

Understanding How Hunt Seat Equitation & Hunter Classes Are Judged

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Exhibitors, at the entry-level, are often confused and / or uneducated when it comes to competing in an English show. I have put together some basic guidelines to help the novice rider, new to the show ring, be better prepared and educated about the system from which these classes are judged.

Let's begin with the differences between Hunter classes and Equitation classes.

HUNTERS

Whenever you see the word "Hunter" on your class list, whether an *Under Saddle* (flat, no jumping), or *Over Fences* class, it means the class is judged *ON THE HORSE'S WAY* of going: manners and style over fences and on the flat. (A pleasure class would also be in this category).

The Hunter divisions are based on how suitable and safe a horse would be to actually ride to the hounds on a hunt. Although the more refined show ring hunters vary drastically from the actual field hunter used on the hunt, they should still cover the ground nicely, with a flat knee and jump with a nice arc (bascule) and knees tucked up. They should possess good manners and be manageable with a light contact to the mouth.

In the Under Saddle class the horse should be ridden with a very light feel to the mouth with the rider rising up in the two-point (half seat) at the canter. Horses are shown in both directions at the walk, trot and canter. The idea is to show how naturally the horse moves without pulling on the reins or "bridling" it up too much. The nose should be poked out a bit, with a long, low head carriage while being balanced. A long, relaxed gait is preferred. The goal is a smooth round over fences with good distances, flying changes and no rails hit or knocked down, and correct striding between jumps.

Be aware that a horse in the Hunter class will be penalized more for knocking down a rail than it would be in an Equitation Class (unless the knockdown is caused by rider error).

EQUITATION

Whenever you see the word "Equitation" on your class list, know that this class is judged on the *RIDER'S FORM* whether over fences or on the flat or medal class. Equitation, by and large refers to the rider's form, position and effectiveness when riding, whether in a flat class (group class with no jumping) or in an over fences class.

Specifically, *Hunt Seat Equitation* is derived from the correct position necessary and desirable for riding a horse over fences. This correct form is exemplified by a very stable leg position, with heels remaining deep, lower leg placed and maintained just behind the girth with a straight line from the rider's hip to heel, a straight back, elastic arms, firm but kind hands that *MAINTAIN CONTACT* with the horse's mouth at all times without interfering with the horse.

The reins should connect with the rider's hands forming an *UNBROKEN LINE FROM THE REINS THROUGH THE RIDER'S FOREARMS TO THE ELBOW*. Because jumping poses an inherent risk, form, strength and excellent body control are of the utmost importance in Hunt Seat. A rider should be able to move the hands forward to release the horse's head and neck when going over the jump without losing their deep heel and tight lower leg so as to never interfere with the process. The over fences round should be smooth, with good distances to each fence and flying changes when needed.

In an *Equitation on the Flat class*, all riders compete as a group at the walk, trot and canter both directions. Depending on the level of the class, the riders may be asked to perform various tests that display their skill, such as extended trot, sitting the trot, simple lead changes, flying lead changes, counter canter, riding without stirrups and various other tests that may be found in the [USEF \(United States Equestrian Federation\) Rule Book](#). In the Over Fences classes, riders perform individually over a course of jumps and again are judged on how well they maneuver the course and maintain ideal form.

As I often tell my students: Good equitation is an art: one should see the results of good riding without seeing how it was done.

A WORD ABOUT WARDROBE:

What is okay and what is not?

HORSES

Hunters / Equitation

- *Always wear a shaped saddle pad. No square pads, logos, etc.*
- *Absolutely NO MARTINGALES in any flat class – AUTOMATIC ELIMINATION*
- *Absolutely NO DROPPED -or- FIGURE 8 NOSEBANDS or FLASH ATTACHMENTS*

Hunters-specific

- *No polo wraps, splint boots, equitation boots, or bell boots – AUTOMATIC ELIMINATION - unless permission has been granted by the judge before the class*

Equitation-specific

- *Equitation boots on the horse are acceptable.*

RIDERS

- Clean beige/khaki breeches only.
- Polished Tall boots or Paddock boots with matching half chaps that fit snugly - *small children may wear jodhpurs with garters*
- Girls' hair should be up in a hair net - *under 12 may have it braided*
- Dark (but not black) hunt coat that just brushes the back of the saddle when rider is mounted
- Show shirt with choker for girls / Dress shirt with tie for boys
- Black ASTM- approved helmet
- Black or brown gloves

NO BLING! Hunters/Equitation is a conservative and traditional sport.

SHOW UP WITH A CLEAN HORSE, CLEAN TACK AND ENJOY YOURSELF