

## 2023 New AQHA Rules

SHW108.7 AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenges highlight the versatility, soundness and willing attitude of American Quarter Horses that are ranch-born and-raised. Through a series of ranch horse competitions, Ranching Heritage Challenges are intended to increase demand for ranch horses by providing an opportunity for ranches and horse owners to compete in unique ranch horse competitions for a significant purse. These Challenges are open to horses bred by an AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeder which have been fully enrolled in the program. Any AQHA or AQHYA member in good standing may own and show an eligible horse in these Challenges which offer multiple divisions for various ages and skill levels for both horse and rider. Classes include working ranch horse, ranch riding, ranch cutting, barrel racing, team roping, **steer stopping**, and **breakaway roping**.

SHW112.4 No 2-year-old may be shown in any performance class prior to July 1 of its 2-year-old year, except in showmanship at halter. **Horses must be at least three years of age to show in ranch riding, ranch trail, and VRH classes.**

**SHW126.6 Show results fines for incomplete or incorrect submitted data for shows beginning January 1, 2023. Errors on the required digital roster and judge card results spreadsheet are calculated by the total show event (all show numbers within an event). Show management will be fined for each instance across the total show event of horse/exhibitor names not matching AQHA's database or exhibitors without the correct membership:**

**Up to 50 errors \$100**

**51-100 errors \$150**

**101-150 errors \$200**

**151-200 errors \$250**

**201-250 errors \$300**

**251 or more errors \$500**

**SHW127.1.1 International owners and tenants of international showground facilities are excluded from SHW127.1. In addition, horses registered in their names may compete at AQHA shows hosted on their property.**

SHW220. AMATEUR AND YOUTH HORSE OWNERSHIP REQUIREMENTS. In addition to the requirements of the ELIGIBILITY FOR PARTICIPATION, AMATEUR ELIGIBILITY and/or YOUTH ELIGIBILITY, and unless otherwise permitted pursuant to AQHA rules and regulations, any horse exhibited in the youth or amateur division must be solely owned by the contestant showing the horse or the contestant's immediate family. Amateur eligibility requirements also apply to the amateur exhibitor when showing in the open division. **See exception for international youth members (excluding Canada) in SHW236.**

**SHW225.8 Notwithstanding SHW225.3.2 above, amateurs may appear in advertisements and/or endorse products or services. Renumeration, direct or indirect, may be received for these activities.**

**SHW236. International youth members (excluding Canada) may exhibit a non-owned, non-leased horse in regular youth division classes. Although a youth may show a non-owned horse in the youth division, doing so could violate AMATEUR ELIGIBILITY.**

SHW246 If an exhibitor wins a class at the Level 1 Championships, he/she is no longer eligible to compete **in all exhibitor age divisions and/or sex divisions** in that class at any future Level 1 Championships. However, if an exhibitor is Level 1 eligible, he/she may continue to show in that class in Level 1 competition.

**SHW247. If an exhibitor wins a class at the Level 2 Championships, he/she is no longer eligible to compete in all exhibitor age divisions and/or all sex divisions of that class at any future Level 2 Championships for the subsequent 3 years. However, if an exhibitor is Level 2 eligible, he/she may continue to show in that class in Level 2 competition.**

SHW306.4 Protective boots, leg wraps and bandages are allowed in reining, working cow horse, boxing, team penning, ranch sorting, barrel racing, pole bending, stake racing, tie-down roping, breakaway roping, dally team roping-heading, dally team roping-heeling, cutting, western horsemanship, ranch riding, ranch trail, **working western rail**, versatility ranch horse classes and ranching heritage classes. The use of slip on (easy-care) horse boots or related footwear are not considered as protective boots and are permissible to be worn in all classes.

Regarding prohibited English equipment:

**SHW312.9 The stirrup leather iron may not be connected by string or any other material.**

SHW334 GAITS - RANCH CLASSES **AND WORKING WESTERN RAIL**. In all gaits, movement of the ranch horse should simulate a horse needing to cover long distances, softly and quietly, like that of a working ranch horse. The following terminology shall apply:

SHW378.3 Ten (10) points (regarding Showmanship)

Exhibitor is not in the required position during inspection

Exhibitor touching the horse or kicking or pointing their feet at the horse's feet during the set-up

Standing directly in front of the horse

Loss of lead shank, holding chain or two hands on shank

Blatant disobedience including biting, kicking, rearing or pawing; horse continually circling exhibitor

**Horse stepping out of or moving the hind end significantly during a pivot or turn more than one time**

Regarding performance classes;

SHW400.1 Exhibit **four** horses in a junior class.

SHW400.2 Exhibit **four** horses in a senior class.

SHW400.8 No horse may be shown in more than **two** youth or amateur subdivisions of any type of event. (Example: A horse ridden in a reining class by a youth in the **13-year-old** and under group can also be ridden in a reining class by a youth in the **14-year-old** through 18-year-old group). However, the same horse may be shown in a Level 1 class then shown by another exhibitor or same exhibitor in Level 2 or Level 3 youth or amateur division.

SHW417. Ranch Riding Class requirements:

SHW417.1 Each horse will work individually. Horses will be scored on the basis of 0 to 100, with 70 denoting an average performance. Each maneuver will receive a score that should be added or subtracted from 70 and is subject to a penalty that should be subtracted. Each maneuver will be scored on the following basis, ranging from plus 1 ½ to minus 1 1/2.: -1 . extremely poor, -1 very poor, -1/2 poor, 0 correct, +1/2 good, + 1 very good, + 1 1/2 excellent. Maneuver scores are to be determined and assessed independently of penalty points. **Natural ranch horse appearance will also be evaluated ranging from plus 1 ½ to minus 1 ½.**

SHW417.2 One of the 15 approved patterns must be used, **except at AQHA World and Level 1 Championship events where alternate patterns may be used.**

SHW419. Ranch Riding Penalties. Maneuver evaluations and penalty applications are to be determined independently. The following penalties will be applied to each occurrence and be deducted from the final score:

SHW419.1 One (1) point

Too slow (per gait)

Over-bridled (per maneuver)

Out of frame (per maneuver)

Break of gait at walk or trot for 2 strides or less

**Wrong lead or out of lead for 2 strides or less**

SHW419.2 Three (3) point

Break of gait at walk or trot for more than 2 strides

Break of gait at lope, except when correcting an incorrect lead

Wrong lead or out of lead **for more than two strides**

Draped reins (per maneuver)

Out of lead or cross-cantering more than two strides when changing leads

**Trotting for more than 3 strides in lope departures or when exiting a rollback**

Severe disturbance of any obstacle

SHW422.1 Credit is given to horse/rider teams who negotiate the obstacles correctly and efficiently. Horses should receive credit for showing attentiveness to obstacles and ability to negotiate through the course when the obstacles warrant it while willingly responding to rider's cues on more difficult obstacles. Quality of movement and cadence should be considered part of the maneuver score for the obstacle. **Natural ranch horse appearance will also be evaluated ranging from plus 1 ½ to minus 1 ½.** Maneuver evaluations and penalty applications are to be determined independently. The following penalties will be applied to each occurrence and be deducted from the final score:

SHW422.2 One (1) point

Over-bridled (per maneuver)

Out of frame (per maneuver)

Each hit, bite or stepping on a log, cone plant or any component of the obstacle

Incorrect or break of gait at walk or trot for two (2) strides or less

Both front or hind feet in a single-stride slot or space at a walk or trot

Skipping over or failing to step into required space

Split pole in lope-over

Incorrect number of strides, if specified

One to two steps on mount/dismount or ground tie except shifting to balance

**Wrong lead or out of lead for two (2) strides or less**

SHW422.3 Three (3) points

Wrong lead or out of lead **for more than two (2) strides**

Draped reins

Break of gait at lope, except when correcting an incorrect lead

Break of gait at walk or trot for more than two (2) strides

Three to four steps on mount/dismount on ground tie

**Trotting for more than three (3) strides in lope departures or exiting a rollback into a lope from a stop or walk**

**Knocking down or over, or severely disturbing an obstacle**

**Stepping out of or falling off an obstacle with one (1) foot**

**Missing or evading part of a log/obstacle with one (1) foot**

SHW422.4 Five (5) points

Spurring in front of cinch

Blatant disobedience

Use of either hand to instill fear/praise

Stepping out of or falling off an obstacle **with more than one (1) foot**

Dropping an object required to be carried

1st or 2nd cumulative refusal

Letting go of gate

Five or more steps on mount/dismount or ground tie

**Missing or evading part of a log/obstacle with more than one foot**

**SHW425. Working Western Rail.** The working western rail class measures the ability of the horse to be a pleasure to ride and should reflect the versatility, attitude, and movement of a working horse. The horse should be well-broke, relaxed, quiet, soft and cadenced at all gaits. The movement of the working western rail horse should simulate a horse needing to cover long distances, softly and quietly. The overall manners and responsiveness of the horse and the horse's quality of movement are the primary considerations. Maximum credit should be given to the horse that has a natural flowing stride and consistent, ground covering gaits. Transitions should be performed when requested, with smoothness and responsiveness. The ideal working western rail horse should have a natural head carriage at each gait. The horse should be ridden on a relatively loose rein with light contact and without requiring undue restraint while being responsive to the rider and making timely transitions in a smooth and correct manner. The horse should be soft in the bridle, yield to contact and shall not be shown on a full drape of rein. Riders are encouraged to use adequate space given the extension of gaits required. This class should show the horse's ability to work at a forward, working pace while under control by the rider. The horse shall be balanced and appear willing and a pleasure to ride in a group situation.

**SHW425.1** Open to horses three years of age and older. Offered as a junior, senior, or all age open division class, and as an all-age class for youth, and as a Select or all-age amateur division class.

**SHW425.2** No horse may cross enter a western pleasure or walk/trot western pleasure and working western rail class at the same show regardless of division (youth, amateur or open).

**SHW426. Class Requirements**

**SHW426.1** All exhibitors will work as a group. Individuals working off the rail will not be penalized and passing is permissible.

**SHW426.2** Horses must work both ways of the ring at the walk, trot and lope. Horses must work at least one way of the ring at the extended trot and extended lope. At the option of the judge, horses may be asked to extend their stride at the walk.

**SHW426.3** The overall cadence and performance of the gaits should be as those described in SHW334 GAITS with an emphasis on forward, free-flowing, and ground-covering movement.

**SHW426.4** At the extended trot and lope, the exhibitor may post or stand in the stirrups.

**SHW426.5** Touching or holding the saddle horn during any extended gait is acceptable.

**SHW426.6** Horses are to be reversed to the inside (away from the rail). They may be required to reverse at the walk or trot at the discretion of the judge but shall not be asked to reverse at the lope.

**SHW426.7** Horses are required to back easily and stand quietly. Horses may be brought to the center or backed on the rail.

**SHW426.8** The rider shall not be required to dismount except in the event the judge wishes to check equipment.

**SHW427. Working Western Rail Apparel and Equipment**

**SHW427.1** No hoof polish or hoof black.

**SHW427.2** No braided or banded manes/tails or tail extensions.

**SHW427.3** Trimming inside ears is discouraged.

**SHW427.4** Trimming bridle path is allowed, also trimming of fetlocks or excessive (long) facial hair.

**SHW427.5** Equipment with silver should not count over a good working outfit. Excessive silver on bridles and saddles is discouraged.

**SHW427.6** It is suggested competitors use a breast collar and a rear cinch.

**SHW427.7** When exhibiting in a snaffle bit or hackamore, an exhibitor may switch between two hands and one hand on the reins at any time.

**SHW427.7.1** Use of two hands (except junior horses shown in a snaffle bit/hackamore), more than one finger between split reins or any fingers between romal reins (except in the two rein) shall be cause for disqualification.

**SHW428.** Faults scored according to severity:

Too slow (any gait)

Excessive speed (any gait)

Over-bridled (nose behind the vertical)

Head carried too low such that the poll is below the withers

Out of frame

Head carried too high

Break of gait

Wrong lead or out of lead

Failure to take the appropriate gait when called

Opening mouth excessively

Draped reins

Use of spurs forward of the cinch

Canted at the lope

Blatant disobedience (kick, bite, buck, rear, etc.)

**SHW429. Faults which will be cause for disqualification: Head carried too low and/or clearly behind the vertical excessively and consistently while the horse is in motion, or otherwise showing the appearance of intimidation.**

SHW528. BREAKAWAY ROPING (now available in open division). This event shall be performed following the same general rules as youth tie-down roping ~~and is available only in the amateur and youth divisions~~. This is a timed event with a one-minute time limit and calves must be used.

SHW552.1 Open exhibitors may show up to **four** junior horses and **four** senior horses in each class if held as a Junior/Senior. If held as an allage class, open exhibitors may show up to four horses per class.

SHW556.11 The use of two-rein equipment is allowed in working cow horse, boxing, ranch riding, ranch trail, **working western rail**, all VRH classes and all RHC classes for one year only.

SHW557.1 Except for the ranch conformation class, horses will be scored from 0 to 100, with 70 denoting an average performance. Each maneuver will receive a score ranging from plus 1 ½ to minus 1 ½, defined as follows: -1 ½ extremely poor, -1 very poor, -½ poor, 0 correct, +½ good, + 1 very good, + 1 ½ excellent. Maneuver scores should be added or subtracted from 70 and are to be determined and assessed independently of any penalty points which may accrue. **Natural ranch horse appearance will also be evaluated ranging from plus 1 ½ to minus 1 ½.**

SHW557.6 In each class, specific maneuvers will be designated by the judge to be tiebreakers. The tie-breaker maneuvers will be made prior to the start of the class and so noted on score sheets. These maneuvers will be ranked as first tiebreaker, second, third and so forth. **Ties through 15th place should be broken. Ties beyond 15th place can remain tied and VRH All-Around credits will be split evenly.**

SHW559. RANCHING HERITAGE CHALLENGES. AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenges highlight the versatility, soundness and willing attitude of American Quarter Horses that are ranch-born and-raised. Challenges are open to horses bred by an AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeder which have been fully enrolled in the RHC program. These events offer multiple divisions for various ages and skill levels for both horse and rider. Any AQHA or AQHYA member in good standing may own and show an eligible and fully enrolled RHB horse in a Ranching Heritage Challenge event. (Note: Ranching Heritage Challenge Finals has qualification requirements.) Challenges may consist of seven different classes. Required classes: working ranch horse, including limited working ranch horse (box236 drive-box-drive) for amateur and youth only and ranch riding; optional classes: ranch cutting, barrel racing, team roping, **steer stopping**, and **breakaway roping**. Equipment, tack, and exhibitor attire should reflect the ranching traditions of the working ranch horse classes and must be permitted by AQHA rules. (See SHW305.7, SHW306.4, SHW320)

**SHW559.8 Steer Stopping - Offered at discretion of show management for open, amateur and youth on horses 4 years and older; judged according to AQHA RHC steer stopping rules (SHW569).**

**SHW559.9 Breakaway Roping - Offered at discretion of show management for open, amateur and youth on horses 4 years and older; follows AQHA breakaway rules (SHW528), except calves or yearlings may be used (cattle must be hornless).**

Regarding VRH And RHC Ranch Riding:

- 1 Point: Over-bridled (per maneuver); out of frame (per maneuver); too slow; break of gait at walk or trot for two (2) strides or less; **wrong lead or out of lead for two (2) strides or less.**
- 3 Point: Wrong lead or out of lead for more than two (2) strides; draped reins; break of gait at lope, except when correcting an incorrect lead; break of gait at walk or trot for more than two (2) strides; out of lead or cross-cantering more than two strides when changing leads; **trotting more than three strides when making a simple lead change; trotting for more than three (3) strides in lope departures or when exiting a rollback.**

Regarding VRH Ranch Trail:

SHW561.11 Credit is given to horse/rider teams who negotiate the obstacles correctly and efficiently. Horses should receive credit for showing attentiveness to obstacles and ability to negotiate through the course when the obstacles warrant it while willingly responding to rider's cues on more difficult obstacles. Quality of movement and cadence should be considered part of the maneuver score for the obstacle. **Natural ranch horse appearance will also be evaluated ranging from plus 1 ½ to minus 1 ½.** Maneuver evaluations and penalty applications are to be determined independently. The following penalties will be applied to each occurrence and be deducted from the final score:

- 1 point: Over-bridled (per maneuver); out of frame (per maneuver); each hit, bite or stepping on a log, cone plant or any component of the obstacle; incorrect or break of gait at walk or trot for two (2) strides or less; both front or hind feet in a single-stride slot or space at a walk or trot; skipping over or failing to step into required space; split pole in lope-over; incorrect number of strides, if specified; one to two steps on mount/dismount or ground tie except shifting to balance; **wrong lead or out of lead for two (2) strides or less.**
- 3 point: Wrong lead or out of lead for more than two (s) strides; draped reins; break of gait at lope, except when correcting an incorrect lead; break of gait at walk or trot for more than two (2) strides; three to four steps on mount/dismount on ground tie; **trotting for more than three (3) strides in lope departures or when exiting a rollback; knocking down or over, or severely disturbing an obstacle; stepping out of or falling off an obstacle with one foot; missing or evading part of a log/obstacle with one foot.**
- 5 point: Spurring in front of cinch; blatant disobedience; use of either hand to instill fear/praise; stepping out of or falling off an obstacle with more than one foot; dropping an object required to be carried; 1st or 2nd cumulative refusal; letting go of gate; five or more steps on mount/ dismount or ground tie; **missing or evading part of a log/obstacle with more than one foot.**

**SHW569 RHC STEER STOPPING. This class to be offered in open, cowboy, amateur, and youth divisions.**

**SHW569.1 Timed event with a 90-second time limit.**

**SHW569.2 Horse must start behind a barrier, rope or electronic.**

**SHW569.3 Only one hand on reins is legal.**

**SHW569.3.1 Romal reins and roping reins are legal.**

**SHW569.4 The roper on the horse being judged may throw as many loops as necessary within the allotted time. If more than more than 1 loop is thrown, the rider must recoil and build additional loops as required. If the rider fails to catch within the time limit, he/she will retire from the arena with a score of zero. Riders are to stay mounted. Loss of rope by the rider is an automatic score of zero.**

**SHW569.5 Cattle roped may be horned or hornless, but type of cattle must be consistent throughout the steer stopping cattle (all horned or all hornless).**

**SHW569.5.1 Horned cattle: Legal catches are both horns, half head or around the neck. If a steer is roped any other way, and the rope can be removed while the rider is still mounted, he/she may continue to rope within the 90 second time limit. A score of zero will be given for no catch.**

**SHW569.5.2 Hornless cattle (muley): Legal catches are around the neck.**

**SHW569.5.3 Arena is to be clear except for the flagger and help to line the cattle. It is the flagger's responsibility to check for legal head catches.**

**SHW569.5.4 It is the contestant's responsibility to signal when the run is complete so the head catch can be checked.**

**SHW570. The judge may at his discretion award a contestant a new steer, the run will start over clean with no penalties.**

**SHW570.1 If a steer is deemed unusable by a judge or show management, that steer will be removed from the pen of cattle used for the competition.**

**SHW570.2 If steer leaves the arena during the 90 second time limit, timer will stop the clock.**

**SHW570.2.1 The contestant will receive a new steer lap and tap (no barrier).**

**SHW570.2.2 Time and all major penalties that have occurred up to this point will carry over to the new steer.**

**SHW571. SCORING. Scoring will range from 60-80 points, with 70 points denoting an average performance. Each maneuver will be scored from a plus three to a minus three, in ½ point increments.**

**SHW571.1 Judging begins when the horse enters the arena.**

**Horse will be judged on the following maneuvers:**

**Box and barrier**

**Running and rating**

**Setting and handling**

**Facing**

**SHW572. Penalties. Maneuver evaluations and penalty applications are to be determined independently. The following penalties will be applied to each occurrence and be deducted from the final score:**

**- 1 point: Nervousness in box; turning head severely; squatting in corner; stopping crooked.**

**- 2 points: Freezing-up in box; jumping the barrier; scotching; missing second loop.**

**- 3 points: Missing first loop; taking off illegal catch.**

**- 5 points: Refusing to enter box; breaking barrier; rearing up in box; running into steer; blatant disobedience (kicking, biting, bucking, rearing, striking, obviously insubordinate).**

**- 0 score: Loss of rope: failure to make legal catch within time limit; fall of horse or rider; excessive schooling; whipping or hitting horse with rope; failure of horse to stop steers forward motion; failure to have steer face horse before dally is released; failure to work in the proper working order; failure of an exhibitor to attempt to work the pattern; abuse; lameness of the horse.**



Regarding All-Around award categories:

Category V    Western Pleasure  
                  2-Year-Old Western Pleasure\*  
                  Hunter Under Saddle  
                  Working Hunter Under Saddle  
                  Pleasure Driving\*\*  
                  Ranch Riding  
                  **Working Western Rail**

Regarding achievement award categories:

Category V    Western Pleasure  
                  Level 1 Western Pleasure\*/\*\*\*\*  
                  2-Year-Old Western Pleasure\*/\*\*\*\*  
                  Hunter Under Saddle  
                  Working Hunter Under Saddle  
                  Level 1 Hunter Under Saddle\*/\*\*\*\*  
                  Pleasure Driving\*\*  
                  Ranch Riding  
                  Level 1 Ranch Riding\*/\*\*\*\*  
                  **Working Western Rail**

**SHW813.2.1 The amateur and select amateur Level 3 high point winners, by class, cannot be the same horse/rider combination. A horse/rider combination will be recognized only in their respective division. (For example: the highest placing amateur trail winner is of select age, recognition will be given to the horse/select amateur combination as well as the highest placing horse/amateur).**

SHW912.2 judge two consecutive years at the same show, set of shows or circuit except when judging cutting, working cow horse, roping, team penning, ranch sorting, speed events, ranch riding, ranch trail, versatility ranch horse **or ranching heritage challenge events** where they may judge up to two consecutive years.