot—only a few degrees in front of the vertical—as the rider's body adjusts from the horizontal motion of the horse's trot to the more vertical motion of the canter (fig. 4.10). When the rider's pelvis angle opens from the position of the posting trot to that of the canter, he is no longer on his crotch, and his buttocks and thighs can be used to absorb the shock of the canter. Tension in the





**4.8** At the sitting trot, the pelvic angle should not be closed any more than shown in this photo. The rider's leg is correctly positioned the same without stirrups as with them—ankle flexed, calf against horse, and knee close to saddle. Although the rider's position is very good, her eyes are down a bit and the horse is slightly overflexed at the moment this photo was taken.

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**4.9** This is the picture of perfection at the working trot rising. The rider's upper body is inclined about 15 degrees in front of the vertical so that she is with the motion of her horse as it demonstrates impulsion, balance, and relaxed submission in a beautiful medium frame. (At the rising trot, a rider's upper body can be a few degrees more vertical or inclined than shown, but should never fall behind the vertical or be inclined forward more than 20 degrees.)

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**4.10** At the canter, the rider's body should be only a few degrees in front of the vertical. The deep seat and well-positioned upper body enable this rider to perform the half-halt successfully, helping to maintain the horse's lightness and balance. The upper body could be even a little more erect, but not on or behind the vertical.

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buttocks and thighs will result in noticeable bouncing of the rider during each stride. This fault should be penalized for it shows that the rider's base of support—his seat—is ineffective, as opposed to a deep, relaxed seat that would indicate support for the rider's upper body and control of the horse.

Although a good rider's thighs and buttocks are relaxed, this does not mean they are physically unfit, for a rider with a weak seat slides back and forth in the saddle as the horse moves, while a fit rider's thighs and buttocks are sunken into the saddle, so horse and rider are at one during the walk, sitting trot, and canter.

# The Judge's Card

## Numerical Scoring

There are three types of symbols used in marking the judge's card: abbreviations, hieroglyphics, and numbers. Limited time and space make these symbols necessary, for if you try to use longhand, you will not have as much time to watch the performance and your card will be messy and confusing.

Abbreviations are made up mostly of consonants suggesting the word or words that describe an error—such as "Tw" for *twist*, or "LF" for *loose form*. When using abbreviations, capitalize only the first letter of a word, so that it will be clear whether your consonants are part of one word, as in the case of "Twist," or of two words, as in "Loose Form" (see list of abbreviations beginning on p. 147).

Hieroglyphics are pictorial representations of your comments. These lines, dots, arrows, and other symbols will

not only save space but also make the card easier to read than if you try to use abbreviations alone.

At the completion of each round, when you have finished using abbreviations and hieroglyphics to record your observations, give the performance a numerical score (figs. 7.1 A & B). If the score is 75 or above, place it on a separate sheet of paper and write the rider's number next to the score, so that at the end of the class you will immediately be able to give the results to the announcer (fig. 7.2). If you do not have enough scores above 75 to pin the class, refer to your card and list the next highest scores until you reach the number of placings you need. (Remember that in the case of an unmounted jog, "Two more entries than the number of ribbons must jog if there are sufficient entries.") At the other extreme, if you have an abundance of horses scoring above 75, you can adjust your cutoff point higher during the class.

Many shows provide a walkie-talkie or head-set, so the

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JUDGES' SCORECARD  
CLASSES OVER FENCES

CLASS NO. 12  
Large Junior Hunter

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	71	73	42	54	48	39	29	27			

NO.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		TOTAL
54	-	△	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			Gm	81
39	-	-	-	△	-	△	-	-	-	-			Fm	68
71	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			Fm	92
66	△	△	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-			Fm	45
27	-	-	-	-	△	-	-	-	-	-			Fm	55
73	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			Gm	90
42	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			Gm	85
101	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			Fm	E
29	△	-	△	-	△	-	△	-	△	-			Gm	60
48	-	-	-	△	-	-	-	-	-	-			Fm	80

A

JUDGES' SCORECARD  
CLASSES OVER FENCES

CLASS NO. 15  
Equitation Over Fences (15-17)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	73	71	29	42	54	39					

NO.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		TOTAL
54	-	△	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			GP	79
39	-	-	-	△	-	△	-	-	-	-			FP	72
71	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			GP	90
66	△	△	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-			FP	45
27	-	-	-	-	△	-	-	-	-	-			FP	55
73	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			EP	92
42	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			FP	80
101	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			PP	E
29	△	-	△	-	△	-	△	-	△	-			FP	85
48	-	-	-	△	-	-	-	-	-	-			PP	67

B

**7.1 A & B** The mock card A above shows symbols and scores as they might appear in a Large Junior Hunter class. Compare these symbols and scores to those in B, which shows the same trips when scored as an Equitation over Fences class. Notice that the horses' general way of moving and specific form errors over fences affect the hunter scores in A, while the riders' general position between fences and specific position errors over fences affect the equitation scores in B.

judge can call in the placings to the announcer. If, however, you have to send the results through a runner, write down your list again and send the copy, so that you will have a list in hand for the jog. Do not write the results at the top of your card until you have finished judging the jog, for a lame horse will change all the placings below it.

Basically, numerical scoring is patterned after the scoring system used at schools:

- |     |             |
|-----|-------------|
| 90s | Excellent A |
| 80s | Good B      |
| 70s | Fair C      |
| 60s | Poor D      |
| 50s | Failing F   |

Think of a score of 90 as a "basic ceiling," with only a horse of exceptional ability—that is, one that is both an excellent jumper and an excellent mover—being able to score above this mark. You also want to think of 95 as an "absolute ceiling," so that your scores will not reach too close to the real ceiling of 100. By trying to cap the scores at 95, you still have a little room in case you are faced with scoring a number of outstanding trips in the 90s. (This is a problem only at the largest shows in the country.)

Reserve scores above 90 for horses of excellent quality that turn in wonderful trips. For horses that have inherent limitations, the scores should never move above 90. Some examples of this are horses that are good jumpers and good

#12 Large Jr.		#15 Equitation O/F	
#	Score	#	Score
71	92	73	92
73	90	71	90
42	85	29	85
54	81	42	80
48	80	54	79
39	68	39	72
29	60	48	67
27	55		

**7.2** It is helpful to have a separate sheet of paper on which the top scores can be listed in proper pinning order. The sheet on the left shows the pinning list for the Large Junior Hunter class in fig. 7.1 A, while the sheet on the right shows the pinning list for the Equitation Over Fences class in fig. 7.1 B.

movers, but are not excellent in either category; horses that are excellent movers, but only adequate jumpers; and horses that are excellent jumpers, but only adequate movers. With the very best trip each of these could turn in, their scores would never go beyond 90. When ridden well, these are the horses that score in the 80s.

To score in the 70s, a good horse—that is, a good jumper and good mover—would have to make some substantial errors. Untalented horses, however, can easily fall into the 70s. A poor mover would not have to have many jumping faults to reach the 70s, and a horse with chronically poor form in the air would have no trouble falling to the 70s or below.

The 60s and 50s represent very bad trips. Judges now have a set of predetermined scores to use for common

major errors. I have provided a chart comparing these predetermined scores for hunter and equitation classes, since the division rules differ (fig. 7.3).

Figure 7.3 shows how judges today score for these faults. It also reflects guidelines in the equitation division. \*Note that 2 refusals eliminate in certain classes as noted in the *USEF Rule Book*. \*\*Also note that “applied” means that this score for judging has been spelled out in the *USEF Rule Book* in one Division, but has traditionally been applied, but not defined, in another Division.

For “trotting on course” to receive a 60, there must be a clear break from the canter, not just a skip behind. The late Gene Cunningham, a well-respected horseman and judge, used to say, “If you can’t post to it, it isn’t a trot.” A skip behind—that is, a break of gait in the hind feet, but not in the front—is penalized at the judge’s discretion.

For a “very poor trip” to receive a score between 51 and 59, it should be so bad that if you deducted points for all the errors, the score would be 50 or less. You stop at 50 to make sure you don’t score a bad trip below one that had a knockdown (exception: equitation classes) or refusal.

When an automatic score of 55 is assigned because of the way a single fence was jumped, the obstacle must have been jumped so dangerously that it made you gasp! This is not just a risky spot but one that nearly “bought the farm” for the rider’s family.

Other than giving these predetermined scores for major errors, you arrive at a numerical score based on the deduction of points for each error committed. Use the symbols previously discussed to “draw a picture” of the way the course is ridden, so that later you can bring each trip to mind if you need to—for instance, if two or more horses have the same score and you have to break the tie. At the end of each trip, starting with a score of 90, deduct points for errors

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<i>HUNTER</i>	<i>EQUITATION</i>
Trotting on course 60	Trotting on course 60
Very poor trip 51-59	Very poor trip 51-59
Dangerous fence 55	Dangerous fence 55
Adding or eliminating a stride inside an in-and-out 55	Adding or eliminating a stride inside an in-and-out 55
	Loss of stirrup or reins was 55, but now up to judge's discretion.
Knockdown 50	Knockdown (4 point deduction from the rider's base score)
Crossing the track 45	Crossing the track 45
	When testing, rider does not attempt part of test (such as fails to back or halt) 50
	When testing, rider makes attempt but is unsuccessful (such as loses counter lead or breaks into canter in front of trot fence). Up to 10 point deduction per occurrence.
Trotting or cantering through the in-gate or out-gate <i>Elimination</i>	Trotting or cantering through the in-gate or out-gate <i>Elimination</i>
1 Refusal 45	1 Refusal 45
*2 Refusals 35	*2 Refusals 35
3 Refusals <i>Elimination</i>	3 Refusals <i>Elimination</i>
Fall <i>Elimination</i>	Fall <i>Elimination</i>
Off course <i>Elimination</i>	Off course <i>Elimination</i>
Stopping for lost shoe or broken equipment <i>Elimination</i>	Stopping for lost shoe or broken equipment <i>Elimination</i>
Jumping course before it is reset <i>Elimination</i>	Jumping course before it is reset <i>(**Applied Elimination)</i>
Bolting from the ring	Bolting from the ring <i>(**Applied Elimination)</i>

**7.3** Hunter and equitation scores compared above.

committed. Use a 5-point deduction for a medium-deep spot as the standard around which all other scores are based.

For horses that are in the category of excellent jumpers and movers, scores above 90 will be based on "plus points." These are additional points added to reflect the quality of performance. Again, you are thinking of 95 as an "absolute ceiling," so do not get carried away and score too high when you get your first really good trip in a class.

Too many horses scoring in the 90s is not the usual problem for judges. Most will be dealing with a number of scores in the 80s and 70s, or possibly below. It will suffice to put a series of plusses if you find you have too many horses scoring the same. (For Classics, just hold up your score, even if it is the same as an earlier one, for the announced score is the average from the two or three judges present. Even at small shows that hold a Classic-type competition using only one judge, there is no problem in holding up the same score as for a previous trip because the final score will be the average of each horse's scores for the two rounds).

It is helpful in judging classes over fences to put a circle around a major error—such as a refusal, a knockdown, an added stride in an in-and-out, trotting on course, or elimination—and to make note of it in your space for comments following the trip, so that you will make "double sure" not to overlook the error in tallying your score. If the competition is terrible and/or the class very small, you may have to pin a horse that has a major fault, such as a knockdown or refusal, but generally these faults would put a hunter out of the ribbons. Of course, an eliminating fault—such as a third refusal or a fall—must not be pinned even if there are ribbons left over.

In numerical scoring, as with everything else, practice makes perfect. If you use this system all the time, you will not feel uncomfortable when your score is displayed to the public during a Classic.