

Guide to the Australian Show Hunter

by Lisa Le Provost and Samantha Watson
Australian Hunter Horse Association

Horses which are considered hunters differ significantly from open hacks or ponies. Traditionally a hack was a horse which was ridden by a gentleman on his short journey from the stables to the hunt field. Once at the hunt, the gentleman would change from his hack to his hunter.

Thus the qualities that are looked for within a hunter are those that would allow a horse to be able to follow hounds for a day's hunting over varying terrain. The Show Hunter is a weight carrying animal capable of carrying his rider with ease and safety over a period of time with controlled, forward energy and strong, easy paces without appearing mechanical or dull. The picture should be one of strength, quality and presence and therefore visual appeal to the judge and spectator. If there is ever doubt, one must always keep in mind the Show Hunter's type and his suitability for the job which he is intended to carry out. A plain but true to type hunter should always win over a horse which is of obvious hack type.

A hunter horse does not have to be of any specific breeding and can be of any colour. Successful Show Hunters have included, and are not limited to, blends of: Thoroughbred, Irish Draught, Native Ponies (UK), Australian/New Zealand bred ponies, Welsh Cob, Warmblood and Arabian blood.

Today, hunter horses are shown either under saddle or in-hand, with ridden classes divided into either show hunter and/or working hunter classes.

Manners

The Show Hunter is, most importantly, a quality, upstanding well schooled, well mannered workmanlike horse. A horse which carries the attributes required in substance and bone, yet is poorly mannered and unable to perform calmly and obediently will not be rewarded as a Show Hunter. Traditionally hunters were required to complete a full day of work with their rider. Therefore, disobediences such as bucking, rearing, jig-jogging, snatching at the bit and unrest in the line up should be penalised, as these demonstrate characteristics that would be intolerable in a horse that one would ride for a full day. A well mannered horse will always place above a disobedient horse and Judges may refuse to award a place to disobedient horses in the Hunter ring.

Substance and Bone

Often where a hunter horse is described one will see the words 'substance' and 'bone' - but what do they really mean?

Weight and bone has a strong influence in the selection of hunter horses. This is because a hunter horse must have strength, quality and presence without fineness and the appearance of being able to carry weight in the hunt field. Bone is measured by the circumference of the horse's leg taken just below the knee. A Hunter horse over 15hh should carry 8 to 9 inches of bone. Galloways and ponies should contain a similar amount of bone in proportion to their height, shape and overall size. Strong flat bone, large knees and hocks are desirable, however, limbs should be well defined without being coarse.

'Substance' refers to the body of the hunter and that he must be in proportion to the bone that he carries. It doesn't mean that the horse should be overweight, as a true hunter horse must show that he has suitable condition to follow hounds for a day's hunting. Thus obese or grossly overweight horses should be penalized in the hunter ring.

Common mistakes:

- A horse which is substantial in build and which may also display the attributes in his body which we require in a Show Hunter, yet is underpinned with fine, petite bone is not suitable to be called a Show Hunter.
- A horse which has been overfed and is overweight either marginally or grossly in an attempt to imitate a substantial body, yet is underpinned with fine, petite bone, is not suitable to be termed a Show Hunter.

In addition to the general criteria of good conformation required in any show animal, look for:

- Straight, correctly set legs, front and rear view;
- Short, wide cannon bones with clean, well developed tendons;
- Large, clean, flat joints (especially knees, hocks and fetlock joints);
- Well shaped feet which are in proportion to the horse;
- Short, broad and well muscled back and loins;
- Splints should not be discriminated against as long as they do not appear to cause unsoundness;

Scars are not the fault of the horse and, provided that they do not impinge on the movement of the animal, no penalty should be imposed

A Show Hunter is described as handsome as opposed to beautiful, however, if a Show Hunter happens to be "pretty" or "beautiful" in the head yet carries all the necessary requirements to be termed a Show Hunter, it is not to be penalised.

Movement

Movement is also an important feature of a hunter horse. A horse which carries the attributes required in substance and bone but however has flashy, eye catching movement which is correct for a Show HACK is not suitable to be termed a Show Hunter.

A Hunter horse must display stronger, plainer paces than would be expected of an Open Hack whilst being smooth, effortless, sweeping, elevated and clean. Thus Hunter horses should be forward moving without extreme or flashy movement to ensure that they carry their rider safely over uneven terrain - short, choppy movement or high knee action is not acceptable.

In keeping with tradition, a lengthened or extended trot is not performed on a hunt field and should not be asked for in Hunter classes. Rather than requesting a lengthened trot (a big, toe flicking extension should not win a hunt class) a judge may ask for a strong trot with some lengthening to be shown.

The Gallop

A gallop is expected of Show Hunters and it should always form part of the workout providing Show Societies allocate adequate space and that the grounds are not dangerous or wet.

A true gallop is immediate, forward and executed out of a canter, without any sign of laziness or disobedience. On the other hand, flat strap and out of control is not correct. The horse must cover the ground in big, easy strides. A good way to note the difference between correct and incorrect gallop is that with an incorrect gallop, the faster that the horse travels the shorter the stride becomes. A correct gallop will display four beats and will be a much longer stride. The horse should finish the gallop calmly and without pulling. It is important also that horses must settle after a

gallop and be able to execute a long rein walk at the end of a work out.

Commonsense must be applied so that small inconsistencies may be forgiven – ie: a horse which changes leg to negotiate slippery ground (as long as this is rectified quickly) is not displaying poor manners.

Turn Out

All competitors and horses in the hunter ring must be neatly turned out to a high standard. Riding wear should be more conservative without bright colours. All clothing and tack should be workmanlike, practical, clean and free from defect.

It is compulsory for all persons competing in ridden classes to wear approved safety head gear, jodhpurs/ breeches, jacket and riding boots with a heel.

Judges have the discretion to make decisions about what comprises correct attire in the ring in which they are judging.

Tack:

- No tack may be worn which in any way conceals an animal's conformation (except for boots of a plain colour which may be worn during the Jumping Phase of a working hunter class only);
- No rugs, clothing or item of tack which reveals the identity of the horse or owner may be worn in the show ring;
- A natural coloured leather dressage or show saddle (ie: with a straight flap) is preferable in show hunter classes, whilst an all-purpose saddle is preferable for Working Hunter Classes.
- Bridles must be leather and of the same or a similar colour as the saddle, the bridle should not be fine whilst the brow band and cavesson should be plain and flat. A plaited top rein is acceptable
- A plain sheepskin numnah or half pad may be used under the saddle, it should fit the saddle and be unobtrusive in both colour and cut. It is preferable for the numnah to be the same colour as the horse's coat or the saddle.
- The girth should match the colour of the saddle and preferably be leather, however neoprene girths made of other material will not be penalised in general hunt classes. White girths should not be worn.
- A horse may be shown in either a snaffle, simple pelham or double biting.
- A plain bamboo or leather covered or plaited crop may be carried but must not exceed 90 cm and must not be used excessively.
- A full hunting whip complete with tongue and lash is the most correct accessory to be carried.

Dress:

- Fitted tweed jacket and vest
- Plain fawn, banana or buff coloured breeches/jodhpurs, not white
- Plain black or brown boots.
- Gloves should be worn by all exhibitors. Gloves can be made of leather or string. Leather gloves should match the colour of the saddle and bridle of the horse and string gloves should match the colour of the rider's jodhpurs or breeches.
- Collar and tie or rat catcher shirt and stock with tie pin;
- The rider's hair, if long, should be neatly encased in a bun and hairnet, children's hair should be dressed appropriately minus large brightly coloured ribbons.

Horse:

- Manes must be plaited, preferably stitched
- Tails pulled or plaited
- No tack may be worn which in any way conceals a horse's conformation (except for boots of a plain colour which may be worn only during the Jumping Phase of a working hunter class)
- The natural markings of a horse may not be added or altered, for example, the addition of a star or a white sock through make up. Make up may be used only to enhance the natural makings of a horse.
- Quarter marks may be used at the discretion of the competitor but must not be excessive.

In Hand Classes:

All persons competing in in-hand classes must wear a hat and enclosed shoes and be smartly and professionally presented including:

- Suit coat and trousers/ skirt;
- Collared shirt with tie or stock;
- Black or brown enclosed shoes;
- A formal or flat or trilby hat may be worn (not a baseball cap);
- No excessive jewellery may be worn;
- Gloves should be worn;
- A whip or crop may be carried but must not exceed 120 cm in length and must not be used excessively.
- Horses in led classes, excluding young stock must be led from the bit. A chain should not be used.
- Young stock may be led in a natural coloured leather halter provided they are under the handler's control.
- Low cut tops must be avoided as should any item of clothing which does not cover as far as the shoulders or the knees of the exhibitor

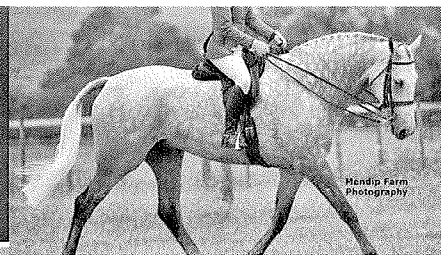
Jumping

Only working hunter horses are required to demonstrate that they have the ability to jump - this is not asked of a show hunter horse. A Working Hunter should have a bold jumping style which is clean in front, but performed at a more forward pace and with less collection than Showjumping.

The marks for the Jumping Phase of a Working Hunter Class are awarded on the basis of conformation, manners, soundness and style and as such these take precedence over the speed and agility which is expected in Showjumping.

Thank you to Lisa Le Provost for providing this article. Lisa is on the Committee of the Australian Hunter Horse Association. For further information go to www.hunterhorses.com.au

AUSTRALIAN
HUNTER
HORSE
ASSOCIATION



...tradition and elegance...



...versatility...



Information on Show & Working Hunters & events, memberships, registrations & judging standards:

www.hunterhorses.com.au