



Taking Ownership:

Taking Responsibility at Horse Shows



PHOTOS BY TRICIA BOOKER

The USHJA Owners Task Force members conclude their ‘Taking Ownership’ series with a look at showing your horse.

By Megan Lacy

As owners, we need to know what it takes to get our horses to the ring.

—Debbie Bass

Whether it’s your first time at a horse show or you’re a regular “weekend warrior,” knowing what to expect and your responsibilities as an owner are important.

Each year, more than 1,100 United States Equestrian Federation-rated Hunter/Jumper competitions are held, along with countless other unrated competitions. With only 52 weekends in a year, you can see that there could be dozens of competitions each weekend across the country. It’s important that you work closely with your trainer to determine the best plan to achieve your goals.

In addition to having a well-informed professional guiding your competition selection process, taking the time to educate yourself about the various competitive offerings in our sport may unlock

new opportunities you never knew existed.

Knowing the competition rating lingo is a big first step, and even some of our most seasoned competitors may be surprised to realize that some old nomenclature has shifted over the years. Competition ratings help exhibitors know what to expect from a competition by setting standards of competition across the country.

Because the Hunter/Jumper sport is composed of two disciplines, USEF rates competitions for each discipline. The USEF-rated Hunter competitions are classified as Premier, National, Regional I and Regional II. While the rating names for Hunter competitions were changed from AA, A, B and C on December 1, 2013, to the current nomenclature, the letter system is still used by many within the sport.

The rating names were meant to provide more context for exhibitors as to what to expect from the different competition levels.

The USEF-rated Jumper competitions begin with Jumper 1, Jumper 2, Jumper 3/4 and Jumper 5/6. Jumper shows are rated on prize money, and Jumper 1 competitions are typically paired with unrated shows, while Jumper 2 competitions fall alongside Regional I shows. Jumper 3/4 typically run with National competitions, and Jumper 5/6 are paired with Premier competitions.

“As the ratings go up, more and more is expected. Prize money is the biggest factor, but it’s also the number of days over which the competition is held and the types of classes offered, among other factors,” said Bob Bell, chair of the

USHJA Competition Standards Committee.

Of course, rated competition is by no means the only type of competition. Many riders will compete at rated and unrated competitions during the course of a year. Competitions not rated by the USEF may be recognized by other organizations. For instance, many state and local Hunter/Jumper organizations offer local competitions and show series, and the USHJA also offers recognition for organizations and competition manag-

ers as a destination.

Once you've set clear goals and understand the competitive opportunities, you'll be ready to work with your trainer to choose the types of competitions that will help you achieve those goals and make fond memories.

Know the Rules

As an owner and exhibitor, you have a responsibility to know and understand the rules. This may seem like a daunting task if you've ever really looked at the *USEF*

“As owners, we need to know what it takes to get our horses to the ring,” said Debbie Bass, chair of the Owners Task Force. “And we need to take responsibility for knowing about the preparation of our horses.”

Remember that beyond the rules is the *spirit of the rules*. This aims to promote integrity, honesty, equal opportunity, fair play, responsibility, respect and enjoyment in the sport, and protect the health, safety and well-being of participants, including our equine partners.

others may find something else that works for them. You need to train both your mind and body.”

Competing includes a variety of costs, so budgeting in advance of the competition is an important consideration. In fact, building competition costs into your overall budget for horse ownership can help make sure you achieve your goals within the sport.

Remember, when it comes

J.P. Bordeleau, right, and Hugh Kincannon



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Bob Bell

ers to host Outreach Competitions, which do not require a USEF rating. These competitions offer year-end awards, as well as recognition throughout the year, for Hunter, Jumper and Equitation classes.

From USEF ratings to USHJA and even state and local recognition, your sport organizations are helping to set standards of competition so exhibitors know what to expect when they compete and have the best experience possible. Bell noted that many exhibitors are not only looking for a specific competitive experience, but are also looking at the competition

Rulebook. The USHJA Owners Task Force recommends that members be especially familiar with Chapter 4, Drugs and Medications—especially General Rule 404: Responsibility and Accountability of Trainers and Other Persons Responsible.

Effective December 1, 2016, GR404 was broadened to include riders, owners, trainers and other support personnel as responsible parties that could be held accountable for medications administered to their horses. It may be prudent to have a signed letter of agreement with the horse's trainer detailing customary show medications and standard show preparation.



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—J. P. Bordeleau

Be Prepared

Bass said that preparing for competition should occur on several levels—physical, mental and financial.

“This is a sport. If you're not physically fit to compete, it can cause problems,” Bass said. “In addition to physical fitness, mental toughness is key. Some people will work with sport psychologists, and

to budgeting for competitions you have to think beyond entries. There are stall fees, braiding fees, trainer day fees, trainer splits, grooming and tipping to consider, among other expenses. If you're unsure of the costs you'll incur when attending a new show or moving up in the competition rating system, be sure to ask your trainer to map out the fees and costs before you commit to attending. Show costs can differ greatly, and you don't want to find a surprise waiting for you when you check out in the show office or receive your monthly invoice from your trainer.

If you're competing at a USEF-rated competition,

you'll need a USEF Active membership and a USHJA Active/Competing membership. Additionally, horses should be recorded with the USEF and registered with the USHJA. Beginning December 1, Hunter/Jumper competitors wishing to earn points at rated competitions will need to have their horses microchipped and record that information with the USEF. Beginning December 1, 2018, all horses competing in classes that require USHJA registration at USEF-licensed competitions will need to be microchipped.

It Takes a Village

From office staff to ring crew to competition officials, it takes an army of people to put together a top-notch competition. In addition to those hired by the competition, each participant plays an important role in creating an environment where horsemanship, sportsmanship and quality competition are paramount.

"Horse shows aren't a typical retail or consumer experience," said Bass. "We're actually part of the event, which means we're part of making the event a great experience."

J.P. Bordeleau, who has been a technical coordinator and manager at competitions across the United States, including the USHJA International Hunter Derby Championship, offered a few tips for having the best experience at your next competition:

- Watch the schedule and know it may change. Schedule updates and other important information are often announced over the loudspeaker or posted in the horse show office.

- Enter the competition as early as possible, so manage-



Everything Starts and Ends with Your Horse

As we wrap up this series on "Taking Ownership," you can find the past installments in these 2017 issues of *USHJA In Stride* magazine:

- Tips for the New or Longtime Horse Owner—March
- Finding the Right Professional for You—May
- Navigating the Purchase Process—July
- Finding Balance in Horse Ownership—September

If there's one thing to take away from this series, said USHJA Owners Task Force chair Debbie Bass, it's that as an owner, everything you do should start and end with your horse's best interest in mind.

"As the science continues to move forward in animal intelligence, we're discovering our sport is different," said Bass. "We are not golf. We are not tennis. We are using horses. They are feeling and thinking horses, and we are on a team with them. We are the stewards of their well-being.

"That's why we are all here—the love of the horse. Horse ownership is a privilege and a responsibility; we owe them a debt of gratitude," she concluded.

ment can make adjustments to the schedule in advance.

- Remember that many horse shows put competition information online, so often their websites and providers are the best places to find results, orders of go, class counts and time estimates.

- Don't hesitate to ask questions of competition management. Introduce yourself when you pose questions; often, competition management will know your trainer and may be able to provide a more comprehensive answer.

"We are here to help, so don't be afraid to ask questions," said Bordeleau. "At the end of the day, I'm going to do everything I can to get the correct answer or resolve the situation."

Bordeleau also noted that the horse show staff work closely with trainers to keep the schedule moving and avoid ring conflicts.

The Owners Task Force members recommend that competitors communicate with their trainers in advance about responsibilities at the

competition. Then, maintain an open dialogue with your trainer throughout the show.

Some questions may include:

- Does your trainer prefer each client to check out at the show office, or does he/she prefer that you leave an open check or a credit card number, allowing him/her to check everyone out at once?

- Do you leave the braider a check, or does your trainer add that bill to your show invoice?

- Who is responsible for you and your horse's annual USEF/USHJA registration, your local and regional association memberships, ASPCA, WCHR and other national program memberships and USHJA Green Hunter Incentive nomination fees, for example? Some memberships must be initiated before the show concludes in order for your points to count.

Each trainer has his or her own approach to ensuring a great experience, and the more you know about what your trainer expects, the more you'll feel at ease and satisfied with the competition experience.

Beyond your trainer, two people you may interact with a lot at a horse show are the secretary and the paddock master (in-gate organizer). The show secretary coordinates the entry information, ensures all of the paperwork is correct and helps close out every single competitor's account as the competition wraps up.

The paddock master works to ensure that the ring runs smoothly and efficiently, coordinating with other paddock masters and working around trainers' schedules so the show ends at a reasonable time and everyone has a wonderful experience. 