

Showmanship

by Pam Christopher

Before you begin to teach your horse the fine points of showmanship you need to have covered basic ground manners. They need to lead well, respect your space, understand what whoa means and be willing to stop and stand for extended periods of time. Once you have mastered this you are ready to tackle showmanship.

AMHR Rules-showmanship according to AMHR rules varies slightly since it is done on the half system and not the quarter system like large horses and AMHA. To put this simply when your judge is doing the inspection of your horse while standing still you are on the opposite side of your horse at all times and may look across your horses back at them. In AMHA showmanship as in Quarter Horse/Paint style showmanship you do the quarter system where you are always one quarter of the horse away from the judge, in they are at your horses hind quarter on the left you are front quarter on the left, they cross to hind quarter on the right, you cross to front quarter on the front, never looking over the top of your horse at the judge. Of course this makes more sense when showing a larger horse where you would perhaps not be able to see over the horse.

AMHR rules are as follows-

- A. In showmanship classes, exhibitors are to show to the presiding Judge only. Below are points on which showmanship classes are to be judged. Only the handler is judged. The horse is merely a prop to show the showmanship ability of the handler. Management must choose and post showmanship patterns.
- B. Appearance of the exhibitor:

10 points – clothes and person neat and clean.
Suitable clothes: hat, boots, long sleeve shirts and gloves are required.
- C. Appearance of horse:
 1. 40 points- conformation not to be a factor.
 - a. 15 points – conditioning
 - b. 15 points – grooming of horse
 - c. 5 points - trimming
 - d. 5 points – tack

D. Showing horse in ring: 50 points.

The Judge will use one of the following three ring patterns in judging this class. Judge will discuss the selected pattern with contestants prior to class. The selected pattern must be posted two hours before the start of the class.

1. Leading 15 points

Enter ring leading animal at an alert walk in a counter-clockwise direction. Walk on animal's left side, holding lead shank in right hand near halter. The remaining portion of the lead is held neatly and safely in left hand. Animal should lead readily at a walk. After Judge has lined up the class in front of spectators, he or she will call on each exhibitor individually to move his or her horse individually. When moving horse, be sure that the judge gets a clear, unobstructed view of the horse's action. Allow the horse sufficient lead to move freely the required distance, stop, and turn to the right around the horse. Exhibitor should perform the showmanship pattern as directed by the Judge or Ring Steward.

2. Posing 15 points

When posing your horse, stand toward the front facing the horse, but always in a position where you can keep your eye on the Judge. Pose your miniature with his feet squarely under him. Do most of your showing with the lead strap. Never touch or kick the horse's leg into position. Do not crowd the exhibitor next to you when in a side-by-side position, or in front of or behind you when lined up head to tail. When Judge is observing other animals, let yours stand if posed reasonably well. Be natural. Over showing, undue fussing, and maneuvering are objectionable.

3. Poise, alertness, and merits: 20 points

Keep alert and be aware of the position of the judge at all times. Do not be distracted by persons or things outside the ring. Show the animal at all times. Be courteous and sportsmanlike at all times, recognize quickly and correct faults of your horse, respond quickly to requests from Judges and officials. Keep showing until the entire class has been placed and excused from the ring. A Judge may ask an exhibitor questions (Example: exhibitor number, horse's age, body parts of horse, etc) At his/her discretion a Judge may ask an exhibitor for an additional test after completion of one of the three set patterns.

AMHR Patterns available at <http://www.shetlandminiature.com>

What to Wear-

The rulebook states long sleeves, pants, boots, hat and gloves.

Jacket- I prefer that a jacket is worn, it looks more polished and professional. A proper showmanship jacket is a longer style jacket and covers your hips and buttocks, your sleeves should be a nice length so that you don't show skin between your jacket and your gloves when your arms are outstretched.

Blouse/shirt You should have a blouse underneath your jacket and men should wear a shirt and tie.

Vests-A vest over a blouse or a shirt is acceptable as well.

Gloves are a requirement, I prefer leather but it is not a must.

Pants Your pants should be nicely fitted but not tight and need to be long enough that they just skim the ground at your heel but not so long that they are dragging and getting dusty.

Hat-I prefer a western hat although you do sometimes see other styles at miniature shows. Be sure your hat is clean and shaped properly, a hat that looks like it has been sat on is definitely unprofessional looking.

Hair-long hair needs to be tied back neatly. A neat ponytail or a hairnet works well. If the sides need bobby pins then use them, no loose flyaway hair that detracts from that neat and tidy picture.

Jewelry-I like some nice jewelry to add to a nice polished outfit in showmanship.

Makeup-I like to see a bit of makeup too but not overdone, and of course it is not a necessity.

NEAT-CLEAN-TIDY

Show halters-My preference for a show halter is a western style one although you can use a cable style one too. I like my lead chain run through the ring on the left side of my halter under the chin to the ring on the right side through that ring and up to the ring on the top right side and snapped with smooth side of snap facing in. I do this to have only a short amount of chain for my preferred length of lead. You can also just double up your chain through the bottom ring on your halter if you prefer. Western style halters should be fitted snug for showmanship classes, quite a bit snuggier than what they would be normally worn. No space should be seen between the horse's head and the halter. Your show halter can have silver on it or not...must be clean!

Grooming- For a showmanship class your horse should be groomed and clean. Clipped neat and tidy. No whiskers, no long hair on the pasterns, neat bridle bath, mane, tail and foretop combed out nicely. Your horse should be very clean, I like some baby oil gel on muzzle and eyes, and foretop gelled, hooves black or clear coated. Before you enter the ring, be sure to pick your horse's feet, check that they don't have hay hanging out of their mouth and give them time on the trailer to relieve themselves-nothing looks worse than your horse having to pee in the ring. Showmanship starts BEFORE you get in the ring!

Etiquette in the Ring

A few things I think are worth mentioning regarding etiquette during a showmanship class. There are some rules of etiquette that you may not find in an AMHR rulebook but they are ones you should regard nonetheless.

-don't talk to other exhibitors during the class unless it is an emergency-showmanship is a class where you are expected to show your horse until the placings are announced so even when the judges card is handed in you don't relax and you don't chat-SHOW your horse!

-respect your fellow exhibitor-they are out there to win the class too-if your horse is not behaving don't let it effect your neighbor-letting your horse walk in circles in the lineup is NOT acceptable in a showmanship class ever. Your horse should be able to stand. If you are having trouble making them stand move to the end of the lineup where you aren't disturbing others. Better yet work with your horse at home so they know how to stand.

-Don't crowd the exhibitor next to you-leave lots of space so if your horse or their horse wiggles around a bit it doesn't become a problem.

-If your horse is being completely unruly(eg-rearing) excuse yourself from the class-don't ruin it for someone else

The Pivot-

A smooth, precise pivot is the essential element to a showmanship pattern. Although in miniature horses you are given the choice of using either left or right hind as your stationary leg to pivot around I always use the right hind. It is my preference for a clean, fluid pivot. The same as with your walk and trot you want to execute your pivot with fluid controlled movements. All of your movements should blend smoothly together.

Assuming that your horse does not know how to execute a pivot here is how I begin to teach a correct pivot on the right hind leg. I always break down the pivot into small movements, rewarding every effort with a pause or a "good job". I don't want to overwhelm a new horse try to do an entire revolution in one continuous motion, or cause them to take one single step that is not a movement I want to see. Focus on doing the pivot step by step, while keeping your horse aligned and maintaining your correct position. Once you can do the pivot one step at a time, you can put it all together for a fluid turn.

Starting position, your horse is a straight line standing square. You are facing your horse on the left so you are directly opposite his nose. Your hands should be approximately 12" from his head, elbows bent at 90degree angles. You should always maintain this exact space from your horse never getting any closer or any further from them. When you start your pivot, you are pushing them away from you and keeping that 12" space between you. If you want to use a kissing sound to cue your horse to start the pivot and move away from you can. This start position ensures that your horse is balanced in the correct position to start his pivot. You want him to cross his left front over his right front to easily make the turn.

At home when teaching the pivot I will often take the lead in my left hand(only for training purposes) give a small pull forward to get him to move forward and then step toward him and give a little "kiss" cue to get him to move away from me. This will get the horse to begin the turn by crossing their left

front leg over their right. Reward them for each small effort and repeat this move....this will create a pivot on the hind. Practice, practice practice!

Your position during the pivot...facing left side of your horses head at his nose, hands 12" from your horses head, elbows at a 90 degree angle, chin up looking ahead, walking crisply around the turn. The smoother and quicker the turn the better. You will not lose points for a slow, perfect turn but you can definitely impress by adding a bit of speed. Just be careful! Don't sacrifice your accuracy for speed.