

## Introductory Cutting Horse Competition Information



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Cutting horse classes are events in which a horse and rider are judged on their ability to separate a calf from a herd of cattle. This is a sport that did serve a purpose in the past on cattle ranches when calves needed to be separated from the herd for medical and sorting reasons.

Below we discuss what an exhibitor can expect when signing up for a cutting event. We also review what most judges are looking for during a cutting horse competition along with a few tips to help get you started.

### Class Breakdown

When arriving at a cutting horse event you may be required to show within a pre-determined working order.

According to the AQHA handbook, cutting events that are held during approved AQHA events follow the rules set by the National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA).

When entering the arena, each exhibitor is required to enter the herd of cattle deep enough to demonstrate ability to do so quietly while making a cut. More credit will be given to the exhibitor who shows less disturbance to both the calf being cut and the rest of the herd.

The judges also prefer that an exhibitor bring a newly cut calf toward the center of the arena. It is recommended that enough distance is allowed between the calf and the rest of the cattle to ensure the herd will not be disturbed by the horse working the calf.

Each exhibitor has 2 1/2 minutes to work as many as three cows. While working each calf you will be judged on your ability to control the calf and keep it from rejoining the rest of the herd.

### Judging Criteria

The judges look for a combination of factors when judging a cutting horse. There is a written rule requirement for the horse to successfully enter the herd deep enough to demonstrate its cutting ability. A three point penalty will be assessed to the exhibitor that fails to do so.

As stated above, it is recommended that each cutting horse do so without disturbing the herd too much. The horse should remain calm and responsive during this time. More credit will also be given to a horse and rider that work the calf farther away from the herd and nearest to the center of the arena.

A loose rein is also a judging requirement throughout the class as a demonstration of the natural ability of the horse.

Other penalties that a cutting horse can incur include various disturbances caused throughout the performance. For example, if a horse ends up scattering the herd when moving into it. Any noise the exhibitor makes toward the herd results in a one point penalty.

A horse can add a three point penalty for working a calf within three feet of the fence, or what has been designated as the back fence.

A horse turning the incorrect way, with a tail toward the cow results in the judges automatically giving a score of 60. Other penalties can result when the reins are used to control the horse, or leg cuing is obvious during the horse's performance.

If a horse loses the cow back to the herd, it will be given a five point penalty. Also, if a rider changes to a different cow after demonstrating commitment to one cow, a five point penalty will be added to the overall score.

A cutting horse will also be penalized for behavior issues during its performance such as pawing, biting, or kicking. A fall of the exhibitor off the horse will result in a score of 60 points.

The above information is in no way complete representation for all of the rules and requirements of an NCHA event. For more information you may want to inquire with your local association or the NCHA.

#### Class Tips

- Stopping during a cutting event is one of the most important maneuvers to perfect. It positions the horse on its hind end which is where all its power comes from when working a cow
  - A horse must be responsive off your leg and spur